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Refurbishing the Freudian

THE FORGOTTEN LANGUAGE: An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales and Myths. By Erich Fromm. 263 pp. New York: Bantam and Company. \$3.50.

Reviewed by
LORINE PRUETTE

ON THE publication of his first book, "Escape from Freedom," Erich Fromm immediately attracted attention as an original thinker in psychoanalysis. He was among the first to recognize that Freud's great contributions were inevitably conditioned by the times and the culture in which he lived. In "The Forgotten Language," Dr. Fromm adds a third dimension to the Freudian interpretation of dreams and challenges the once-sacrosanct Oedipus complex.

In this interesting work he restores the dream to respectability, and goes far beyond the hackneyed symbolism of the boxes and the towers. He finds a logic in dreams and a great deal more meaning than wish fulfillment, although he illustrates such dreams also. He holds that we may be better people in sleep than awake, and argues this convincingly. Dr. Fromm is a scholar, with a richness of references to the history of man's thinking about himself, the universe and the gods. Unlike some of the earlier analysts, he does not feel that all knowledge of human psychology began in the latter part of the last century, when Freud and Dr. Josef Breuer got together on a case of hysteria that Breuer had cured by hypnosis.

At times "The Forgotten Language" has a poetic quality not so much in phrase as in manner of thinking. This is especially evident in the discussion of the meaning of the Sabbath, the day on which God and man both rested. At times the reader is reminded of Robert Graves' murky, fascinating novels concerned with the worship of the Mother Goddesses. Both men see in symbols and myths various evidences of this earlier, gentler religion in which all men had value because they were sons of the mother, and the father's role was unknown or ignored. They hold that when the father became the authoritative head of family, state and religion, the individual's value was reduced to the single virtue of obedience.

Sophocles wrote in a patriarchal society, in which Zeus was far more powerful a god than Ceres. In his three plays about Oedipus he was re-working a myth that was already old. Freud seized upon the myth to illumine his theory of the incestuous sexual drives of the child, since Oedipus kills his father and marries his mother. He had found a metaphor to carry his meaning, and the Oedipus complex became, so, the cornerstone of a new religion. Fromm takes a little hammer of judicious inquiry and comes very close to smashing at least a corner of that cornerstone.

The recent production of Cocteau's "Oedipus" makes the incestuous relation of mother and son the crux of this famous myth. But Gluck's little play of the same name, dating from 1930, anticipates some of the conclusions of Fromm. They both see the significance of Oedipus' answer to the famous riddle of the Sphinx: what goes on four legs, then two, then three. Gluck, speaking as Oedipus: "It was I and I alone who understood that the only password, if one didn't want to be eaten alive by the Sphinx, was Man. . . . And although to each one of us, my children, the Sphinx may put a different question, you must persuade yourselves that the

answer is always the same . . . Man." Fromm: "The riddle itself, this answer to which required nothing but cleverness, serves only as a veil for the latent meaning of the question, the importance of man."

Analyzing the myth as he earlier studied the symbolism of dreams, Fromm shows how the significant element is obscured. He finds that there was no attraction between the mother and the son whom she had thought dead, that the Queen simply went on with the job of being King of Thebes. The plays then appear as a study of recurring struggles between father and sons, a struggle for authority and power, in which the Queen and the devoted daughter Antigone still represent the older, matriarchal religion. In the end, the Mother Goddesses still manage to have their way.

The analysis is too detailed to be reported here, but it is conducted in a highly effective fashion, and stems logically from the earlier section on dreams and on the Sabbath. When Dr. Fromm attempts to round this out with an interpretation of the fairy tale, "Little Red-Cap"—one wonders why this name was not changed to Little Red Riding Hood—and still further to an interpretation of Kafka's nightmare dream, "The Trial," the argument is not so convincing. Indeed, in the fairy tale the author seem to revert to the traditional sexual symbolism, perhaps because of the brevity of his treatment. The earlier section on dreams should be of great interest to the general reader. Dr. Fromm's interpretation of the Oedipus myth has already been presented in a symposium and summarized by Patrick Mullany in his "Oedipus, Myth and Complex." But the complete discussion of the development of symbols makes us eager for the promised second volume on this basic language of human thinking.

Lorine Pruette has written on various psychological subjects, including a biography of G. Stanley Hall.

Stage Life

EMMA CONQUEST. By Rene Ray. 374 pp. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. \$3.

TO quest René Ray goes far back into family history. Somewhat more than a century ago, an English youth with the odd name of Doggered Conquest was cut off by his family for marrying "beneath him," so he took his bride to the Continent and soon became the most fashionable glove-maker in Paris. For his son, Hugo, he picked out a French girl with a "dot." As a pioneer aviation enthusiast, Hugo returned to an unfamiliar homeland, and consoled himself for his wife's invalidism by acquiring a mistress. This shy, devoted being—brought up in poverty and forced by her father into marriage with a brute—gave Hugo a gifted daughter, Emma.

The author's exploration of this background is so thorough that you are convinced that it will be key to Emma's character, but somehow the whole narrative remains locked. Hating her illegitimacy, Emma develops into a successful actress, but her outbursts against her father and mother are part hysterics, part histrionics. "Emma Conquest" finally shapes up as a staged simulation of life that pants so hard it hasn't strength to draw a natural breath.

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Download Citation on ResearchGate | On Apr 1, 1958, Barbara Allen Woods and others published *The Forgotten Language: An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales and Myths*. Tales, remain as important cultural elements since early times. Before, as verbal folk tales, its purpose was to give advice to the listener. After they were written down, the tales that contained scary elements were soften in order to make them more suitable for the children who will read those tales. Previous scholarship on my topic is confined to a literature review in Michael Eigen's (1998) major statement of his own position, a few pages and a scholarly article by Jones (2001, 2002), and several chapters in Sayers' (2003) introductory survey of psychoanalysis, religion, and mysticism.