SLAYING THE DRAGON WITHIN:
ANDRE NORTON'S FEMALE HEROES

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If I were to write a modern fairy tale with a female protagonist, it might go something like this.

Once upon a time in a little town on the banks of a wide river in the kingdom of Ohio, Rebecca (our beautiful, young central character) was forced to work as cashier in a local market because her mother insisted she pay room and board (our heroine is imprisoned at a dead end job by an unsympathetic mother). She worked hard under bad conditions (only two ten-minute coffee breaks a day) and dreamed that Rob Smith, last year's star quarterback and senior class president (a prince) would ask her to marry him (rescue her), and that they would live happily ever after.

Happily ever after, which is never explained in fairy tales or Hollywood movies, means that Rebecca will bear Rob's children, keep his house, remain true to him, obey him, and both sacrifice for and nurture those around her. She will be happy doing these things not only because society promises her that she will be but because it expects her to be and it educates her to love and to please.

The story above lacks the glitz and detail of a real fairy tale, but it follows the same story grammar and it sends the same message. It does not matter whether the female protagonist is named Rebecca, Barbara, or Michelle, or whether she is named Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Red Riding Hood, or Rapunzel. Nor does it matter whether she is imprisoned by a dead end job, by motherhood, by wifely obligations, by a wicked stepmother, by evil sisters, by a spell, or by being locked in a tower. Nor does it matter whether her rescuer is last year's star quarterback, the "hunk" who lives next door, the dynamic young businessman, or whether he is a woodsman, a knight, or a prince.

Rebecca's role in our culture, at least as it is expressed in literature until recently, is well-defined. She is to wait, to depend, to love, to obey, to please, to nurture, to sacrifice--in short, to be passive and to pacify. In return, her husband will not only support and protect her, he will redeem her from evil. After all, was it not a woman who caused our fall from the Garden of Eden?

Rebecca is not to become adventurous, inquisitive, courageous (unless she is rescuing or protecting children), independent, or self-actualizing. She may, of course, hide these qualities. If she displays them she will be punished, for they are reserved for the hero, and in western literature the hero is almost exclusively white, young, male, handsome, and healthy. He is not female, not Afro-American, not Puerto Rican, not Mexican, not Indian. He is not old, impaired, or ugly.

And while there certainly are exceptions, this is the image of the female in our culture as projected by contemporary film and fiction. It is not an image based upon real life; rather, it is an image that the general public believes because it has been taught to believe it (Pope 6).

This image of the female hero in our culture is the principal discovery of The Female Hero in American and British

Literature by Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope, but there is a great deal of evidence to support their finding. Scott Winokur reports, for example, that women who speak tentatively subtly assure listeners that they are willing to accept second-class social status, this from a study by social psychologist Linda Carli. And among the mass of evidence cited by Pearson and Pope is a 1974 study by Lenore Weitzman and Diane Rizzo entitled "Images of Males and Females in Elementary School Textbooks in Five Subject Areas." This study discovered that though women comprised 53% of the population when the study was done, pictures of women in the textbooks comprised only 31% of the total, and as grade levels rose, the percentage of women in the pictures declined. Moreover, men were shown in more than 150 occupational roles, many of them quite glamorous, but almost all women were shown as housewives. Women were shown to predominate in two roles: more women than men were shown as evil characters and more women than men were shown as clumsy, stupid, or the object of a foolish joke (Pope 6).

Yet, despite this, Pope and Pearson conclude that there are female heroes in American and British literature. Though they are rarer than their male counterparts and different from them, they still follow Joseph Campbell's prototypic, heroic mono-myth of separation, initiation, and return. Even though differences occur at each stage of the mono-myth, the pattern for female heroes must be considered a significant variation of it. The variation uncovered by Pope and Pearson should not be confused with female heroes who are simply "men in drag." She-Ra, Wonder Woman, Sheena of the Jungle, Red Sonia, even C.

L. Moore's Jorel of Joiry usually broadsword some villain, or "punch him out," rather than outsmart him. And, James Riemer reports in an article entitled "Masculinity and Feminine Fantasy Authors" that such macho females are on the increase (19).

Nonetheless, female heroes of the Pope and Pearson variety do occur in the fantastic, and foremost in creating them is Andre Norton. Among her female heroes are: Kilda of _Dread Companion_, Gillian of _Year of the Unicorn_, Maelen of _Moon of Three Rings_ (and its sequels _Flight in Yiktor_ and _Dare to Go A-Hunting_), Ziantha of _Forerunner Foray_, and Simsa of _Forerunner_ and _Forerunner: The Second Venture_.

Female heroes of the Pope and Pearson model do not separate from their communities, societies, or tribes for the same reasons as their male counterparts. They do not leave to seek adventure, fame, or fortune. Rather they leave to escape the repression of a society that sees them as inferior.

