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READER-RESPONSE THEORY AND ANDRE NORTON

In applying reader-response theory to Andre Norton's writings, the important points to arise are that an emotional response to literature, and specifically to Andre Norton, is a valid one, that reader-response criticism can help in objectifying this response and in understanding the phenomenon of a popular literature, and that certain aspects of Norton's writing encourage a reader's participation, that the emotional and imaginative investment of the reader is not the result of just the reader's personality or background.

The impetus for these ideas begins with a recollection: when I was a graduate student, a common belief among us novice English teachers was that we should never teach a book we genuinely loved--because, we felt, the experience could ruin our enjoyment of it. Our treasures might not survive the analytic assaults of bored pupils clamoring for grades. Works that we "admired" or "respected" were no problem--they almost begged for the debate of the classroom. But the books that we cherished, that we grew up with, that we read again and again with longing and nostalgia--we were reluctant to expose those works to open criticism.

Now, looking back at that time, I see that our defensiveness was a bit paranoid. After all, books don't bleed--they're not so vulnerable. Changing reputations don't wound, anesthetize or

remove vital parts. Instead, what really was on the line for us was not the book, but ourselves. The novel could not be hurt, but our precious reading of it, what we felt was our unique response, the emotional investment during our experiencing of the work--those were vulnerable, and we were hesitant to argue intellectually what for many of us was first subjective and personal. Books don't feel, but readers do.

Such a concern is relevant to Andre Norton, who obviously is very popular and yet just as obviously has been neglected by critics, though not by fans, for much of her career (McGhan 128, Schlobin xiv). This situation is changing, and reasons have been given for the neglect--her lack of self-promotion, her non-appearance in the SF magazines, her being branded as a juvenile writer (McGhan 128). But I would add to this list what was mentioned above: in discussing her, or any other truly popular writer, readers risk exposing themselves. Some authors' works can be so much a part of individual development that wrenching them away, burying the emotional experience of the work to examine the work objectively, is hard to do.

Yet this does not mean that readers have to unburden their lives, secret or public, to understand how to react to a book. Such a catalogue of emotions would be autobiography, or blatant egoizing, instead of literary criticism. And yet it is reader-response theory that offers a way of objectively discussing what is often a subjective experience. The theory does this because it concentrates on the process of reading, on the interaction

between the text and the response of a reader--on what literature does, not on what it is. Though the various proponents of the theory have individual slants they agree on this point of reader-text interaction. Stanley Fish says that literature is not an isolated, static object existing on its own, that instead it comes into existence only when it is read, when it is part of the active temporal event of a person reading it (Murfin 140).

Norman Holland claims that reading is a "personal transaction" between a text and a reader, that the person brings to the text "something extrinsic" and that separating the two--the part that comes from the text and the part from the reader--is not easy: "The schemata, conventions and codes I bring to bear may be literary, biological, cultural, or the results of economic class, but it is I who bring them to bear with my unique identity" (372). Holland wants to restore, he says, stories to their "rightful owners--you and me and all of you and me, our emotional as well as our intellectual selves" (373). And Wolfgang Iser, whose ideas are central to this essay, argues that reading is "a creative process that is far above mere perception of what is written. The literary text activates our own faculties, enabling us to recreate the world it presents. The product of this creative activity is . . . not the text itself, nor is it the imagination of the reader: it is the coming together of text and imagination" (279). Indeed, Iser defines well the fears of those novice teachers mentioned earlier: he says that the explanations of a work's effectiveness "arise from (and often lead to)

detachment" which dulls and flattens the effect of the text (Act, 10)--and which thus threatens a fan's emotional closeness to it.

