

Jungian Undertones in Harris

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The Trouble With Princesses, Christie Harris. Illus. by Douglas Tait. McClelland and Stewart, 1980. 170 pp. \$9.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-7710-3997-2.

Christie Harris' adaptations of North American Indian tales are too familiar now to need introduction. In the fantasy issue of *Canadian Children's Literature* (15/16), three of her recent publications were reviewed, and more were subjected to detailed consideration in critical articles. In this latest book each of the seven tales has a Princess as a main protagonist, and in only one does Mouse Woman appear. The illustrations, again by Douglas Tait, though few in number, are strong and strikingly ferocious. This is appropriate, however, for Mrs. Harris has made a conscious effort (as evidenced by her short introductions to each tale) not only to demonstrate linkages between Old World and Western legends, but also to stress what she calls the "spirited" nature of her female protagonists, presumably in response to the feminist distrust of the passivity of too many literary heroines. If Bruno Bettelheim is correct that a fairy tale's psychological meaning is "irrespective of the age and sex of the story's hero",¹ this collection should be a doubly appealing and powerful one for it abounds with active, independent young people of both sexes.

Coincidentally, the fantasy issue of *CCL* presented an article in which the illustrator Elizabeth Cleaver wrote of her own interest in linking Indian/Eskimo lore with the psychological theories of Carl Jung. Even a cursory examination of the Jungian elements in these legends retold by Christie Harris reveal the same linkage. Perhaps, as Robert Kroetsch suggested, Canadian literature may tend to be Jungian while American leans to the Freudian.² Already, in addition to the more obvious influences in the work of Northrop Frye, and Robertson Davies, Jungian parallels have been demonstrated in the fiction of (among others) Atwood, Laurence, Grove, and Munro. A knowledge of the basic aspects of Jung's concept of the personality would be a useful tool for the student of Canadian children's literature to develop.

Much more than Freud, Jung stresses the ongoing nature of the endless process of normal psychological growth toward the goal of individuation, Jung's term for the integrated self. In Jung's view individuation has to be preceded by adaptation to a necessary minimum of collective social and environmental standards. The three aspects of the self that must be

assimilated are the persona, the shadow and the animus/anima. This latter archetype stands at the threshold of the richest area of the unconscious, and it is this problem of integration with the contrasexual Other that the legends in the Harris collection focus on. Without such integration we cannot, as one Jungian puts it, "become full and independent partners with a beloved person in the outside world."³

The magic number in the tales is four, the number which Jung deduced from his experiments to represent the complete self much better than the Christian three. Many of the stories revolve around four characters with the final four representing two couples while the initial ones, as in the first tale, are purely female. This initial tale, "The Princess and The Mountain Dweller", resembles the Cupid and Psyche myth that Eric Neumann counts as one of the few legends to represent the inner quest from the feminine point of view.⁴ The resolution of the Indian tale restores the girl to good relations with her mother and her tribe, in addition to dramatising her integrated independence even in marriage to the Mountain Dweller who had been an emblem of danger to her until she conquered the hidden Evil Woman. Marie Von Franz suggests that tales like this dramatise in symbolic form the time and suffering required for a woman to recognize her own inner Other, but also the rewards, for

if she realizes who and what her animus is and what he does to her, and if she faces these realities instead of allowing herself to be possessed, her animus can turn into an invaluable inner companion who endows her with the masculine qualities of initiative, courage, objectivity, and spiritual wisdom.⁵

Not all tales end so happily. One, "Bogus-A Ghost Story", suggests the dangers of an animus possession which reduces the Princess (who like Eurydice has eaten of the food of the dead) to the role of a saviour of youth - not her own lover - though she herself cannot be saved. In this tale, and many of the others like "The Fierce Eagles", the Princess functions both as a Self and as an anima to the prince. But the anima is not, as is so often the case, depressingly pale, spiritual and passive. Instead, it appears as strongly and actively protective, wiser than the male in practical ways, and though desirous of relatedness (to the Jungian the essence of the feminine) insistent on waiting until an interpersonal relation can be combined with an independent existence. The ultimate test of the strength of this Selfhood is demonstrated in the last tale, "The Song of the Bears". Here a young Princess rebels from her tribe to unite with her chosen lover, is separated from him and taken as a wife by the Bear Prince, and after giving birth to two children, is rescued by her lover and forgiven by her tribe to whom she gives a verse which protects them from the Bears. Although thus protected they restore her children to her to complete her happiness, she possesses the

wisdom and the inner strength to accept the desire of the one son to return to his father.

The extra depth of the selfhood illustrated in this story is not well served by Mrs. Harris' introductory comment that: "Even Mouse Woman – that wonderful little narnauk who was a friend to young people in trouble – could not have helped runaway Princes Kind-a-wuss, because what she was doing was not a proper thing to do." Although on the surface these stories may not seem to serve the child who needs "the reassuring happy ending" that Bettelheim looks for in the fairy tale, nor the adult who seeks a clear cautionary moral, they are rooted deeply in an archetypal wisdom that is truly life-enhancing. A fuller Jungian exploration than can be undertaken here would provide the scholar with a fertile area for investigating one important aspect of our Canadian heritage.

NOTES

¹Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York, Vintage Books, 1977), p. 17.

²Robert Kroetsch, "The Canadian Writer and the American Literary Tradition", *The English Quarterly*, 4, 1971, 47.

³June Singer, *Boundaries of the Soul* (New York, Doubleday, 1972), p. 237.

⁴Eric Neumann, *Amor and Psyche* (Princeton University Press, Bollinger Series LIV), 1956.

⁵Marie Von Franz, "The Process of Individuation", in *Man and His Symbols*, ed. Carl Jung (New York, Laurel Edition, 1968), p. 206.

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