the Psychoanalysis of Fire

Preface by Northrop Frye
We have only to speak of an object to think that we are being objective. But, because we chose it in the first place, the object reveals more about us than we do about it. What we consider to be our fundamental ideas concerning the world are often indications of the immaturity of our minds. Sometimes we stand in wonder before a chosen object; we build up hypotheses and reveries, in this way we form convictions which have all the appearance of true knowledge. But the initial source is impure: the first impression is not a fundamental truth. In point of fact, scientific objectivity is possible only if one has broken first with the immediate object, if one has refused to yield to the seduction of the initial choice, if one has checked and contradicted the thoughts which arise from one's first observation. Any objective examination, when duly verified, refutes the results of the first contact with the object. To start with, everything must be called into question: sensation, common sense, usage however constant, even etymology, for words, which are made for singing and enchanting, rarely make contact with thought. Far from marvelling at the object, objective thought must treat it ironically. Without this malign vigilance we would
never adopt a truly objective attitude. When we are dealing with men, our equals and our brothers, our method should be based on sympathy. But when confronted with the inert world whose life is not ours, which suffers none of our sorrows nor is exhorted by any of our joys, we must restrain all our enthusiasms; we must repress our personal feelings. The axes of poetry and of science are opposed to one another from the outset. All that philosophy can hope to accomplish is to make poetry and science complementary, to unite them as two well-defined opposites. We must oppose, then, to the enthusiastic, poetic mind the taciturn, scientific mind, and for the scientific mind an attitude of preliminary antipathy is a healthy precaution.

We are going to study a problem that no one has managed to approach objectively, one in which the initial charm of the object is so strong that it still has the power to warp the minds of the clearest thinkers and to keep bringing them back to the poetic fold in which dreams replace thought and poems conceal theorems. This problem is the psychological problem posed by our convictions about fire. It seems to me so definitely psychological in nature that I do not hesitate to speak of a psychoanalysis of fire.

Contemporary science has almost completely neglected the truly primordial problem that the phenomena of fire pose for the untutored mind. In the course of time the chapters on fire in chemistry textbooks have become shorter and shorter. There are, indeed, a good many modern books on chemistry in which it is impossible to find any mention of flame or fire. Fire is no longer a reality for science! Fire, that striking immediate object, that object which imposes itself as a first choice ahead of many other phenomena, no longer offers any perspective for scientific investigation. It seems, then, that it would be instructive from a psychological point of view to trace the way in which this phenomenological value has become inflated and to study how a problem which had been a prime concern of scientific research for centuries was suddenly broken down into smaller problems or set aside without ever having been solved. When, as I have done on many occasions, one asks educated persons and even eminent scientists, "What is fire?", one receives vague or tautological answers which unconsciously repeat the most ancient and fanciful philosophical theories. The reason for this is that the question has fallen within a zone that is only partially objective, a zone in which personal intuitions and scientific experiments are intermingled. As a matter of fact, we shall demonstrate that our intuitions of fire—are more perhaps than of any other phenomenon—are heavily charged with fallacies from the past. These intuitions lead us to form immediate convictions about a problem which really should be solved by strict measurement and experimentation.

In one of my early books I attempted to describe, in connection with heat phenomena, a clearly-defined axis of scientific objectivization. Here I showed how geometry and algebra gradually contributed their abstract forms and principles so that experimentation might be formalized into a scientific path. It is now the other axis—no longer the axis of objectivization but that of subjectivity—that I would like to explore in order to illustrate the double perspectives that might be attached to all problems connected with the knowledge of any particular reality, even a well-defined reality. If we were correct in our theorizing about the real implication of subject and object then we should attempt to make a clearer distinction between the pensive man and the thinker, without, however, any real hope of ever being able to make an absolute distinction between them.