Though one might not accept every detail of the theory and though various approaches exist within it, such a criticism still seems perfect for popular fiction--since so many readers have brought so much time, devotion and money to their personal interests in reading it. This is not to slight other forms of criticism. Historical and sociological studies, for example, in trying to explain why certain works are popular to certain groups of readers in certain historical periods would be just as useful. And, as said, not all proponents of reader-response criticism agree. At one end are structural-sociological writers (like Fish and Jonathan Culler) who deal with so-called "interpretive communities" or "reading conventions," and on the other end are subjective critics who feel that the reader brings almost everything to the experience of the book, that the text is just a blank on which the reader writes (like Holland and David Bleich) (Davis 347-348). But the type of criticism used here is something in between, a concentration on what happens between reader and text one-on-one: an activity that is inaugurated by the text (and which thus gives the text a crucial role, and warrants our examining it) but one which is general enough that I can use the phrase "a" reader as opposed to "the" reader ("the" reader being part of a special group).

In doing so, I am not arguing that all readers have similar reactions. Far from it. The assortment of response is one of

reader-response criticism's major points--that the reader brings something to the reading. But, simply as an initial approach, I do not want to explore the specific responses of specific groups, whether determined by class, race, gender, education, or historical era. All of that can be done and very profitably, but structural, sociological, Marxist, and feminist critics could do it better. Instead, I want to show how a text first addresses readers, asks for participation from them, and encourages them to put themselves in the situation of the characters, to experience the story, or to fill in the background imaginatively. How different groups of readers, and different readers among these groups, respond to this input from the text is still open--emphatically so. How readers react would have as many possibilities as there are schools of literary criticism. But that readers do react is the point of what is said here.

And a popular fiction that generates fans, clubs, conventions and sales suggests that the reader-reaction is immediate and strong, a subjective response that does not wait for the objective approval of reviewers or critics. A claim of personal ownership from so many fans clearly shows how important is the attachment. The reasons for Norton's followers are surely varied, but the hold is unquestionable. And such strong but quiet acceptance suggests that she would be excellent for showing how "a" reader is led to invest personal interest in her works.

The characteristics of Norton's writing that do this can be grouped under three large categories: her characters, her plots,

and her alien worlds. These are very broad, interrelated, and aspects of them have been addressed before by Roger Schlobin and Carl Yoke. But here they will be placed in the context of how her books engage a reader's imagination and elicit personal and emotional responses. Doing this, viewing the three text-oriented categories in terms of the temporal and dynamic event of reading, changes their focus: character becomes the discovery of self, plot becomes the finding of a place, and alien setting becomes the unfolding of a world. The nouns become verbs--and that's the whole point. The Beast Master (1959) provides primary illustrations, as do parts of Judgment on Janus (1963) and The X Factor (1965).¹ And the issues that emerge in studying these books are adolescence and what the association with that state means for a reader, the whole charge of escapism and wish-fulfillment that is often associated with popular literature, and narrative and descriptive gaps that are filled in by a reader's imagination. As will be shown, all of these points arise from the strategies and concerns of reader-response criticism.

First of all, to discuss Norton's characters is also to deal with plot. Not that her characters are determined by plot, but that through the course of the action-based novel, the main character also travels a dynamic course of development or self-discovery which is inseparable from the story--and parallels a reader's experience of the book. As Schlobin says, Norton's protagonists "deal not only with dangerous external forces but also with their own maturation and personal challenges" (29), and

Yoke argues that a novel's "physical quest is frequently paralleled by an internal one" (13). For instance, a quick review of her novels shows that almost all of them begin with a sense of confinement that is frustrating to the main character. Hosteen Storm of The Beast Master is caught by red tape in a Government Center where he is seen as being possibly violent--and that he is holding his emotion in check is suggested by his tunic's "striking addition of a snarling lion's mask" while he himself smiles "with gentle detachment" (ch. 1). Also, as pointed out by nearly everyone who has written on Norton, many of her characters begin in a state of exile or exclusion ("alienated, outcast, and alone" [Yoke 23])--Storm has lost his home of Terra, Naill Renfro in Judgment on Janus is a war refugee stuck in the Dipple of Korwar, which he calls a "prison," and Diskan Fentress, the imperfect offspring of a contracted marriage in The X Factor, sees himself as too clumsy and slow to fit into his father's polished family. Such is the opening set-up for many of the novels: youths trapped in situations they do not like while being primarily alone (or sometimes they can communicate only with animals, as Fentress can, and as Storm feels close to only his team of beasts). And then almost immediately, before the end of the first chapter, the people manage to escape their situations and are about to enter wholly new worlds (Storm reaches Arzor, Renfro Janus, and Fentress steals a tape that will take him to Mimir). The characters declare themselves, decisive action is taken immediately, and

