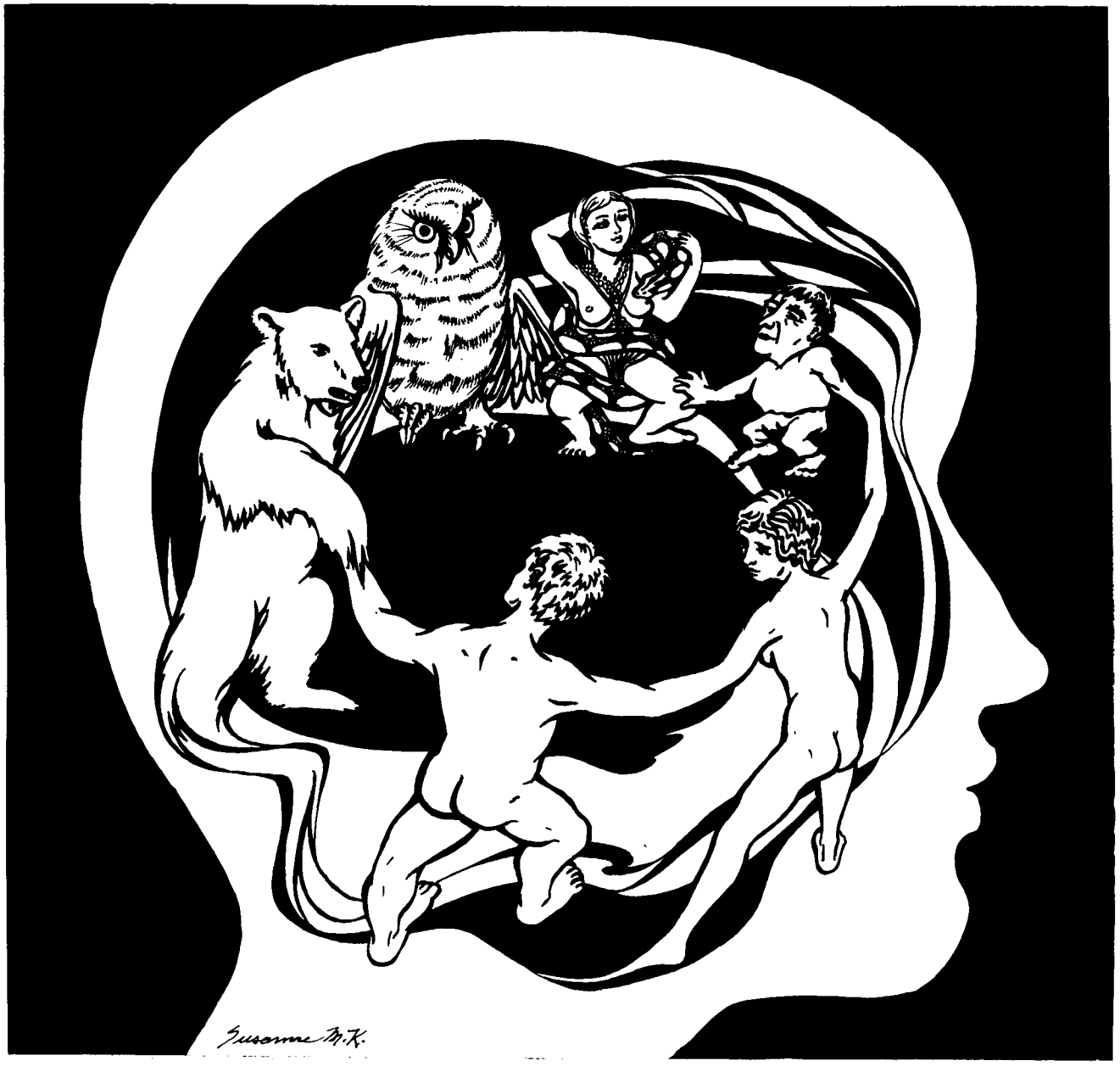
Fiction and the New Androgyne:

Problems and Possibilities in *The Diviners*

by Nancy Bailey

Androgyny, predicted Carolyn Heilbrun in 1973, is an idea whose time has come. Evidence has mounted since then to the point where it seems that, as writers, critics and scholars, we must come to terms with this very old concept which is suddenly new.(1) According to Joseph Campbell, androgyny as an ideal predates the patriarchal view which sets "apart all pairs of opposites."(2) This is the view which has dominated Western thought for centuries now. Thus the reappearance of the androgyne, which June Singer suggests is the oldest archetype of which we have any experience,(3)may represent just another version of the dream of return to Edenic harmony. But it may, instead, herald a revolutionary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and creative expansion of awareness, an iceberg of which the Women's Movement constitutes only the visible tip.