In any case it is the pensive man whom we wish to study here, the man pensively seated by his fireplace in complete solitude at a time when the fire is burning brightly as if it were the very voice of this solitude. We shall have, then, many opportunities to show the dangers that first impressions, sympathetic attractions, and careless reveries hold for true scientific knowledge. We shall easily be able to observe the observer and so arrive at the principles underlying this value-laden or rather this hypnotized form of observation that is involved in gazing into a fire.

Finally, this slightly hypnotized condition, that is surprisingly constant in all fire watchers, is highly conducive to psychoanalytical investigation. A winter's evening with the wind howl-
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ing around the house and a bright fire within is all that is required to make the grieving soul give voice to its memories and sorrows.

It is the muted voice of the dying winter embers
Which enchants this heart of mine,
This heart which like the covered flame
Sings as it is consumed.

Toulet

But although this book is easy to write when we go about it line upon line, it seems to be quite impossible to give it a well-organized structure. To draw up a plan of human errors is an enterprise impossible of fulfillment. It is particularly difficult in the case of a task like ours, which cannot be treated on the historical plan because the conditions that led to reverie in the past have not been eliminated by contemporary scientific education. Even the scientist, when not practicing his specialty, returns to the primitive scale of values. Thus it would be a vain undertaking to trace the historical development of a thought which has always run counter to the teachings of the history of science. Instead, we shall devote part of our efforts to showing that reverie takes up the same primitive themes time and again and always operates as it would in primitive minds, and this in spite of the successes of systematic thought and even in face of the findings of scientific experiments.

Nor shall we situate our studies in a remote period in which it would be too easy to illustrate the prevalence of fire worship. What appears, however, to be a worthwhile project is to establish the secret persistence of this idolatry of fire. Therefore, the closer that the document we are using is to our own time the more forcefully will it demonstrate our thesis. Our aim will be to track down in historical records the permanent document that indicates a resistance to psychological evolution, that reveals the old man in the young child, the young child in the old man, the alchemist in the engineer. But since, for us, the past represents ignorance just as reverie represents futility, our aim will be as follows: to cure the mind of its happy illusions, to free it from the narcissism caused by the first contact with the object, to give

it assurances other than mere possession, and powers of conviction other than mere warmth and enthusiasm, in short, to give the mind proofs that are not as unsubstantial as flames.

But we have already said enough to bring home to the reader the meaning of a psychoanalysis of the subjective convictions related to the knowledge of fire phenomena, or more briefly, of a psychoanalysis of fire. It will be by specific arguments that we shall make clear our general theses.

We would like, however, to add a further remark by way of warning. When our reader has finished reading this book, he will in no way have increased his knowledge. This will not be entirely our fault, perhaps, but rather will be the price that must be paid for the method we have selected. When we turn inwards upon ourselves we turn aside from truth. When we carry out inner experiments, we inevitably contradict objective experiment. Again it must be repeated that in this book when we talk of our personal experiences we are demonstrating human errors. Our work is offered, then, as an example of that special psychoanalysis that we believe would form a useful basis for all objective studies. It is an illustration of the general theses put forward in our recent book, The Formation of the Scientific Mind (La Formation de l'esprit scientifique). The pedagogy of scientific instruction would be improved if we could demonstrate clearly how the fascination exerted by the object distorts inductions. It would not be difficult to write about water, air, earth, salt, wine and blood in the same way that we have dealt with fire in this brief outline. To tell the truth, these substances which receive an immediate emotional value and lend objective research to the study of non-general themes are less clearly double—less clearly subjective and objective—than fire, but nevertheless they too bear a false stamp, the false weight of unquestioned values. It would be more difficult but also more fruitful to use psychoanalysis to examine the bases for certain other more rational, less immediate and hence less effective concepts than those attached to our experiences of substances. If we succeeded in inspiring any imitators, we should urge them to
study, from the same point of view as a psychoanalysis of objective knowledge, the notions of totality, of system, of element, evolution and development. One would have no trouble in discovering that underlying such notions is a system of heterogeneous values, indirect but of an undeniably affective nature. In all these examples one would find beneath the theories, more or less readily accepted by scientists and philosophers, convictions that are often quite ingenious. These unquestioned convictions are so many extraneous flashes that bedevil the proper illumination that the mind must build up in any project of the discursive reason. Everyone should seek to destroy within himself these blindly accepted convictions. Everyone must learn to escape from the rigidity of the mental habits formed by contact with familiar experiences. Everyone must destroy even more carefully than his phobias, his "phobias," his complacent acceptance of first intuitions.