very soon a new realm of possibility opens--worlds full of danger, mystery, promise . . . the unknown. The plot has not motivated them; their assertive personalities have motivated it.

This scenario is not surprising to anyone familiar with Norton's works, but it relates specifically to reader-response theory because the state of Norton's characters at the start of many of her stories is part of, or very much like, adolescence, even when the age of the character, like Storm's, does not fit that time-period exactly. This doesn't mean that Norton's readership is restricted--anyone can enjoy her writing. Nor is it proper to claim that her so-called intended audience--if there is such a thing--is just an adolescent one. But the lack of profanity and sex, the repeated average length of her early works (almost always eighteen chapters), the relative youth of her main characters, the repeated dispute between conformity-authority and individual uniqueness and freedom, and especially the dynamic of character-plot-alien world which is the central focus of this essay, all suggest that perhaps the reader who would have the strongest emotional response to her writing has, at least, a partially adolescent mind--and an emotional reading experience is the one under discussion here. Furthermore, Norton's works, to elicit such a response from as many readers as possible, need a common denominator, and a state that any reader goes through is adolescence, or at least like it. It's a state when a reader, awash with longings and expectations, might want to trade in the past, to break from the confinement of childhood and parental

authority, to move out of the prison of the defined past and the defined self (defined by parents and environment), to enter a larger world of freedom and adventure, to test and thus to find a self through the exploration of a new landscape beyond the old confines. And this new landscape--if desire could become fulfilled--would be open, boundless, new, exciting, filled with wonder and danger, and it also would be undefined. The longing of adolescence (and I would never limit this feeling to just this time, but it is a period when the feelings can be common) is not so much the desire to know what's out there but more the desire not to know, to maintain the sense of wonder and yet to find oneself capable of encountering it.

This is one aspect of Norton's appeal. Her novels deal with this same type of transitional state, an archetypal "rite of passage" as Schlobin says (xxvii), or, as Yoke says, a period when a "metamorphosis of personality" occurs (13). Actually, the personalities of the characters need not change, but there is almost always a growth in knowledge--the self, if not modified, is at least discovered, defined, or put into an environment where it more easily fits.

This dynamic can be summarized in detail. The characters begin in restrained emotional turmoil (Storm eager for vengeance, Renfro wanting to save his mother from a painful death, Fentress sick of how different he is from everyone around him). And the emotions are exacerbated by traditional--though not exclusively--adolescent concerns of difference, rejection, authority, and

freedom. Fentress, though hopeless at the start of The X Factor, never thinks of suicide because "he was too young and still not desperate enough" (ch. 1)--too adolescent to be jaded yet. The longing for freedom is perfectly stated in Judgment on Janus when Renfro thinks of the "desires" and "needs" which had been prevented in "the vise of the Dipple": "To observe, to learn, to experiment with the new" (ch. 2). And being filled with such emotion makes the characters see themselves as different. As the late-teen Fentress says almost pathetically of his father's family, "You cannot hate those who are perfect . . . you can only hate yourself for being what you are" (ch. 1). But from such an imprisoning state a break-out occurs that leads to the events of the rest of the book, where the frustration of longing is resolved by the removal to an alien world where the main characters find outlets, arenas, for their constrained energy and needs--for there they are allowed to function and grow. Fentress, though he admits to being in great danger when he arrives on Mimir, is happy--because he has his own freedom (ch. 2). And, unlike the settlers on Janus who have no desire to learn anything of the planet and who want to destroy the native forests, Renfro is curious about them instead, open to their "wonder" (ch. 1).

