

Love's Body. Norman O. Brown. New York: Vintage Books, 1966. 276 pp.

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Norman O. Brown first came to the attention of the psychoanalytic audience with his book *Life Against Death*, a psychoanalytic study of history—a work of broad scope, much erudition, and provocative insights. The present work, *Love's Body*, is therefore a profound disappointment in view of the potential brilliance which Brown has clearly evidenced.

By way of an overall summary to a text which is difficult to classify as either prose or poetry, we would say that Brown has attempted to present a Buddhist interpretation of love and psychoanalysis. He dismisses the individuation of psychoanalytic thought as illusory. As a corollary approach he is apparently trying to forge a psychoanalytic justification of his position by canonizing the primary process functioning of the religious metaphysic.

The format of the text includes such chapter headings as “Liberty,” “Nature,” “Unity,” “Boundary,” “Fire,” “Fraction” and similar titles. Clearly there is no one major thesis which the text develops. Brown is in untiring opposition to the obsessive compulsive consciousness of contemporary Western man. His present text, which may be compared to the expression of free association as presented in a poetic and symbolic language, is an attempt, presumably, to offer a “nonobsessive” text. In so doing Brown clearly opts for the developmentally primitive organization of the psyche-soma as reflected in the term polymorphous perverse taken as the ideal of human existence. It is only with these points in mind that Brown's proclaiming the salvific virtues of the unconscious and of primary process, as well as his oft-repeated theme throughout the text that “the norm is not normality but schizophrenia,” become at least understandable without lessening their absurdity.

Understandably, then, the concept and reality of boundary in its many functions, most basically as the endopsychic phenomenon permitting a distinction between the self and the object world, are dismissed by Brown as false and illusory. Likewise any, even descriptive, distinction between ego and id is declared to be anathema. What Brown seems unaware of, or chooses to ignore, is that the difference between normal and psychotic symbol formation is precisely the capacity of the symbol to act as a bridge, as it were, across a recognized and acknowledged boundary. It is unfortunate that Brown has not had the opportunity to work clinically with persons suffering from the very maladies which he holds out as the goal of humanity. The schizophrenic who cannot emotionally distinguish himself from others, who has not structured his impulses (the work of ego organization), who is unable to recognize functionally the world as structured (reality principle), is a profoundly lonely, terrified human being.

In this connection we may also note that to summarize psychoanalytic thought on the reality principle in the following fashion is to indulge in such gross simplification and error as to stun the reader:

Psychoanalysis begins on the side of imperialism, or enlightenment, invading the heart of darkness, carrying bright shafts of daylight ... carrying the Bible and flag of the reality-principle. (Psychoanalysis ends in the recognition of the reality principle as Lucifer, the prince of darkness, the prince of this world, the governing principle, the ruler of darkness of this world.) The reality principle is the prince of darkness; its function is to scotomize, to spread darkness; to make walls of thick darkness, walls of separation and concealment. Psychoanalysis ends here: Freud remained officially faithful to the principle whose pretensions he finally exposed (p. 150).

How does one answer when Brown, attempting to explain genital organization of the person, evidences such concretization of thought as the following?

The outcome of the castration-complex is genital organization, the primacy of the penis, the identification of the whole person with the penis (*italics added*, p. 124).

And throughout all of this there are selected and apparently random quotations from M. Klein, Ferenczi and Freud.

Obviously in a review of this size one cannot give a detailed critique of the entire text, nor is such intended. However, the above quotations and comments are intended to reflect the serious danger of combining a sophisticated literary awareness, a potpourri of religious symbols, and psychoanalytic concepts in an attempt to offer a new value system or metaphysic for contemporary man.

What is at issue here is not the import of symbol, for there is no question that symbol formation is a prime product of human consciousness. Nor is the reality of participational human existence denied-existentialism has recalled once again these values; nor, finally, is the question one of whether there is a dimension of phylogenetic inheritance-Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* favors this opinion. The seductive poetry of the term "symbolic consciousness" should not be employed to mask the serious difficulties involved in Brown's panegyric of this concept. For mature individuation is not a burden, but an achievement; symbiosis is not ultimate unity, but the deepest incapacity to grow. And love is only meaningful when it is given by one who does not dissolve in the giving, but has a self and a personal history with which to respond to and reach the other.

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