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Review E. Fromm >The Forgotten Language< (1951a, English)

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Fromm's new book forms an integral part of the theme that runs through his "Escape from Freedom," "Man for Himself" and "Psychoanalysis and Religion." The solution for man's problems does not lie in listening to the sweet calls of authorities outside himself, secular or divine. It lies only within himself. He must therefore listen to himself and learn to understand his own language, his dreams and myths. Dreams tell him something of his own soul and its deepest experiencings, and myths that of the generations that preceded him.

Fromm describes his book as "an introduction to the understanding of dreams, fairy tales and myths." It includes chapters entitled "The Nature of Symbolic Language," "The Nature of Dreams," "Freud and Jung," "The History of Dream Interpretation," "The Art of Dream Interpretation" and "Symbolic Language in Myth, Fairy Tale, Ritual and Novel." In general Fromm's treatment of these topics is elementary. The theoretical remarks on symbolism do not mention the work of others, such as Whitehead, Casirer or Langer. Its operation in dreams is limited for the most part to stating how he agrees or disagrees with Freud or Jung.

He divides symbols into three categories, one of which is that of universal symbols, although at one point he proceeds to modify that until its universality is washed out of it. One wonders what real issue is at stake for psychoanalysis in the question of the existence of universal symbols. To the extent that one individual's experience approximates another's, and that of one group another's, there may be an approximation of symbols. But the important point is that this cannot be taken for granted until so proven in the individual case. The even profounder issue is the use made of any set of so-called universal symbols: namely, to bolster a particular theory of neurosis. In the case of orthodox Freudian followers such use is made of "sex" symbols, and on the part of Fromm himself, "authority" symbols.

As regards his technique of interpreting dreams, Fromm at times appears like a chess player who makes a move but can't quite take his finger off the piece lest he should want to change his mind. He works terribly hard to keep within Freud's formula of childish wish-fulfillment but has to break away when it comes to "insight" dreams and anxiety dreams. The latter he even sees in some instances as due to the threat to the individual's true self. But even with these dreams he cannot go very far because he is limited by his theory of neurosis. He emphasizes the malevolent authorities which operated in childhood but does not take into account the malevolent forces which the individual organized in himself in response. Fromm deals with authority figures in dreams as concrete representations: father, mother, etc. He does not trans-



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pose them in terms of the individual's character structure. Essentially he does not see them as intrapsychic elements. He quotes, for instance, the dream in which an anti-Nazi sits down to a pleasant chat with Hitler as the fulfillment of a wish, instead of (possibly) the patient's beginning recognition of the pride he takes in his own inner dictatorial system.

Yet Fromm makes clear that a full understanding of an individual's dreams can be had only in terms of the individual's character structure. But here, too, he is bound down by his genetic and simplified notions of character structure and neurosis. He can therefore be satisfied to accept as valid the insight gained from a dream that a patient's depression was put into him by his mother. The whole present character structure of the patient with all that keeps the depression going is thus apparently disposed of.

Fromm's struggles to remain under the hegemony of Freudian authority and at the same time follow truth is occasionally a painful spectacle to watch. This is particularly the case with the contortions he goes through to establish his version of the Oedipus complex. According to him it is really a clash between an authoritarian and humanistic way of life, or between power and subservience on the one hand and love and equality on the other. He traces this conflict back to a clash between matriarchal and patriarchal civilizations. The one he has representing love, growth, creativeness; the other, authority and domination of the state over the individual ... He goes through all this to maintain the Freudian mold for his ideas.

It may therefore be said that Fromm in this book does not push forward the frontiers of our knowledge of dreams or neurosis. Very often he does not even reach them. Even in an "introduction" he could have gone further. Nevertheless, for those not acquainted with the later developments in psychoanalytic thinking it can be helpful. For others, too, a book by Fromm can never be without some gain. His constant reminder of man's need to listen to the voice within him is too vital to become dull or unprofitable. And Fromm can be eloquent and inspiring. It is therefore all the more regrettable that one cannot have the benefit of Fromm's thinking on the advances that others have made in the understanding of dreams and psychoanalytic theory in general.