Then, by the end of the novels, Norton's characters have found their new homes. Indeed, the places seem to have been waiting for them. Though Storm's second world is similar to his Navajo birthplace, he is told by a native that he is really a

native Norbie spirit who left "faraway" but who now wants to return: "Inside, you Norbie come home again" (ch. 6); the brothers-in-fur have been waiting for someone like Fentress; and the transformation on Janus from human to Iftin can occur only when a person is already "sympathetic" to the life of the forest (ch. 17). But this transition is not easy; it involves a cross-over from a rejected past--an emphatically dead past--to an undefined but developing future. Renfro's mother, the link to his past, dies at the start of Judgment on Janus; when Renfro leaves the Dipple he feels that "He had to go fast, not looking back, never looking back now" (ch. 1), and once he is transformed into an Iftin, there is no suggestion that he can return--that he would even want to. Fentress finds at the end of The X Factor that he no longer admires his step-brother (and note how narratively convenient it is that a member of his family appears at the end to show him how much he has changed) and that he is closing a door "firmly" on his past which cannot be opened again (ch. 18).

Storm in The Beast Master undergoes even more complex realizations about self, change, and discovery. His own aloneness after the loss of Earth and the demands of his sworn vengeance have isolated him throughout the book. When he confronts the equally isolated Xik at the end--his enemy, but one also cut off from its homeworld--he thus faces and conquers this objectification of his own loneliness. "You stand alone," he says to the alien, "one among the many who hate you. Never shall

you see your homeworld again!" (ch. 18). By saying this, Storm deals with his own exclusion and difference ("the agony of the old loss was dulled"), and only by facing it can he thus free himself and become independent of the past. Storm finds a surrogate family at the end with his same Navajo heritage and a father-figure who once was married to his real mother. But his mother has long since died. Crucially--especially for the passage of adolescence--Storm is not returning to a maternal womb. It is a new home, and his mother "helped to make it," but the mural of the terrestrial desert with its Navajo horsemen, painted by his mother and which haunted him before, is now "only a painted wall, nostalgic, beautiful, not meant to hold a man in spell" (ch. 18). You can't go home again, the experience suggests, but you can find a new home.

And these transitional states of fear and hope, loss and longing, mirror adolescence perfectly. No one can go back to childhood, but anyone can enter the frightening and yet beckoning world of adulthood. The stories thus provide reflections for adolescent readers, or any readers with longings to break free, and help them to imagine future potential self-developments. Again, this summary is not to suggest a specifically intended readership, but to point out that a particular kind of reader--who is not so uncommon--could have a very emotional and subjectively meaningful reading.

Yet, if a reader identifies so closely with the situation in the book, cannot a critic raise the charge of "escapism," the

ever-present bane of popular literature, the charge that Norton's works might be run-away-from-reality pleasure-jaunts that divert readers from the so-called "real" world to fantastic and unlikely places? Or, to put it another way, is the reader too, through such close familiarity with a character, whisked off into the same never-never-land? But do readers, like Fentress at the end of The X Factor, rip off their clothes and leave humanity to join a communal tribe of animals? That readers share vicariously in the characters' journeys is, of course, true, but to say that the experience of the novel fulfills any of a reader's longings or emotional turmoil is not the case. Little that is substantive or physical comes from reading a novel, just the pleasure of imaginative interplay and recognition--something satisfying that cannot be denied, something complex, useful and sometimes necessary, but readers still are left with their own situations whatever they might be. Readers may have brief escapes or diversions from these problems, but of course their wishes are still not fulfilled; dreams are simply brought to the surface, examined, "formulated." Indeed, Iser quotes a crucial passage from D.W. Harding which clarifies the whole notion of so-called "escapism" in popular writing:

What is sometimes called wish-fulfillment in novels and plays can . . . more plausibly be described as wish-formulation or the definition of desires. . . . It seems nearer the truth . . . to say that fictions contribute to defining the reader's or spectator's values, and perhaps stimulating his desires, rather than to suppose that they gratify desire by some mechanism of vicarious experience. (294)

A novel does not fulfill the wishes of a reader. A reader gets nothing tangible at all, and yet the reader gets something, which must come from the reader's own self, or, more accurately, from the interaction of the reader with the text. A reader's identification with a character is not so much an end as a means, a way of testing one's own frustrations and expectations against those of the character in the book (Iser 291). An adolescent's desire to break with the past, for example, or anyone's need of change from oppression, is not so much gratified as discovered and defined.²

Indeed, the "escapes" described in Norton's books are not easy or immediate. Storm in The Beast Master struggles with the mission of vengeance, a "legacy" that was given to him by a grandfather "trying to keep alive in the last of his own blood a little of the past" (ch. 5). But Storm realizes that he is "accursed" (ch. 5) by it and that eventually--to move on to his other life, to cross the transition, to conclude the book--he must sever himself from it. Even Fentress wants only the right to be himself: "All he asked . . . was what they would not grant him--solitude and freedom from all they were and he could not be" (ch. 1). But when he gets to Mimir, he finds at first that he is still inadequate, not good enough for both the brothers-in-fur and the impatient, demanding Julha. And Renfro leaves the results of one war only to land in the middle of two others, the present one between the settlers and the forest, and the past one between the Larsh and the Iftin.

Through such stories readers can test their own possibilities of moving on into uncertain futures, an activity which is all part of the dialectic that occurs between text and reader. As Iser suggests, reading formulates not only the world of the book, but "ourselves . . . what had previously seemed to elude our consciousness" (294). Readers can't escape to an Arzor or Janus in real life (they might not want to--the places are dangerous), but through the imagination and emotion that were stimulated by the reading-creation of these places, they might find that they themselves desire places where they feel they belong, or justification for their assumed uniqueness, or new functions and new selves; or even more immediate desires as a need for travel, for learning ecology and archaeology, for wilderness vacations, for visiting zoos . . . or even for owning a cat. This is not an escape from self but an exploration and discovery of self, a break from what was to what really is, and to what could be.

Another aspect of reader-response theory relevant to Norton's plots is what Iser says about narrative expectations established by the gaps in the text, which then are filled in by the reader (280). A text engages the reader's imagination by setting up expectations which are either fulfilled or opposed by the rest of the book. Such expectations are common in popular fiction, to the point of formulaic repetition that sometimes makes reading passive and unstimulating--"habit-forming," some would say. Norton's readers know to expect stunners, blasters,

the Space Patrol, Free Traders, flitters, Forerunners and com-units. But the emotional investment of her readers would not exist if she were this predictable. The communion between Fentress and the brothers-in-fur, though the potential for it is established in the second chapter, undergoes many delays and reversals before the end, and any hint in the reader's mind that a possible romance might grow between Fentress and the equally-young female Julha is progressively squashed.

More complexly, The Beast Master sets up the givens of a standard Western: the setting has horses, corrals, open prairie; the settlers wear wide-brimmed hats; the men go armed; "private differences are settled speedily with the stun ray or one's fists" (ch. 1); and the native Norbies have customs similar to those of American Indians. This helps the readers to fill in the background: the economics and social structure of the Old West, or some variation, can be assumed to exist, and they thus help to realize the setting. But note how the inclusion of "stun ray" in the passage above changes readers' lazy expectations and inspires imaginative play: the Norbies and Nitra aren't Indians exactly, the fawns aren't cattle, Arzor is not the American Southwest, and the Xiks and Sealed Caves are purely science-fictional intrusions that imaginations must accommodate. Western images are summoned first from past knowledge, but then the narrative reminds readers that it is not a Western novel, and so the creative building of the world must undergo a redefining, a recoloring, a thorough revision of our vision. Indeed, the

process is very similar to Storm's modification of his view of Quade, the enemy he is sworn to avenge: "He had accepted Quade, the enemy, but this other Quade [the kind man who saved his life] was infringing more and more on his carefully built-up image" (ch. 5). And this is precisely the type of activity sought by reader-response critics: when a situation in the text mirrors the situation of the reader (Murfin 146).