To sum up, while we do not seek to instruct the reader, we should feel rewarded for our efforts if we can persuade him to practice an exercise at which we are a master: to laugh at oneself. No progress is possible in the acquisition of objective knowledge without this self-critical irony. Finally, it should be noted that we have cited only a very small portion of the documents that we have compiled in the course of our endless readings in the old scientific books of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As a result, this short work is a mere outline of the subject. If it had been solely a question of recording stupid observations, it would have been only too easy to have written a large volume.

Fire and Respect:

The Prometheus Complex

Fire and heat provide modes of explanation in the most varied domains, because they have been for us the occasion for unforgettable memories, for simple and decisive personal experiences. Fire is thus a privileged phenomenon which can explain anything. If all that changes slowly may be explained by life, all that changes quickly is explained by fire. Fire is the ultra-living element. It is intimate and it is universal. It lives in our heart. It lives in the sky. It rises from the depths of the substance and offers itself with the warmth of love. Or it can go back down into the substance and hide there, latent and pent-up, like hate and vengeance. Among all phenomena, it is really the only one to which there can be so definitely attributed the opposing values of good and evil. It shines in paradise. It burns in Hell. It is gentleness and torture. It is coquetry and it is apocalypse. It is a pleasure for the good child sitting prudent by the hearth; yet it punishes any disobedience when the child wishes to play too close to its flames. It is well-being and it is respect. It is a tutelary and a terrible divinity, both good and bad. It can contradict itself; thus it is one of the principles of universal explanation.

Were it not for these initial values it takes on, neither the
tolerance of common opinion which accepts the most flagrant contradictions nor the enthusiasm which accumulates, without proof, the most laudatory epithets, would be understandable. For example, what affection and what nonsense there is in this page written by a doctor at the end of the eighteenth century:

I mean by this fire not a violent, tempestuous, irritating and unnatural heat which burns instead of cooking the bodily humors just as it does the foods; but rather that gentle, moderate, aromatic fire which is accompanied by a certain humidity having an affinity with that of blood and which penetrates the heterogeneous humors as well as the nutritious juices; separates them, wearies them down; polishes the roughness and bizarreness of their several parts; and finally brings them to such a degree of gentleness and refinement that they are now adapted to our nature.

In this page there is not a single argument; not a single epithet, which can be granted an objective meaning. And yet how convincing it is! To me it seems to combine the persuasive power of the doctor and the insinuating power of the remedy. Just as fire is the most insinuating of medicaments, so in extolling its virtues the doctor is at his most persuasive. In any case, I never reread this page—let him who can explain this invincible association—without remembering the grave and kindly doctor who used to come to my bedside when I was a child and who would calm my worried mother with one learned word. It would be a winter’s morning in our poor home. The fire would be shining in the hearth. They would give me syrup of Tolu. I can remember how I would lick the spoon. Where are they, those days filled with the warm smell of balsam and the hot aromas of the medicines?

When I was sick my father would light a fire in my room. He would take great care in arranging the logs over the kindling chips and in slipping the handful of shavings between the kindlings. To fail to light the fire would have been incredibly stupid. I could not imagine my father having any equal in the performance of this function, which he would never allow anyone else to carry out. Indeed, I do not think I lit a fire myself before I was eighteen years old. It was only when I lived alone that I became master of my own hearth. But I still take special pride in the art of kindling that I learned from my father. I think I would rather fail to teach a good philosophy lesson than fail to light my morning fire. Thus how keenly sympathetic I am when I read in the work of a favorite author [Ducarla], who is usually occupied with scientific research, this page which to me is almost a page of personal memories.