Women in our culture are taught that they are inferior through a series of culturally-sanctioned myths. These myths, of sexual difference, virginity, romantic love, and maternal self-sacrifice, teach women to repress, hate, and fear those very qualities that society identifies as heroic--adventurousness, independence, self-actualization, courage, and inquisitiveness. It does so because those qualities are reserved for the male (Pope 20).

From each of the myths, women learn particular negative ideas. From the myth of sexual difference, they learn that they are not only diametrically opposite to and inherently different from men but that this difference makes them inferior. From the myth of virginity they learn that they must be chaste and without ego (Pope 25). From the myth of romantic love, they learn that they cannot themselves act to change things. And, from the myth of maternal self-sacrifice, they learn that they should expect nothing in return for their efforts except the satisfaction that they have been useful (Pope 41). The messages of these myths are internalized and become the dragons of convention that enslave women. Female heroes will not separate from their societies until they realize that the people, institutions, processes, and systems that they have relied upon are really their captors. To be free, the female hero must break her dependency upon them (Pope 68).

Each of Norton's female heroes under study here are made to feel inferior or are similarly repressed by their cultures. In Norton's stories, the resulting alienation occurs because the women are different from those around them. Kilda, for example, is a "cross-birth." Her parents are divorced, and she has been sent off to live in a special school where she is being trained for a menial job. Maelen is a member of the Thassa, a minority race, out of power. Because of her actions in the novel, she is exiled from her planet and her people. Simsa is an orphan of a race unknown on her planet and lives in the Burrows, the poorest stratum of Kuxortal society. Ziantha is a child of "the Dipple," an extensive slum housing the outcast, the poor, and the sweepings of civilization (Norton, _Foray_, 41). And Gillian is a witch of Estcarp, an orphan whose hair is dark and whose skin tans easily, while her companions are blonde and fair.

These women are like most of Norton's protagonists, who are, according to Roger Schlobin, "at odds with the social order,""outcasts," "disenfranchised," and "hunted or hounded by authorities" (Yoke 13). They are almost always alienated in some way from those around them, and the alienation is frequently the result of some prejudice or exploitation. They are also often removed geographically from their normal surroundings (Yoke 13). Whatever the specific causes, Norton's female heroes are taught pretty much the same thing that females in western culture are taught--that they are somehow inferior just because they are females.

To become heroes, of course, women must recognize that they are repressed and they must then rebel against the conventions that bind them. In Norton's stories, this exit from society is not so much an act of will as it is a forced withdrawl. Simsa is forced from the Burrow when Frewar, the Old One who is both her surrogate mother and protector, dies. Kilda is forced away when she becomes too old to live at the training school, Maelen when she uses her powers in an unauthorized way and sets into play a chain of events that will cause her exile, Ziantha when Yasa, a catlike alien, recognizes her powers and exploits her. Only Gillian makes a completely free choice to leave, but she knows that she does not belong in High Halleck. Prompted by curiosity and boredom she elects to become the payment bride of a tribe of were-riders. Regardless of how it occurs, Norton's female heroes are set upon a journey that will test their wills and transform them.

The journey or quest marks the initiation phase of the mono-myth, and it is here that the female's experiences differ widely from those of the men. While male heroes "swash and buckle," cut the heads off monsters with their broadswords, and pound villains into oblivion with their fists, female heroes, and males who are powerless, "master" their worlds not by physical domination but by understanding them.

For the female hero, the journey provides opportunities to develop courage, skills, and independent thinking, things she would not likely do if she were to remain in a repressed environment. Events that occur in the course of their journeys force the females to reach deep into themselves for solutions, which, in turn, produce the conditions that cause their transformations.

During her journey, the female hero displays several qualities that define her. She may bring them to the quest, or she may develop them during its course. First, she is much more in tune with spiritual or natural forces than her male counterpart (in fantasy, these forces are often personified). Often they represent values that her culture advocates but does not practice. Second, she often acquires possession of or already has some secret or superior knowledge (in fantasy, it is often some special power or ability). Third, she discovers that her femaleness, or her sign of inferiority, is not a handicap or wound. Fourth, she learns a whole series of paradoxical truths.

Fifth, her motive for the journey is, at least initially, to find someone who will save her, though she frequently ends up saving herself. And finally, she encounters a force, or forces, that threaten her destruction or imprisonment. Norton's heroes display most of these characteristics.

Certainly they are, or become, deeply in tune with the spiritual and natural laws of their universes. Yoke writes that Norton's protagonists become more fully realized when they recognize the basic laws of their universes and align themselves with them (Yoke 18). Schlobin writes:

> They recognize their own places within the patterns and rhythms of elemental law and carry that recognition forward into a hopeful future. These patterns and rhythms are in nature, but nature is only one of their manifestations, only a part of the necessary interrelationships that are the foundations of a complete and proper realization of self (Schlobin xl).