Though the whole span of Norton's stories can be shown to encourage reader participation through hints and expectations (see, for example, the last lines of many of her chapters, which often set up threats, beckonings, journeys, possibilities), I should point out briefly just how well her opening chapters function. They are masterpieces of reader titillation. The plots unfold almost immediately; the frustrated characters, as mentioned before, are moved in a flash from dead-end stillpoints to new realms of freer action. And before those first chapters conclude, hints of mystery involving the new worlds often are established. In The Beast Master Arzor is said to be "three-quarter wilderness," a frontier planet, where there's a problem with stock disappearing, and that "Everyone would like to know" how it's done. The mystery is set, and the peculiar legend of the Sealed Caves is also introduced, an alien wonder, a possibility that--you can bet--will become a reality about midway through the book. And the chapter includes a calling, a beckoning, an invitation into the new world, which is also an invitation to the reader to enter the rest of the book. Storm

wants to get beyond the settler's "plasta-crete buildings" to feel the wind from the mountains that call of freedom, and, at the end of the chapter, while watching a horse with a "delight in his freedom to move," he approaches it, this symbol of frontier openness and action, "more eager than he had been for over a year." The X Factor's first chapter shows Fentress choosing a tape that will take him to the type of planet "that poses some kind of puzzle," and he, like a reader, is moved to speculation and wonder: "What could such puzzles be?" And just one line from Judgment on Janus is enough to suggest the haunting otherness of the alien landscape: "Always the forest waited . . . and so did that which was within the forest."

Finally, and related to the above point, is what might be the most memorable aspect of Norton's claim for reader participation: her creation of alien worlds. Here the "gaps" are especially relevant, for Norton is not a highly descriptive writer. Rather she's an evocative one. Important for her is not a catalogue of physical data but the emotion suggested by the landscape, which allows readers to fill in for themselves what might be missing. When Renfro first encounters an enormous "Great Crown" tree where the natives once lived, the description of it is almost no description--it depends more on emotional identification: "He stared in wonder. Old, very old . . . huge . . . This--his tangled memory sought, found--this was Iftsiga! the ancient citadel of the south. And it lived!" He climbs to a "limb that was large enough to accommodate four of his kind

walking abreast," the kind of specific measured detail one expects from other science-fiction works. But more important for Norton are the emotional associations brought back by memory. Renfro "paused only a moment at the hollow of the doorway before stepping into the past--the far, far past" (ch. 6).³ Though Renfro (now an Iftin) has genuine memories of the place, Norton's worlds for the reader are also both strange and familiar, like places that are different but not so different that we wouldn't feel we belong there. They make readers seem like changeling children (as in Judgment on Janus) or Norbie "spirits" come home again (as in The Beast Master).

Also representative is the first depiction of Arzor mentioned above: "The arch of sky overhead, with the tinge of mauve to give it an un-Terran shade, and the wind that swept down from the distant rust-red ripples of mountains hinted of the freedom he desired" (ch. 1). Though different colors set the alienness, more crucial is the feeling of beckoning and longing, of possible fulfillment--that what Storm desires might be out there. Later, in a description of the effects of the spring rains, the point again seems less the details of color and plant-life than the dynamic of the landscape:

"Pretty, eh?" . . . The yellow-green ground blanket ahead was patterned with drifts of white, golden, and scarlet flowers. "But wait a month or so and"--he snapped his fingers--"all dried and gone. Just sand and rocks, some of the thorn bushes, and the rest a lot of nothing. Fastest changing country you ever saw!" (ch. 4)

In a plot that moves, perhaps the landscape must develop too; the changing characters move through a changeable world that interacts dynamically with them (as the flashflood in the mountains that later occurs and redirects the storm).⁴

Furthermore, in Norton's books a place in the landscape is often identified as an area of unexplained happenings, legend and wildness, of forbidden ground--like the Peaks in this novel, the forest on Janus, or the shadow-city of Xcothal on Mimir--and the characters almost inevitably enter it. Her landscapes aren't so much there, hard and defined; instead they unfold, open like a story. And because of this, her worlds might be less interpreted by the reader than they are realized.