I have often amused myself with this trick when I was out visiting or when I had company at home: the fire would die down; for a long time the others would poke at it knowingly through a thick cloud of smoke, but in vain. Finally they would resort to chips and coal which often did not arrive in time; after the logs had been turned over a good many times, I would succeed in getting hold of the fire tongs, a feat that requires patience, audacity and some luck. I would even call a halt to the festivities while I pretended to cast a spell, like the faith healers to whom the Faculty of Medicine turns over a patient whose life is despaired of; then all I would do would be to put a few half-burned logs facing one another, often without those present noticing that I had touched anything. I would sit back, apparently without having done anything at all; they would look at me as if to tell me to get busy, and yet the flame would come and lay hold of the pile of logs; then they would accuse me of having thrown some kind of flash powder on it, and, in the end, would usually acknowledge that I had made the most of the draught; they did not go so far as to inquire into the complete, the efficient and the radiant kinds of heat, or into pyroshpheres, translative speeds, and calorific series.

And Ducarla goes on to display both his domestic talents and his ambitious theoretical system of knowledge in which the propagation of fire is described as a geometric progression which follows “calorific series.” In spite of this mathematical intrusion, the first principle of the “objective” thought of Ducarla is very evident, and its psychoanalysis is immediate: let us put glowing ember against glowing ember and the flame will come to brighten our hearth.
Perhaps the reader here can discern an example of the method that we propose to follow in our psychoanalysis of objective knowledge. It is really a question of finding how unconscious values affect the very basis of empirical and scientific knowledge. We must then show the mutual light which objective and social knowledge constantly sheds on subjective and personal knowledge, and vice versa. We must show in the scientific experiment traces of the experience of the child. Thus we shall be justified in speaking of an unconscious of the scientific mind—of the heterogeneous nature of certain concepts, and we shall see converging, in our study of any particular phenomenon, convictions that have been formed in the most varied fields.

For one thing, perhaps it has not been sufficiently noted that fire is more a social reality than a natural reality. To see the justification for this remark there is no need to go into lengthy considerations of the role of fire in primitive societies nor to insist on the technical difficulties involved in keeping a fire burning; all that is necessary is to practice some positive psychology by examining the structure and the education of a civilized mind.

In point of fact, respect for fire is a respect that has been taught; it is not a natural respect. The reflex which makes us pull back our finger from the flame of a candle does not play any conscious role in our knowledge about fire. One may even be astonished that it has been accorded so much importance in textbooks on elementary psychology, where it is offered as the eternal example of the intervention of a sort of reflexive thinking within the reflex, of a conscious thought in the midst of the most violent sensation. In reality the social prohibitions are the first. The natural experience comes only in second place to furnish a material proof which is unexpected and hence too obscure to establish an item of objective knowledge. The burn, that is to say the natural inhibition, by confirming the social interdictions, whereby only gives all the more value to the paternal intelligence in the child's eyes. Thus there is at the base of the child's knowledge of fire an interaction of the natural and the social in which the social is almost always dominant. Perhaps this can be seen better if we compare the pin-prick and the burn. They both cause reflexes. Why then are points not the object of respect and fear in the same way as fire? It is precisely because the social prohibitions concerning points are much weaker than the prohibitions concerning fire.

This, then, is the true basis for the respect shown to flame: if the child brings his hand close to the fire his father raps him over the knuckles with a ruler. Fire, then, can strike without having to burn. Whether the fire be flame or heat, lamp or stove, the parents' vigilance is the same. Thus fire is initially the object of a general prohibition; hence this conclusion: the social interdiction is our first general knowledge of fire. What we first learn about fire is that we must not touch it. As the child grows up, the prohibitions become intellectual rather than physical; the blow of the ruler is replaced by the angry voice; the angry voice by the recital of the dangers of fire, by the legends concerning fire from heaven. Thus the natural phenomenon is rapidly mixed in with complex and confused items of social experience which leave little room for the acquiring of an unprejudiced knowledge.