Two of the obvious ways that Norton's female heroes display this super-sensitivity is through the development or discovery of special powers or talents, and through their ability to communicate with animals.

The special powers of the heroes are the equivalent of superior knowledge, and they develop when the hero is forced to search deeply within themselves for solutions. The powers are usually parapsychological. Maelen can enter the bodies of the animals on her planet, and by singing, she can transfer personalities from one body to another. Though untrained and unrecognized, Gillian has the same potential power as other witches of the Witch World, which is "the magic of wind and storm, as well as those spells which twist a man's shape and wits" (Witch World 50). She should be able to tap into elemental power, but until late in the story, she does not know she is a witch and only manages to save herself by an act of will. Ziantha, like many of Norton's protagonists, has the power of psychometry. It is the ability to sense history that has been recorded in inanimate objects. Even Kilda, who has no identified special power, possesses sharp wits, exceptional intuition, dogged determination, and immense courage. When faced by enormous dangers in a hostile and alien alternate world, she instinctively makes all the right choices to survive. She knows that a native plant, the notus for example, is extremely beneficial to her. It does, in fact, heighten her intuition (Dread 149).

Awareness of elemental powers is also displayed by the ability of the female heroes to communicate with animals. Simsa, for example, who is catlike herself, communicates with a zorsal named Zass. Ziantha communicates with and receives a great deal of help from Harath, a down-covered, four-tentacled animal that is psychokinetic. Maelen can talk with the animals on her planet. Even Kilda senses which beast-people in the alien world are friends.

The female hero of the Pope and Pearson model also discovers that her femaleness is not a wound. This can be generalized to include any difference that a person's culture uses to make him or her feel inferior.

Norton's female heroes not only learn that their differences are not a disadvantage but that they are, in fact, real assets. Simsa's differences include her catlike nature, her blueish-black skin, her silver hair and eyebrows, and her claws on both hands and feet. She is agile, swift, and dangerous, so that those Burrowers who know her, fear her.She is physically unlike anyone else on her planet, and as we later learn, she is, in fact, a Forerunner, an ancient race presumed to be extinct. Maelen is from another ancient race, the Thassa, but becomes exiled from it and her planet, and must wander the universe with a man who has lost his body and a hunchbacked child. Gillian is physically different from the wenches about her in High Halleck and she possesses witch powers. Kilda is a "cross-birth," whose parents have abandoned her, and Ziantha is an orphan from a vast slum with extrasensory powers.

While these differences do alienate and isolate Norton's female heroes, they also force the women to break with the conventions of their societies. That, forces them to go on quests, and that, in turn, forces their transformations of personality. This change will permit them to transform their cultures, should they wish to do so, and more importantly will permit them to redeem their self-images. In this process, they essentially learn to value those qualities that their original cultures used to deem them inferior (Pope 14).

The hero's differences also prompt a new appreciation of heritage and talent. These realizations often occur when the female hero must use her special powers (one of the qualities that alienate her from her culture) to save someone. Maelen, for example, switches Krip Vorland from one body to another. Ziantha saves a sensitive named Ris Lantee from being dissipated in a series of distant pasts. Gillian, her personality divided by a spell, forges her personality together again. And Kilda saves both the children that she has been charged with protecting and a ranger named Jorth Kosgro. In saving people that the hero cares about, she comes to realize that her powers are good.

During her journey, the female hero undergoes a series of trials that make her aware of eternal and paradoxical truths. These are the same truths that everyone comes to know--life and death, form and chaos, art and science, and so on. However, in fantasy, in particular, she becomes aware of the eternal battle between active good and active evil. This is never clearer than in Dread Companion where Kilda moves from a positive world through a gate into a negative one.

Like her male counterpart, the female hero overcomes many obstacles on her journey. She dispatches monsters, joins battles, and dispels threats to her security, but unlike her male counterpart, she solves her problems with her wits, her ingenuity, her resourcefulness, and her intelligence. Her physical battles are fairly rare. She prefers to act defensively rather than offensively. Norton's female heroes fit this profile. Even when they are forced to defend themselves, as Kilda does several times in Dread Companion, they rarely kill someone.

One of the common variations to the hero's journey is a trip through an underworld. Though it is sometimes figurative, in fantasy it is often literal, as it is in The Odyssey and in The Inferno. Norton's female heroes frequently make such underworld journeys. They may them in another time, in another dimension, in a parallel world, on another planet, or on their own planet when it has suddenly become a Hell because of some disruption. Sometimes the underworlds are strung together like beads on a necklace to stress the difficulty of passage through this phase of initiation.