My approach is that of a student and teacher of literature--concerned to understand what implications androgyny has for works of fiction in particular and what light it can throw on the process of creation. Those of us whose background is literary study are well aware of Coleridge's dictum that "a great mind must be androgynous." This in turn led Virginia Woolf to conclude that "a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine."(4) The Diviners is useful as an illustration of this concept, since the protagonist, Morag Gunn, is a woman and a writer--indeed the writer of the novel we read. Her development as a writer becomes the symbol for her internal development of a creative wholeness which I take to be equivalent to androgyny.

The first problem is that of definition. The word "androgyny" combines the Greek for male and female, but beyond that neither history nor the dictionary is of much help. They just affirm Heilbrun's admission that androgyny is "unbounded and hence fundamentally indefinable in nature."(5) To give the term boundaries and thus prevent it from simply becoming a catch word for any ideal of wholeness, androgyny is defined here as representing an inner state of wholeness which engages masculine and feminine polarities in an harmonious balance. Defined this way, as a term to describe a psychological mix of ideal masculine and feminine qualities in a person of either sex, androgyny draws attention to sexual polarization as a root cause of psychological and social problems. This should be a concern natural and significant to readers and writers of both sexes, but especially to a woman writer whether she be feminist or not.

In such a definition of androgyny masculine (as differentiated from male) would represent qualities of aggression, and of intellect used to see and act on dictinctness, difference, separation; Feminine (as differentiated from female) would represent qualities of sensation, intuition and above all of relatedness. Both qualities would be equally necessary to a person of either sex. Each would qualify and support the other within persons of whatever sex and each would have its own validity. This last statement is the only new emphasis to what has been inherent in the Jungian definition of androgyny. Even with this definition, unlike the homosexual or bisexual person, the androgyne is a purely imaginative and ideal creature, never found in the physical world. Indeed, androgyny, as an ideal, implies that the reunification of the sexes within the self is a prior concern to that of the relation between the sexes in society. Perhaps this is why psychologists especially of the Jungian school are comfortable with the term,

while many (though not all) feminists are not. Cynthia Secor and others reject androgyny as being not practical enough as an instrument of change, partly because it is "devoid of context."(6)

"Devoid of context" presents a problem for literature too, especially in fiction, and may suggest why painting, sculpture, poetry and myth have been the only arts historically to portray androgyny. Fiction demands a much stronger sense of social context. Indeed, although Morag has this context as a woman (and a Canadian), criticism has been directed at the vagueness of her portrait as a writer. Context seems to be lacking here, leading The New York Times critic of The Diviners to complain that "unlike writers in my experience who write for a living, Morag never changes publishers, feels her agent is neglecting her, worries about the size of other writers' advances, or has any truck with universities."(7) This is true; instead, the context revealed by the titles of Morag's novels is that of a symbolic progression of the inner self from the light of "Spear of Innocence" and "Prospero's Child" through the darkness of "Jonah" back to the light of "Shadow of Eden" and "The Diviners." Thus, Morag's development, as I have shown elsewhere(8)is consistent with that of the Jungian process of individuation. (And, in what would seem so far to be the norm for any fictional character, Morag achieves androgynous wholeness only after the mid-point of her life. The concept of androgyny seems to offer an enriching way of exploring older characters which literary critics must develop terminology to describe.) The journey of the self which Morag records from a combination of memory and present action, is one which, while it includes continuing mystery and uncertainty, resolves itself finally in the comic mode of integration--the mode appropriate to the androgyne.

But this itself may be another problem for fiction--for of what interest is, as one critic describes androgyny, "a static image of perfection?"(9) If Morag becomes androgynous as I believe she does, then it is clear that this condition does not imply a cessation of trouble, conflict or sorrow. Morag remains painfully aware of the darkness within and without which often connect in her relation to Pique, her daughter. She records Pique's cry, "Can't you see I despise you?" and her daughter's challenge that Morag wanted her "for your own satisfaction, yes. You never thought of him, or of me," remains unanswered. In place of static perfection what characterizes Morag is her ability to balance opposites and rest in the tension which this generates rather than to insist on the stasis of fusion.