Consequently, since the prohibitions are primarily social interdictions, the problem of obtaining a personal knowledge of fire is the problem of clever disobedience. The child wishes to do what his father does, but far away from his father's presence, and so like a little Prometheus he steals some matches. He then heads for the fields where, in the hollow of a little valley, he and his companions build a secret fireplace that will keep them warm on the days when they decide to play truant from school. The city child has little acquaintance with the joys of the fire flaming up between three stones, he has not tasted the fried scone nor the snail that has been placed all slimy on the fiery embers. He may very well escape the Prometheus complex whose action I have often experienced. Only this complex enables us to understand the interest that is always aroused by the rather trite legend of the father of Fire. Moreover, one must not hasten to confuse this Prometheus complex with the Oedipus complex of classical psychoanalysis. Doubtless the sexual components of reveries
about fire are particularly intense, and we shall attempt in a later chapter to demonstrate this fact. Perhaps, however, it is better to designate all the shades of unconscious convictions by different formulas, until we can see later how the various complexes are related. As it happens, one of the advantages of the psychoanalysis of objective knowledge that we are proposing to carry out seems to be that we are examining a zone that is less deep than that in which the primitive instincts function, and it is because this zone is intermediary that it has a determinative action on clear thought, on scientific thought. To know facts and to make things are needs that we can characterize in themselves without necessarily having to relate them to the will to power. There is in man a veritable will to intellectuality. We underestimate the need to understand when we place it, as pragmatism and Bergsonism have done, under the absolute dependence of the principle of utility. We propose, then, to place together under the name of the Prometheus complex all those tendencies which impel us to know as much as our fathers, more than our fathers, as much as our teachers, more than our teachers. Now it is by handling the object, it is by perfecting our objective knowledge, that we can best hope to prove decisively that we have attained the intellectual level that we have so admired in our parents and in our teachers. The acquiring of supremacy through the drive of more powerful instincts naturally will appeal to a much greater number of individuals, but minds of a rarer stamp also must be examined by the psychologist. If pure intellectuality is exceptional, it is nonetheless very characteristic of a specifically human evolution. The Prometheus complex is the Oedipus complex of the life of the intellect.

Modern psychiatry has made clear the psychology of the pyromaniac. It has shown the sexual nature of his tendencies. On the other hand it has brought to light the serious traumaism that a psyche can suffer from the spectacle of a roof or haystack that has been set on fire, from the sight of the great blaze of fire shining against the night sky and extending out over the broad expanse of the ploughed fields. Almost always a case of incendiaryism in the country is the sign of the diseased mind of some shepherd. Like the bearers of sinister torches, these men of low degree transmit from age to age the contagion of their lonely dreams. The sight of a fire will cause some man to become a pyromaniac almost as inevitably as a pyromaniac will some day start a fire. Fire smokers in a soul more surely than it does under ashes. The arsonist is the most dissembling of criminals. At the asylum of Saint-Ylie, the pyromaniac with the most marked tendencies is a very obliging fellow. There is only one thing that he claims he does not know how to do, that is to light the stove. Like psychiatry, classical psychoanalysis has long studied dreams about fire. They are among the clearest, the most dis-
tinct, those for which the sexual interpretation is the most cer-
tain. Therefore we shall not touch upon this problem.

