INTRODUCTION

ANDRE NORTON: BEYOND THE SIEGE PERILOUS

IN *Witch World,* THE MODERN-DAY MERLIN, JORGE PETRONIUS, describes the purpose of the Siege Perilous. "One takes his seat upon the Siege and before him opens that existence in which his spirit, his mind—his soul, if you wish to call it that—is at home. And he goes forth to his future there."

Simon Tregarth, soon to find a home and a destiny in the Witch World, comments wryly, "Some odd worlds your stone must have opened if your tale is true."

Some odd worlds indeed. And some very wonderful ones.

Like the Siege Perilous of the Arthurian myths Andre Norton loves, she too is an opener of Gates—from the Witch World to burnt-out Dis and isolated Beltane, from Arzor to Zacan, and throughout Earth's past and its many possible futures. Andre Norton has spent over fifty years opening Gate after Gate to legions of readers and writers. As you read this, she is probably sitting in her study at her typewriter, companioned by her cats and her honors—the Gandalf award for life achievement in fantasy, the Balrog, and the first Grand Mastership that the Science Fiction Writers of America ever awarded to a woman.

These are the obvious honors. The others are subtler—the reams of correspondence, pen-friendships that have matured over years, the stack of manuscripts, frequently first or second novels sent her by publishers who trust her to give a newcomer a break, the published books dedicated to her or

inscribed to her by their authors, the animals of glass and china, the ornaments, and the embroideries painstakingly created and offered by their makers who want not to repay her—for that is impossible—but to try to make her a gift in return for the great gift she has made to them and millions like them. And is busily working on right now.

Moonsinger's Friends, named in tribute to Andre Norton's persona in the Sword and Sorcerers' Guild of America—Moonsinger of Nine-lived Bast—is another one of those gifts. In it, some of the finest writers of fantasy and science fiction have combined their talents and dreams to produce stories that Andre Norton might enjoy. There are only fifteen stories here, for if every writer who was influenced by Andre Norton had contributed a story, you wouldn't be reading an anthology. You'd be holding in your hands the first volume of what could easily grow into a library.

The idea for *Moonsinger's Friends* was born at a Philcon several years ago, following a discussion of "critical recognition"—such as it is—for fantasy and science fiction writers. Andre Norton's name came up, and, as Donald Wollheim has remarked in his Introduction to the 1974 *Book of Andre Norton:*

> In lists of leading science fiction writers such as might be compiled by academics and fan experts, it is probable that the name of Andre Norton would be missing, whereas such writers as Robert Heinlein, Poul Anderson, Arthur C. Clarke, John Brunner, and others would certainly be present.
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> The world of science fiction and fantasy readers, the same people who devour Anderson and Simak and Farmer and Niven, also buy and read everything by Andre Norton they can get their hands on.
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> While they spend a lot of time discussing the sociology and speculations of the other writers, Andre Norton they read for pleasure.

And yet, because—also, as Donald Wollheim says, "you will not find her at conventions or bumbling around at liter-

ary gatherings, nor expounding any special theories at academic halls," she receives less notice than one would expect. This "relative critical neglect is regrettable," observes *The Science Fiction Encyclopedia*.

While it doesn't necessarily seem regrettable to Andre Norton, who is a storyteller in a tradition thousands of years old, it bothered the crowd of us who lingered after that 1981 Philcon panel. Clearly something had to be done about this, and we were the ones who were going to do it. Ironically, the idea for *Moonsinger's Friends* arose from precisely the sort of academic halls in which Andre Norton does *not* bumble about, as well as from fantasy writers in general. The senior statesmen (and women) of universities, in the fullness of their careers, are often honored by their colleagues and former students, who present them with a book. Such a book is called a *Festschrift* (since universities go in for Anglo-German rituals), literally, a text that celebrates something: in this case, an eminent career and an outstanding individual. The academic *Festschrift* usually consists of essays and articles written within the honoree's field, though poems (usually learned translations) are occasionally allowed. I remembered one such book compiled in honor of scholar and fantasist J. R. R. Tolkien, and suddenly decided that such a volume—but one of stories like the ones Andre Norton has made a career of telling—would be the very thing. Several authors present agreed with me. One of them, Diane Duane, is a contributor to this book.

