

L. C. Feldstein:

The Face of Erich Fromm

... for the soul
If it is to know itself
It is into a soul
That it must look.

—George Seferis

And the soul inscribes itself upon a man's face. In the subtlety of its movements, in the immediacy with which it registered every nuance of feeling, and in its sheer aliveness, *Erich Fromm's* face was the most marvellous face I have ever known. It was the kind of face which draws itself deep into one's memory, and its image lasts as long as one lasts. By the reverberations which it sets up within one, it transmits itself to another, thence to another, until, in the end, it has echoed among countless strangers who, by those reverberations, have, for a brief moment, become intimates.

Surely, *Fromm's* face must have etched itself upon hundreds who, like myself, were privileged to have known him as teacher, personal psychoanalyst, supervisor, and guide. How much the more for those who, unlike myself, were privileged to have known him as friend. And, if Seferis is right, then the more profoundly a face reveals the soul, the more, when one looks upon that face — especially when, like *Fromm's*, it is so mobile, so fine, its lineaments so varied and vibrant — one peers into one's own soul. To have known *Erich Fromm* in any capacity is somehow also to have known him as a friend. In addition, it is to have delved deep into the very labyrinth of one's self. With utmost precision, his face registered the entire range of human emotions. Unlike the legendary psychoanalyst, so impassive and removed, *Fromm* was an astoundingly vital presence. His every gesture lived and resonated with his spirit. Before you, his face was luminous with soul, its contours shaped directly, spontaneously, and in perfect synchronicity. Unalloyed and pure, *Fromm's* countenance, once experienced, endures, and never ceases to sink into one's inmost depths. It had the power to penetrate you. *Fromm's* eyes sang, his facial lines danced, his voice pulsed with conviction, integrity, and openness. Above all, he was humane ... and so very human. So human that there was a certain childlike joy which, clearly, he felt in his own powers — a certain audacious self-centeredness, some might say. But to touch that self-centeredness was for me, and I imagine for so many others, to invite



me to touch my own center. Never obtrusive, it was a self so centered upon itself that it inspired one fully to encounter one's entire being, and to join one's very center to his center.

As psychotherapist, *Fromm* abhorred mere technique. For him, it implied trickery, hence deceit. Always, he spoke from his center. As both teacher and psychoanalyst, I could not forget his example. I learned, often painfully, to trust myself; at least, to entrust myself to myself. Let flow forth what will — the flaws, the absurdities, the contradictions, the downright blunders — at least, in the end, I will have possessed myself. Such, for me, was *Erich Fromm's* message. More than anything else, I learned this precept: be who I am; never be other than myself; allow my own words to flow. Not randomly, hardly uncritically, but truly; now haltingly, now gushingly, but always spoken, with feelings which are my feelings. And feel my feelings fully, to the last draught. Not to wallow in them, nor to indulge a false self-romanticism; but to speak my feelings deliberately, circumspectly, reverentially — and always, in the end, spontaneously and, insofar as possible, easily. Respond to the other as he or she moves me to respond: tenderly, kindly, and with profound respect, but authentically, and without duplicity. This ideal, which *Erich Fromm's* entire being stood for, became my ideal. And, though I often deviated from it, I could still hold it before me as the ideal which alone is worthy of either teacher or psychoanalyst.

To experience *Fromm*, even in his eccentricities, was invariably to liberate the creative surge within oneself. Compassion, warmth, strength, firmness radiated from him. They flowed toward you, and caught you up in their embrace. They so intermingled that, in his presence, one felt totally accepted, wholly without need for pretense, sham, or cant. And, if only momentarily, one was transformed by that presence, even quite radically metamorphosed. One felt oneself to be larger than one had been, to pulsate with new life. For a face so to affect one, and, through one, others as well, is to immortalize the soul which illumines that face. *Fromm's* vitality was so enormous that it had the power to spread, and by its impact, even upon a single person, to grow.

Erich Fromm's writings were powerful, lucid, deceptively simple. They have stirred a whole generation into reflection upon the meaning of love, authority, human wholeness. When he was at his best, his face, and his voice, shone through his words. For, in the end, *Fromm's* genius was in his actual presence, and in the surges of that presence, through each who was affected, to another. Others will judge, in times to come, the ultimate stature of *Fromm's* written words. But no person who has ever encountered *Erich Fromm*, face to face, can doubt the ultimate stature of the man. His face, his voice, and his spirit-illuminated physical presence are inviolable. They will not perish.

—Leonard C. Feldstein