Since we are limiting ourselves to psychoanalyzing a psy-
chic layer that is less deep, more intellectualized, we must replace
the study of dreams by the study of reverie, and, more parti-
cularly, in this little book we must study the reverie before the
fire. In our opinion, this reverie is entirely different from the
dream by the very fact that it is always more or less centered
upon one object. The dream proceeds on its way in linear fash-
ion, forgetting its original path as it hastens along. The reverie
works in a star pattern. It returns to its center to shoot out new
beams. And, as it happens, the reverie in front of the fire, the
gentle reverie that is conscious of its well-being, is the most
naturally centered reverie. It may be counted among those
which best hold fast to their object or, if one prefers, to their
pretext. Hence this solidity and this homogeneity which give
it such charm that no one can free himself from it. It is so well
defined that it has become banal to say, "We love to see a log fire
burning in the fireplace." In this case it is a question of the quiet,
regular, controlled fire that is seen when the great log emits tiny
flames as it burns. It is a phenomenon both monotonous and
brilliant, a really total phenomenon: it speaks and soars, and it
sings.

The fire confined to the fireplace was no doubt for man the
first object of reverie, the symbol of repose, the invitation to
repose. One can hardly conceive of a philosophy of repose that
would not include a reverie before a flaming log fire. Thus, in
our opinion, to be deprived of a reverie before a burning fire
is to lose the first use and the truly human use of fire. To be
sure, a fire warms us and gives us comfort. But one only becomes
fully aware of this comforting sensation after quite a long period
of contemplation of the flames, one only receives comfort from
the fire when one leans his elbows on his knees and holds his
head in his hands. This attitude comes from the distant past—a
The child by the fire assumes it naturally. Not for nothing is
it the attitude of the Thinker. It leads to a very special kind
of attention which has nothing in common with the attention
involved in watching or observing. Very rarely is it utilized
for any other kind of contemplation. When near the fire, one
must be seated; one must rest without sleeping; one must engage
in reverie on a specific object.

Of course the supporters of the theory of the utilitarian
formation of the mind will not accept a theory so facile in its
idealism, and they will point out to us the multiple uses of fire
in order to ascertain the exact interest that we have in it: not
only does fire give heat, but it also cooks meats. As if the complex
hearth, the peasant's hearth, precluded reverie.

From the notched teeth of the chimney hook there hung
the black cauldron. The three-legged cooking pot projected
over the hot embers. Puffing up her cheeks to blow into the
steel tube, my grandmother would rekindle the sleeping flames.
Everything would be cooking at the same time: the potatoes
for the pigs, the choice potatoes for the family. For me there
would be a fresh egg cooking under the ashes. The intensity
of a fire cannot be measured by the egg timer; the egg was done
when a drop of water, often a drop of saliva, would evaporate
on the shell. Recently I was very much surprised to read that
Denis Papin used the same procedure as my grandmother in
tending his cooking pot. Before getting my egg I was condemned
to eat a soup of bread and butter boiled to a pulp. One day,
being a hot-tempered and imperious child, I threw whole spoon-
fuls of my soup into the teeth of the chimney hook saying,
"Eat, chimney hook, eat!" But on days when I was on my good
behavior, they would bring out the waffle iron. Rectangular
in form, it would crush down the fire of thorns burning red as the
spikes of sword lilies. And soon the gaufre or waffle would
be pressed against my pinnafore, warmer to the fingers than to
the lips. Yes, then indeed I was eating fire, eating its gold, its
odor and even its crackling while the burning gaufre was
churned under my teeth. And it is always like that, through
a kind of extra pleasure—like dessert—that fire shows itself
a friend of man. It does not confine itself to cooking; it makes
things crisp and crunchy. It puts the golden crust on the griddle
cake; it gives a material form to man's festivities. As far back
in time as we can go, the gastronomic value has always been more highly prized than the nutritive value, and it is in joy and not in sorrow that man discovered his intellect. The conquest of the superfluous gives us a greater spiritual excitement than the conquest of the necessary. Man is a creation of desire, not a creation of need.