And so, here it is . . . a collection of short stories and novelettes written to honor the woman who opened Gates to many of us and who, as writer, mentor, and friend, has *been* (to borrow another contributor, C. J. Cherryh's, phrase) "the gateway through which so, so many of us have come into this field in the first place." Usually books like this include biography, bibliography, and an attempt by the general editor to come to grips with what's all too frequently termed in academic circles the "achievement" of the person to whom the book is presented.

I'm not going to try that. Andre Norton's "achievement," so to speak, is all around us, not just in the shelves of

bookstores, libraries, and readers, but in the lives of the men and women who, in many cases, have grown up reading her novels.

As Joan D. Vinge remarks in her Afterword, Andre Norton has helped us to grow up. Many of her books are the first science fiction a lot of readers encounter. The experience is always the same. Something about that particular novel strikes a chord in the young reader, who suddenly feels at home and knows that he or she has to find more of these books. Ask any Norton reader. Chances are, any one can tell you which Norton book opened the Gate to wonder—and will probably urge you to reread it before you do anything else.

We are, of course, lucky that we had someone like Andre Norton to open Gates for us when we were children and teenagers, because the impressions that are made then are lasting ones. Opening Gates for young people is a tremendous responsibility that Andre Norton has borne lightly and joyfully, and for which frequently she has not gotten the credit she deserves. As Ursula K. LeGuin (no mean opener of Gates herself) remarks in "Dreams Must Explain Themselves," "Sure it's simple, writing for kids. Just as simple as bringing them up."

In the same essay, LeGuin points out:

> The British seem not to believe publishers' categorizations of "juvenile," "teen-age," "young adult, etc." so devoutly as we do. It's interesting that, for instance, Andre Norton is often reviewed with complete respect by English papers, including the *Times Literary Supplement* . . . They seem to be aware that fantasy is the great age-equalizer; if it's good when you're twelve, it's quite likely to be just as good, or better, when you're thirty-six.

This is true of the worlds that Andre Norton's Gates have opened to us. We don't just read her new books and then add them to the collection on the shelves to gather dust; we reread the old ones. Any new Witch World novel is a perfect invitation to sit down and reread all the others. Norton's

books don't just show us wonders that don't dim as the years pass and, presumably, we enter the "real world," they show us wonders in such a way that we see ourselves in them. We participate, we share, and, if we happen to be in need of it, we are healed just as surely as if we'd stumbled upon one of those pools of red mud that you find in Escore if you're very, very lucky. It isn't just that we can "relate"—in some cloying pop-psychology sense—to a renegade like Simon Tregarth, or a displaced person like Troy Horan, or veterans like Ranger Kartr mourning burnt-off worlds, or Beastmaster Hosteen Storm, but in a more personal and immediate sense.

Like the Gates that the Siege Perilous unlocks, the Gates created by Andre Norton let us into places where our spirits find homes, where we're not strange, where there are people who are like us, who want what we do. They heal our loneliness, at least while we're reading. And goodness knows that for most of us who regard castles, starships, wizards, and aliens as desirable mental furniture, we need that. Adolescents spend plenty of time wondering if they'll ever find a place where they fit in, where they could be accepted *precisely* for the qualities that make them feel like outskirters in our schools, our shopping malls—in the "real world."

Here was a real live published author (and if that's not an authority figure, what is?) showing us wonders. The existence of her books implied that there might be more writers who told such stories.

For those of us who are female, there was a special shock of recognition, usually expressed as, "You mean Andre Norton's really a woman?" That was almost as much a delight as finding out she existed in the first place. Not only did *she* do things—she wrote books, which is what a lot of us wanted to do—she wrote books about characters we might, if we were very, very lucky, be able to match. After all, very few of us are likely to grow up into Jirel of Joiry or Red Sonya. But a bookish girl, given a star-faring society, might grow into a Roane Hume or a Charis Nordholm; a sensitive one might become a Kaththea or Jaelithe Tregarth, a resourceful one Joisan, or Gillan in *The Crystal Gryphon* and *Gryphon in Glory* and *Year of the Unicorn*. That was a relief

for me, at least. While I had no trouble identifying with the promising young cadets of Robert Heinlein's *Space Cadet* (probably because I assumed that the female cadets were too busy studying astrogation to come forward and tell their stories), it *was* much, much easier to put myself in the slippers or spaceboots of another girl—and it still is. And seeing such people actually doing things that counted made it easier for me, and women like me, to try for lives of our own. Not that we wouldn't have, in any case. But just by being there and telling her stories, Andre Norton made it easier for all of us.