A passage from Gilbert Ryle (used by Iser), describing how a view of the mountain, Helvellyn, is imagined, supports this point: "Seeing Helvellyn in one's mind's eye does not entail . . . the having of visual sensations. It does involve the thought of having a view of Helvellyn and it is therefore a more sophisticated operation than that of [actually] having a view of Helvellyn. It is one utilization among others of the knowledge of how Helvellyn should look, in one sense of the verb, it is thinking how it should look" (282). This passage describes a reader's interplay with any visual description of a scene, and note how much a reader contributes: expectations, faith, how it "should" look. And Iser adds that the actual sight of the place, after all the contribution from the mind's eye, is often disappointing. This is why films of especially likable novels

are so often unsatisfying. In reading a novel the "imagination senses the vast number of possibilities" on how to visualize the hero and settings, but "the moment these possibilities are narrowed down to one complete and immutable picture, the imagination is put out of action, and we feel we have somehow been cheated" (Iser 282). In the film, viewers are confined to mere "physical perception," but in the novel, what readers sense is "simultaneously richer and more private" (283).⁵

For Norton, the sparseness of her descriptions, the dynamic of unfolding that's inherent in them, the mysteries and so-called alien wonders she's so famous for (such little things as the "eye-stone" found in The Beast Master, or the more elaborate--but frankly not fully described--alien gardens in the Sealed Caves), allow for even more reader imagination and participation than what would be expected in a genre which is known for its detailed backgrounds, its "world-building." As in the old Medieval ballads passed down through oral tradition, where anything of excess has been stripped away, only the essentials to build elaborate stories are left (I say this because some of my best class discussions, best moments of student-participation, have been about the ballads). The leanness of Norton's descriptions subtly evokes greater reader imagination.

And this point is important in yet another way. A strong contention throughout Norton's works is the human need for a capacity to see--to be open, curious, imaginative and flexible. Both Schlobin (xxviii-xxix) and Yoke (21) have found tolerance

for other races and openness to experience in her writings. Storm's grandfather could not forgive the grandson "who had walked the alien way," (ch. 5) which only left Storm an impossible burden that eventually he has to discard. At the beginning of The X Factor, Fentress closes his eyes and ears to all sensory input, hating his world, but he then learns to see the "shadows" of Mimir, which no other human in the book can do; as the brothers-in-fur say, "To those who have no eyes, no ears, there is neither sight nor sound nor being" (ch. 18). And Renfro is rightfully appalled at the settlers on Janus who want to make the planet conform "to their own off-world pattern of life" (ch. 3), who try to avoid "contact with other beliefs and customs" (ch. 4), a blindness the opposite of which Renfro experiences after his transformation in the forest, when he "could make out every rib of leaf . . . seeing such as he had never experienced before!" (ch. 5). But what Norton argues thematically is exactly what she asks, and seems to expect, of her reader. A reader is led not to reconstruct the landscape from just the hard objective data of scientific measurement, but to create it imaginatively--consciously and unconsciously--from suggestive associations, feelings, memories, longings and dreams. No one is asked to decipher, but to realize--asked to see. And thus by participating in the interactive reading of the text, a reader demonstrates one of her major themes.

Such an idea leads to my conclusion, which, since this essay started with a personal recollection, will be based on another.

