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Fromm, Erich
LOVE, SEXUALITY, AND
MATRIARCHY: About

Gender 8258

Ed. by Rainer Funk

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A mixed bag of 11 pieces, previously unpublished in English, by the noted German-Jewish-American social psychologist.

Fromm (*The Art of Loving, Escape from Freedom*, etc.) is at his most interesting in writing about the complementary nature of the positive “selfishness” of a healthy self-love and the capacity to love another, a theme whose expression in modern Western philosophy and in human relationships he explores in the book’s longest essay. He also contributes to intellectual history in elaborating on the pioneering proto-feminist 19th-century writings of Swiss legal scholar J.J. Bachofen, who articulated the position, advanced for its time, that while on the whole there are certain basic and deep biological differences between the sexes,

characterological differences among individuals are far more significant. Regrettably, these pieces contain some tired perspectives on such issues as homosexuality (in an essay apparently written around 1940, he refers to it as “usually an expression of grave personality disorder”). Fromm also is not above stating unverifiable psycho-historical points of view. For example, speaking of the capacity to hate as manifest in Weimar and Nazi Germany, he claims, “Latent hostility was peculiarly the lot of members of [the German lower middle class] long before it was actualized by Nazi propaganda.” It remains unclear what is, or how one measures or even perceives, such latent hostility.

As these essays show, Fromm was a wide-ranging thinker whose writings sometimes manifested brilliant insights or practical wisdom. Yet, as this volume also shows, he will not be remembered as belonging to the first rank of the century’s great social scientists and philosophers, especially those from Germany and Austria. That may be because of the diffuseness of Fromm’s thought, his often unsatisfying attempts to synthesize the insights of anthropology, philosophy, and history, as well as depth, interpersonal, social, and even his own “pop” psychology.

Anonymus, 1997 Review E. Fromm *Liebe, Sexualität und Matriarchat* (1994a, English),
in: *The Kirkus Reviews*, New York (November 15, 1997).