But the reverie by the fireside has axes that are more philosophical. Fire is for the man who is contemplating it an example of a sudden change or development and an example of a circumstantial development. Less monotonous and less abstract than flowing water, even more quick to grow and to change than the young bird we watch every day in its nest in the bushes, fire suggests the desire to change, to speed up the passage of time, to bring all of life to its conclusion, to its hereafter. In these circumstances the reverie becomes truly fascinating and dramatic; it magnifies human destiny; it links the small to the great, the hearth to the volcano, the life of a dog to the life of a world. The fascinated individual hears the call of the funeral pyre. For him destruction is more than a change, it is a renewal.

This very special and yet very general kind of reverie leads to a true complex in which are united the love and the respect for fire, the instinct for living and the instinct for dying. To save time one could call it the Empedocles complex. One can see its development in a curious work of George Sand. It is one of her early works, saved from oblivion by Atrore Sand. Perhaps this Dreamer's Story (Histoire du Rêveur) was written before the first trip to Italy, before the first Volcano, after the marriage but before the first love affair. In any case it bears the mark of the Volcano, imagined rather than described. This is often the case in literature. For example, one will find an equally typical page in the work of Jean-Paul Richter, who dreams that the sun, son of Earth, has been shot up to heaven through a mountain's erupting crater. But since the reverie is more instructive for us than the dream, let us follow the account in George Sand.

In order to obtain the view of Sicily in the early morning light as it stands out fiery red against the glittering ocean, the traveller makes his way up the slopes of Mount Etna as night is falling. He stops to sleep in the Goat Grotto, but, since sleep will not come to his dreams before his fire of birch logs; he naturally remains

... with his elbows leaning on his knees and his eyes fixed on the glowing embers of his fire from which white and blue flames escape in a thousand varied forms and undulations. “Now there,” he thought to himself, “is a reduced image of the action of the flame and the movement of the lava during the eruptions of Mount Etna. Why have I not been called upon to contemplate this admirable spectacle in all its horrors?”

How can one admire a spectacle that one has never seen? But, as if to give us a better indication of the true axis of his magnifying reverie, the author continues:

Why have I not the eyes of an ant in order to admire this burning birch log? With what transports of blind joy and of love's frenzy these swarms of little white moths come to hurl themselves into it! For them this is the volcano in all its majesty. This is the spectacle of an immense conflagration. This dazzling light intoxicates and excites them as the sight of the whole forest on fire would do for me.

Love, death and fire are united at the same moment. Through its sacrifice in the heart of the flames, the mayfly gives us a lesson in eternity. This total death which leaves no trace is the guarantee that our whole person has departed for the beyond. To lose everything in order to gain everything. The lesson taught by the fire is clear: “After having gained all through skill, through love or through violence you must give up all, you must annihilate yourself.” (D'Annunzio, Contemplation de la Mort.) As Giono points out in his Les Vieilles Richesses such is at any rate the intellectual urge “in old races, as among the Indians of India, or among the Aztecs, among people whose religious philosophy and religious cruelty have rendered anaemic to the point of total desiccation so that the head has become
merely a globe of pure intelligence." Only these intellectualized people, these individuals subjected to the instincts of an intellectual formation, continues Giono "can force the door of the furnace and enter into the mystery of the fire."

This is something that George Sand is going to make clear to us. As soon as the reverie becomes concentrated, the genie of the Volcano appears. He dances "on blue and red embers . . . using as his mount a snowflake carried along by the hurricane." He carries the dreamer away beyond the quadrangular monument whose foundation is traditionally attributed to Empedocles, "Come, my king. Put on your crown of white flame and blue sulphur from which there comes forth a dazzling rain of diamonds and sapphires." And the Dreamer, ready for the sacrifice, replies: "Here I am! Envelop me in rivers of burning lava, clasp me in your arms of fire as a lover clasps his bride. I have donned the red mantle. I have adorned myself in your colors. Put on, too, your burning gown of purple. Cover your sides with its dazzling folds, Erna, come, Erna! Break open your gates of basalt, spew forth your pitch and sulphur. Vomit forth the stone, the metal and the fire! . . ." In the heart of the fire, death is no longer death, "Death could not exist in that ethereal region to which you are carrying me . . . My fragile body may be consumed by the fire, my soul must be united with those tenuous elements of which you are composed." Very well," said the Spirit, casting over the Dreamer part of his red mantle, "Say farewell to the life of men and follow me into the life of phantoms."