I once had an excellent teacher who said very little of his own in class but listened to and respected everything that we students said. He could find something worthwhile in nearly any comment, and he never imposed an authoritative view. When he retired, a student of his wrote in praise that in his classes, everyone felt a little more intelligent. I argue that in reading Andre Norton readers feel a little more creative. What readers imagine and contribute, what they bring to the reading of her, is up to them, something determined by their individual lives. I could show what I have brought to reading her, how my white, adolescent, suburban, male, late 50's-early 60's background influenced my period of strongest response, whether I see it as class-determined or something uniquely my own. But to do so would be to talk only of myself. I have tried instead to discuss those things which presumably would be more common--not inclusive of everyone's experience, but at least not focused on just one reader or one group of readers. Readers naturally have different reactions, but that's the whole point. To generalize reader-response ideas fully, all of us, as readers, have to fill in the blank, have to see ourselves as part of the reading. A book is not an artifact or a purely objective set of codes, but nor is it a living thing--it doesn't think or act or grow. Yet something does happen when it is read. It comes alive in us.

So to examine books completely, we sometimes do have to put our experiences on the line--as those one-time graduate students I mentioned at the start were so reluctant to do. But an

advantage of reader-response theory is that it provides the means for dealing with that reluctance; it reassures us that my student-friends were not totally irrational or paranoid, that in one way our lives were threatened--not our everyday lives, but the lives we live inside a novel when we read it. And the wonder of Andre Norton is that, perhaps more easily than other writers, she allows us to enter her narratives. What is so impressive about her books is that they contain not only all of her alien worlds, but all of ours too.

NOTES

1. My choice of texts is more random than what it seems. I wanted works from the early part of Norton's SF career because those books I have read most often. I did not want works that dealt with groups rather than individuals (such as Plague Ship and Dark Piper), nor did I want sequels. I always felt that The Beast Master is a worthy novel that deserves attention, and Judgement on Janus and The X Factor were simply those I had read most recently and which obviously fit my argument. (Perhaps another reason why Norton criticism is not extensive is the formidable task of deciding just which books to use.)

2. Similar responses to charges of escapism have been made by Schlobin and Robert Scholes. Both of them feel that literary escapism is not a one-way movement from the empirical "real" world but is also a return with gained insight. Schlobin says that fantasy can "make wish manifest," can bring the mind into "confrontation with its own potentialities," and that the "mundane life," presumably of the reader, is transformed. See his Introduction to The Literature of Fantasy: A Comprehensive, Annotated Bibliography of Modern Fantasy Fiction (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1979). And Scholes argues that what he defines as "sublimation fantasy" turns "our concerns into satisfying shape," that it serves to relieve anxiety and make life bearable--and that, in addition, escapism is a "dirty and

degrading" concept. See his Structural Fabulation: An Essay on Fiction of the Future (Notre Dame, Indiana: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1975), p. 5. These ideas parallel Iser's since the benefits are not just the exclusive right of the writer but of a reader as well, who performs a similar confrontation with potentialities and a possible transformation of one's own life.

3. A valuable exercise is to contrast this description with the more typically science-fiction one of the "Trees of Ranau" in ch. 13 of "The Plague of Masters" (original title, Earthman, Go Home! 1961), by Poul Anderson. It depicts similarly giant trees but in a more scientific and detailed way, carefully leading a reader's objective visualization through the swelling of known terrestrial referents. See Wendland, Science, Myth and the Fictional Creation of Alien Worlds (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985), 71-72, for a summary of how the description works.

4. Norton commented at the 12th IAFA Conference that she never maps her created landscapes or imposes a pre-set plan on them. (She said that the map included in Witch World was required by the editor and that she did not fully agree with it.) This emphasis on the malleable and flexible nature of her settings is part of my point: they remain in a state of imaginative flux, in the writer's mind but also in a reader's mind too.

5. Another example is a reader's possible disappointment over the cover painting for a book. Indeed, studying how various cover artists have interpreted the visuals of a novel over several editions would be a perfect exercise in reader response. Though editors obviously influence what appears, such a study should reveal more about the artists and how they view the books than the books themselves.

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