For many of us, male *and* female, those of us who weren't content just to read but who tried to figure out what Kaththea and her Hilarion might do *next,* or what Nik Kolherne did with his new face and new family, another, greater Gate opened up: we discovered to our great joy that we too could be openers of Gates. If we did a good job, then people would go through our Gates too, perhaps, in the process of creating Gates—and stories—of their own; and no one would ever run out of Gates or things to read.

This is what the writers in *Moonsinger's Friends* have in common with the readers: they travel through Gate after Gate like C. J. Cherryh's Morgaine, but with one important difference. No one gets hurt or stays lonely.

Still, Andre Norton isn't just one Gatekeeper out of many; she remains quintessentially *the* Gatekeeper, the first one, the one we return to.

There's always a special quality to Andre Norton's stories. If you read her as an adult, you once again become the wise child or adolescent or whatever that you were when you discovered her books. Who says you can't go home again? And who says that you can only have one home? You can find a home in any one of Norton's books and, better yet, you can take from them the very things that delighted and impressed you at any point in your life. Best of all, once you put the book down and reenter daily life and the all-too-familiar round of teachers, classmates, and later, jobs, bills, and other obligations, you can use what you gained in her books to help you function . . . better than before. This is

due to the very special insight all of Andre Norton's books contain, an insight that makes them simultaneously exotic and familiar.

Most of Andre Norton's characters are young. Through no fault of their own—there's been a war, a plague, their parents have been killed or called away—these people find themselves alone like the children in *Dragon Magic*. Some are actual exiles or refugees, like Rahotep, nomarch-in-exile, or Troy Horan and Niall Renfro, who drift in the shadow world of the Dipple, where the luxuries of exotic Tikil serve as a frustrating reminder of what they can't have, what they might have lost, what others have, but aren't sharing. For some, it's even worse than that: they've lost their parents, or like Nik Kolherne, been disfigured, wounded like Kemoc Tregarth, or tested to the limits of their endurance like Kaththea, his sister. And then there are the others, like Roane Hume in *Ice Crown*, who have never been loved, or who, like Ross Murdock, turn feral because no one cared whether they lived or died.

If these were actual flesh-and-bloods, social workers would make gloomy observations in casebooks, and the rest of us might look away. That's because what these characters face are the very things that we all fear: loss, exile, loneliness, pain . . . and they face it under stark circumstances.

Then it usually gets worse. Even as the protagonists cope with their initial grief or trouble, the writer pits them against an overwhelming problem. To quote a maxim of fan writers: "First you chase your hero up a tree. Then you throw rocks at him." The Tregarths must first rescue Kaththea from hostile Witches, then help purify all Escore. Charis Nordholm is sold by enemies to a free-trader and runs into Jacks and Wyverns almost simultaneously. Troy Horan falls afoul of the Hunters, a time trap, and postwar intrigues, while Kana Karr, Kade Whitehawk, and Travis Fox encounter bigotry, manipulative governments, violence, and a chance to make a better future . . . assuming they can survive the present.

And the wonderful thing is that they make it! Each one of Norton's characters faces a test in direct proportion to his or her abilities to cope—and succeeds. This is profoundly satis-

fying to read. We know that at the end of a Norton novel, a sympathetic character will win through to what he or she most wants. So what if Roane Hume's uncle and cousin take off and leave her on Clio? She has good friends and a sure place in Reveny. Troy Horan will never see his range again, but he'll hunt the wilds with Rerne and his fur friends. Ross Murdock may never have known his own parents, but he finds a father-substitute and friend in Gordon Ash.