Kilda, for example, goes first to another planet and then through a gate into another world where time moves much more slowly than it does in her original world. Simsa leaves the Burrow, then her home planet, and eventually ends up on a sun-baked, inhospitable planet where she fights to survive. Ziantha travels to one planet and then another before being drawn into a distant past, and then an even more distant past. Maelen watches her own planet dissolve into war and then is exiled from it. Gillian is first lost at sea, then carried far inland to High Halleck, then shipped to the were-riders as a bride-payment and transported elsewhere, and finally, she is forced to endure the gradual erosion of her own personality. Each of these trips leads to trials of the greatest terror and thus each is a kind of Hell.

According to Pope and Pearson, the female hero must face a force that threatens either to imprison or destroy her. Norton's heroes do this, usually while journeying through their underworlds. Kilda, for example, faces a force of immense powers that she calls Melusa while she is in the alternate world. Ziantha faces forces in Nurnoch, a world doubly removed in time from her own, that threaten to seal her in a tomb as a blood sacrifice. Gillian must counteract the power of a spell that has divided her personality in two and threatens to dissipate that part that has retained her real identity.

The underworld motif brings with it psychological implications. More specifically, the landscapes found there represent mental terrains, and the forces, the female hero's own shadow. The shadow is, of course, a Jungian term naming an archetype, or complex of the personality below consciousness where desires, impulses, instincts, and behaviors that are considered undesirable by society are repressed.Because she has been taught to do so, the female hero also represses all the negative feelings generated by the myths that enslave her.

In the psychological symbolism of the story, the female hero must face her shadow and defeat it. This permits her to undergo a transcendent function that Jung calls "inviduation" to forge a new, more mature, integrated, and mentally healthy personality. In doing so, she frees herself from her feelings of inferiority and slays the dragons that enslave her. Such a battle must be joined and won according to Pope and Pearson if the female hero is to achieve a "free, whole, and joyful life" (Pope 16).

In her journey, the female hero also learns that all people have within them the best qualities of both sexes, and that none of these qualities are identifiable as belonging exclusively to either men or women. She learns that the final state of wholeness is indeed androgynous, and so are its symbols (Pope 16).

In Norton's stories, this state of integrated wholeness in the female hero is often symbolized by bonding with a male. Frequently, as in classic comedy, the bonding takes the form of marriage. But the new marriage relationship is quite different from those in the cultures that the female heroes have fled. The new relationships must fit the new personalities of the women involved, women who will now not accept any form of repression.

Dread Companion best exemplifies this new relationship. Upon returning to her own time, Kilda discovers that she has been gone more than fifty years and that things have changed considerably. War with previously unknown aliens caused some planets in that area of space to be abandoned, and Dylan, the planet they are on, to be evacuated except for a small outpost (Dread 224). Kilda and her male companion, Jorth Kosgro, a ranger she saved from transforming to a beast in the "other" world, are accepted by the colony, but Kilda is psychologically unable to accept the role that the colony tries to force upon her--obedient and subservient wife, self-sacrificing mother, and so on. It is a role that denies all the she has learned about herself, a role that she is now constitutionally unable to fill. She resists the colony's efforts to marry her off for a reasonably long time, and then Jorth, who has repaired his original scout ship, asks her to marry him and to leave for a life of exploration and adventure. She accepts because she knows that this relationship will recognize her new attributes.

Gillian also marries at the end of Year of the Unicorn, becoming wife to Herrel, a were-rider. Both Gillian and her husband, who is regarded as inferior by his father, chief of the group, have made significant sacrifices to achieve a relationship which promises mutual respect and integrity (Yoke 14). Both have forged new, healthy personalities--in Gillian's case the forging is literal.

Though Ziantha, Maelen, and Simsa do not marry at the end of the novels in which they appear, each has forged an exceptionally strong bond with a male companion which preserves the qualities that they have developed during their respective journeys. Ziantha has not only forged a strong personal relationship with Ris Lantee, she has shared a body with him. Maelen has forged a similar relationship with Krip, shifting him from body to body to keep him alive, and Simsa has likewise bonded with the spaceman Thom.

The marriage symbol in Norton's novels represents the psychological ideal of the complete self, much as the sword and cup do in grail quest stories (Pope 15). Both symbols are also erotic and recognize that males and females are fully human and fundamentally alike (Pope 150).

Once other significant difference between the female hero and her male counterpart occurs in the return phase of the mono-myth. Briefly, the female hero feels no obligation to transform her community, tribe, or community. Like Norton's female heroes, the Pope and Pearson model believes that the treasure of her quest has been the full realization of self. Because of her experiences during the initiation phase of her journey, she now possesses the characteristics to perform such a transformation, but "unacknowledged as a cultural leader, she does not presume to kill dragons for others". Nor does she expect them to become her followers or subjects (pope 14). Rather, she considers others to be her equals and encourages them to undertake their own journeys towards self-fulfillment. She does not wish to entrap them, to make them feel guilty, or to dominate them. Having slain her own dragons, she does not wish now to become one.

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