Thus a reverie by the fireside, when the flame twits the frail birch branches, is sufficient to evoke the volcano and the funeral pyre. The bit of straw which flies away with the smoke is sufficient to urge us forward to meet our destiny. What better proof is there that the contemplation of fire brings us back to the very origins of philosophic thought? If fire, which, after all, is quite an exceptional and rare phenomenon, was taken to be a constituent element of the Universe, is it not because it is an element of human thought, the prime element of reverie?

When one has recognized a psychological complex, it seems that one has a better and more synthetic understanding of certain poetic works. In point of fact a poetic work can hardly be unified except by a complex. If the complex is lacking, the work, cut off from its roots, no longer communicates with the unconscious. It appears cold, artificial, false. On the other hand even an unfinished work such as the Empedokles of Holderlin, which has appeared in various readings containing numerous repetitions, nevertheless retains a certain unity because of the mere fact that it has been grafted upon the Empedocles complex. While Hyperion chooses a life which is mingled more intimately with that of Nature, Empedocles chooses a death which fuses him into the pure element of the Volcano. As M. Pierre Berteaux has aptly pointed out, these two solutions are more alike than it appears at first sight. Empedocles is a Hyperion who has eliminated the elements of Werther-like morbidity and mentalism, who, by his sacrifice, consecrates his strength and does not confest his weakness; he is "the man of ripe experience, the mythical hero of antiquity, wise and sure of himself, for whom voluntary death is an act of faith proving the force of his wisdom." It is truly a cosmic death in which a thing is reduced to nothingness along with the thinker. The funeral pyre accompanies him in his passing.

Giova ciò solo che non muore, e solo
Per noi non muore, cio che muor con noi.

Only that is good which does not die, and only,
For us, that does not die which dies with us.

D'Annunzio

At times it is before an immense fire of live coals that the soul feels itself affected by the Empedocles complex. The Foscara of D'Annunzio, burning with the inner flames of a hopeless love, desires death on the funeral pyre while, fascinated, she contemplates the furnace of the glass-blower: "To disappear, to be swallowed up, to leave no trace!" moaned the heart of the woman intoxicated with the idea of destruction. In a
second this fire could devour me like a vine twig, like a wisp of straw.' And she would approach the open apertures through which the liquid flames could be seen shining more brightly than summer's noon-day sun and coiling around the clay pots in which was melting the still shapeless metal that the workers, stationed about the furnace behind the fire screens, were scooping up with an iron rod in order to give it shape with the breath from their lips.”

It can be seen that in the most varied circumstances the call of the funeral pyre remains a fundamental poetic theme. It no longer corresponds in modern life to any real-lifeUNIT

Psychoanalysis and Prehistory:

The Novalis Complex

Psychoanalysis has already been long engaged in the study of legends and mythologies. It has prepared for studies of this kind a working stock of explanations that are sufficiently rich to throw light upon the legends surrounding the conquest of fire. But what psychoanalysis has not yet completely systematized—although the works of C. G. Jung have cast a bright light upon this point—is the study of scientific explanations, of objective explanations, which purport to account for the discoveries of prehistoric man. In this chapter we shall bring together and complete the observations of C. G. Jung by calling attention to the weakness of rational explanations.

In the first place we must criticize the modern scientific explanations which seem to us quite inappropriate for prehistoric discoveries. These scientific explanations originate in an arid and cursory rationalism which claims to be profiting by recurring factual evidence; but which is, however, quite unrelated to the psychological conditions of the primitive discoveries. There is then a place, we feel, for an indirect and secondary psychoanalysis which would constantly seek the unconscious under the conscious, the subjective value under the objective evidence,