The difference between balance and fusion is the one Marilyn Farwell, writing on Virginia Woolf(10)sees as

crucial to a positive interpretation of androgyny. In the past the androgynous ideal has been conceived of as a fusion in a male model--whether that model be Adam (the original androgyne) or Christ. For the writer the paradigm of fusion would mean that a woman would write like a man--the ideal would be that there would be no way of telling whether she was a woman or not. But this is clearly a great loss. What the paradigm of balance would imply is that a woman would write like a woman who was androgynous--and so would a man. In other words, androgynous writing would be defined, as Farwell suggests, by a wealth of perception and a wide range of creative voices and perceptions, rather than as a single universal mode of knowing.

Morag is again a good illustration of the possibilities. The novel Morag writes, while it shares with the other Manawaka novels by Margaret Laurence the strong inner monologue of the protagonist's voice, reflects far more diversity of tone, voice, rhythmn and dialogue than any of the others. The outward-reaching quality of Morag's vision is reflected in the clarity with which she perceives and describes whatever spatial or temporal environment she inhabits, although the city world is clearly less in tune with her imagination than the small town and country. Her ability to participate sympathetically in the lives of her characters is not limited by gender, class or experience. In writing her third novel "Jonah," Morag discovers that while "in some ways she knows more about Coral . . . it is Jonah who seems likely to take on his own life." Similarily in her non-professional life, Morag can accept and balance the irreconcilable differences between her needs and those of Jules or Pique, and between her own needs as mother, as erotic woman and as writer. Because of this acceptance she is free of emotional dependence on others, yet she is also able to release them into moral responsibility like her own.

In June Singer's book on androgyny (the most complete study so far on the subject) the first requirement for the androgynous person is that "one must accept oneself as a total and complete being, else each will be looking for another person who will fill out the inner spaces."(11) One of the remarkable things about Morag's acceptance of self is that she does not show concern for femininity (or the lack of it) as it is culturally defined. This fear, one that research has shown to be prevalent among professional women, is illustrated in Anna Wulf, Lessing's novelistic protagonist in The Golden Notebook. But in contrast to Anna Wulf whose animus figure writes in her notebook the first sentence of her new novel, Morag remains independent of her animus figures, Christie, Jules and McRaith. Nevertheless, through them she gains the energy to leave Manawaka, to leave her

husband Brooke and to return to create a home of her own. Each serves as an animus figure in connecting Morag to the deepest levels of her contrasexual self and to the creative unconscious wherein lie the springs of her novelistic inspiration. (A careful differentiation of characters who are animus/anima figures from those who are not would be a useful and interesting literary study in this connection).

Jung has suggested that the bird, a common symbol of the spirit, is normally found in a woman's imagination to be resting on the earth, representing the primary female link to matter.(12) In Morag's imagination, however, spirit dominates and accordingly the novel abounds in images of birds in flight. This suggests the way that the integration of the animus within her has released and empowered the full range of possibilities in her imagination. The other image dominating the novel--that of the flowing water of the river is the one Singer uses as her metaphor for androgyny.(13)

A further problem with the treatment of androgyny in the past is that the androgynous ideal has always been conceived of from a male consciousness or point-of-view, even when the writer was a woman.(14) For example, in Blake and Shelley or Jung and Neumann the masculine is completed by the feminine but never the feminine completed by the masculine. What the anima can do for a man has been eloquently described; what the animus can do for a woman is only now being described by Jung's followers. In The Golden Notebook there is a conscious exploration of the subject from a female consciousness. Morag has not chosen to be, nor is she aware of being, in the androgynous state but her portrayal reveals many parallels--not only with June Singer's ideal but also with what Ravenna Helson describes as a result of her study of women authors of fantasy. Helson's study was an attempt to illustrate that the meaning of the "androgyny of a creative person . . . need not be frightening" and that it represents the "nonconventional integration of personality" that is consistent with creativity (while the less creative individuals tend to a conventional adjustment or to rebellious conflict).(15) Helson's schema, portrayed as "The Creative Woman as a Circle of Friends," includes archetypal friends such as the Owl, Dwarf, Bear and Serpent Lady--as well as an animus figure. These archetypes represent, for Helson, personality functions including sex, charm, narcissism, cruelty, introspection, aggression, vulnerability, inner wisdom, craftsmanship, endurance and creativity. This makes a strong, complex portrait, like the one that Morag's lover, McRaith, paints of her in which her eyes appear as "angry and frightened, frighteningly strong."

