

★ **To & Fro****Leah Hager Cohen**

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Challenging its audience to find themselves within its heroines' tales, Leah Hager Cohen's magnificent turn-and-read novel *To & Fro* is a tour de force peek into the wilds and wounds of childhood.

Annamae, a linguist's daughter in Brooklyn, sees "signs and wonders" everywhere. She makes promises to stars. She aches for the characters in stories, who ought to be afforded free will. She dances with her reflection, writes letters to unmet beings, and sees the colors and personalities behind the letters of the alphabet. In the mirror-fronted journal that keeps her company, she makes a record and channels words not yet understood, as with a calliope-echoing poem: "Many times I have seen you / But you have not seen me // Wandering / You call my name // I hold out my hand / You don't see..."

In a land that is much different than, but that in many ways also mirrors, Annamae's: Ani, who once left her cherished mother beside living waters in a cave, puts a kitten, Company, in a bike basket and sets off down the road. She doesn't know quite where she's going, but she feels the pull—toward a port market with "owls, pomegranates, ice, medicine. Glass eyes—false teeth—wigs—butter—wives!"; toward the realization that "through stories we find we are not alone."

By design: different readers will read this novel differently. They will find what they are meant to find. They will learn that its white space "makes room for our questions." And they will come away comforted, or changed, or believing that they are the friends who Annamae seeks. There are messages herein, for those who dare to receive them.

With "nary an end" and triumphs aplenty, *To & Fro* is a luminescent novel that makes treasures of childhood wonder, whose heroines' curiosity reflects the wisdom of sages.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (May / June 2024)

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