The advantages that the strength of an androgynous self would bring to a writer seem undoubted. But for the

woman as person, and the character in fiction, one last problem must be raised. Is the condition of androgyny necessarily synonymous with isolation? Singer is confident that no necessary sexual isolation ensues--in fact she believes that the bodily experience of androgyny "can find its ultimate expression through sexual intercourse" since "the power of androgynous sexuality is heightened because within its functioning is couched the seed of its opposite: silence, aloneness, withdrawal, asexuality."(16) The sexual union of Morag and Jules for which Laurence has been so severely chastized in some quarters dramatizes this condition. However, just as in her youth Morag refuses to bow to Manawaka's intimidation and thus faces isolation from all of her peers except Jules, so in her maturity the price of her creativity and her self-integration is isolation.

Although Morag is completely free of the intolerant arrogance and hubris that characterize Stephen Daedalus, her strength is formidable and so isolating that her portrait alienates many readers as much as does Joyce's portrait of the artist as a young man. The tragic isolation of Morag's Manawaka ancestor Hagar Shipley in The Stone Angel is much easier to accept than Morag's, whose solitude stems from the archetypal comic mode of integration, wholeness and androgyny. The concept of wholeness existing without an other, of love as a solitude, is a difficult one to accept. Morag's ability to remain whole, loving and creative while still separate and alone is as remarkable as any of the epic male victories recorded in literature. Sensitive literary critics are needed to help perceptive readers to see that such a condition when it is a part of androgyny is not to be confused with the death of love or with alienation. Instead it must be seen as part of a challenging redefinition of selfhood in literature as in life. Jolande Jacobi, a Jungian psychologist, provides a fitting concluding description:

> Once we have perceived the contrasexual element in ourselves and raised it to consciousness, we have ourselves, our emotions, and affects reasonably well in hand. Above all we have achieved a real independence and with it, to be sure, a certain isolation. In a sense we are alone, for our 'inward freedom' means that a love relation can no longer fetter us; the other sex has lost its magic power over us, for we have come to know its essential traits in the depths of our own psyche. We shall not easily 'fall in love', for we can no longer lose ourselves in someone else, but we shall be capable of a deeper love, a conscious devotion to the other. For our aloneness does not alienate us from the world, but only places us at a proper distance from it. By anchoring us more firmly in our

nature, it even enables us to give ourselves more unreservedly to another human being, because our individuality is no longer endangered. To be sure, it usually takes half a lifetime to arrive at this stage. Probably no one can do so without a struggle. It also takes a full measure of experience, not to mention disappointment.(17)

NOTES

1. C. Heilbrun, Towards Androgyny (London, 1973). Since then, for example, the whole Women's Studies issue, 2, 1974; A. Kaplan and J. Bean, Beyond Sex-Role Stereotype: Readings Toward a Psychology of Androgyny (Toronto, 1976); June Singer, Androgyny (Garden City, 1976).
2. J. Campbell, The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology (Penguin, 1976), pp. 26-27.
3. J. Singer, p. 20.
4. V. Woolf, A Room of One's Own (Penguin, 1974), p. 97.
5. C. Heilbrun, p. xi.
6. C. Secor, "Androgyny: An Early Reappraisal," Women's Studies, 2, 1974, p. 163.
7. Marge Piercy, "Gritty Places and Strong Women," in W. New, Margaret Laurence: The Writer and Her Critics (Toronto, 1977), p. 213.
8. N. Bailey, "Margaret Laurence, Carl Jung and The Manawaka Women," Studies in Canadian Literature, 2, 2, 1977,pp. 306-321.
9. Secor, p. 165.
10. M. Farwell, "Virginia Woolf and Androgyny," Contemporary Literature, xvi, 4, pp. 434-435, 441.
11. J. Singer, pp. 323-324.
12. C. Jung, The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious, C.W. 9, i, p. 334.
13. J. Singer, p. 333.
14. B. Gelpi, "The Politics of Androgyny," Women's Studies, 2, 1974, p. 152, et passim.
15. R. Helson, "The Inner Reality of Women," Arts in Society, II, i, 1974, p. 35 and "Heroic and Tender Modes in Women Authors of Fantasy," Journal of Personality, 41, 4, 1973, p. 493.
16. J. Singer, p. 327.
17. J. Jacobi, The Psychology of C.G. Jung (New Haven, 1973), p. 123.