If the worlds Norton's characters live in really offer them no future, if they're totally barren, then her heroes and heroines find worlds in which they *can* be at home. Niall Renfro in *Judgment on Janus* and *Victory on Janus* becomes Ayyar of the Iftin, and is probably hunting in his deep, leafy forests now. At this very moment, Diskan Fentress of *The X Factor* may be dancing thal patterns with the brothers-in-fur in the magic city of Xcothal. And Dane Thorson is checking his cargo lists, content with the ship that has become family and hearth for him. We wish them well. And, just a little, we envy them. By the end of the book, each has found a sure place; found friends, love, an end to loneliness, and a purpose within their power to achieve.

That last point is very important. Note that with all these characters, their struggles fall into a larger pattern. This is especially true for characters in a series such as Witch World, in which the black/white opposition found in all high fantasy forces everyone not just to take sides but to take up arms. There is no such thing as simply going off and living your life. You either share the common war, or you die in it.

Mind you, none of Norton's characters is asked to solve the whole problem. You can imagine Shann Lantee giving a helping hand to a youngster who needs it; but you can't see him lobbying for better orphanages on Tyr, his homeworld. Troy Horan will probably be content to protect the wilds of Korwar, but I doubt he'll stand for election to the very political bodies that forced him from his first home. Characters like Kade Whitehawk or Kana Karr, who find themselves forced to become revolutionaries, know that they'll have only their own, individual guerrilla actions to worry about. No one's asking them to take up the One Ring, blast the Death

Star, single-handedly maintain Equilibrium, or even pull a sword out of a stone. If their tasks are less lofty, that just makes their success more believable—and themselves more approachable. The sum of their lives seems to outweigh any theories about life that a lesser writer might impose.

But the sum of Norton's characters' lives includes a subtle and far-reaching moral code that permeates her books and impresses readers more surely than a thousand lectures or incendiary pamphlets. No one, reading of the adventures of the *Solar Queen,* can fail to note how well the crew members from all races get along . . . at least some of the time. And in *Star Rangers* (now retitled *The Last Planet*), we can see how the rangers of all races and species work together to survive. And just in case we miss it, we have contrasting characters: the settlers of Khatka who created a reverse apartheid, the people who denied Travis Fox a scholarship, Joyd Cummi, who dies partially because of his own hatred of people he considers barbarians. This isn't just restricted to Norton's science fiction. The Witch World is peopled not just with humans but with the Thas, the Krogan, the Flannan, the elven-seeming People of the Green Silences, and the Renthan, to name a few. If they are considered good or evil, it's because of the side they choose, not their physical form. The Renthan might be grotesque on first glance; but they are wise, even majestic in council. Dinzil, on the other hand, was a handsome man, and totally corrupt.

Norton's—and her characters'—respect for otherness extends not just to "intelligent life forms" but to animals, especially to cats. At times, the distinction between "people" and "animals" blurs, as in *Catseye,* where Troy Horan becomes one equal in a team of cats, foxes, and kinkajou. Hosteen Storm has an eagle, a dunecat, and meerkats to assist him. On Warlock, Shann Lantee teams up with wolverines, while Charis Nordholm is adopted by a curl-cat. And if anyone thinks that these animals are subordinate or cute little pets, they'd better think again, and reread the books in which they appear.

Another value Norton insists on, in that unobtrusive, matter-of-fact way of hers, is egalitarianism. Nowhere is this more

apparent than in the Witch World books. Koris of Gorm is despised by his father's people for his mixed blood—and those people fall prey to Kolder, while the Torfolk too are punished. Simon Tregarth, of unknown race, is welcomed into Estcarp, which finds him a strong shield against the Dark. Loyse of Verlaine stands with hereditary enemies against the Shadow and against Kolder. Again, what matters is the side they're on, not their race.

But even on the "right" side, Norton shows situations that clearly cannot be allowed to go on. For example, the Matriarchate of Estcarp's witches causes population decline and makes women with Power regard men (who are thought to lack it) with disdain, a situation that occasionally has explosive consequences, as when a Witch is raped in order to take away her power and, not so incidentally, humiliate her, and all other witches. This situation cannot endure. Into it walk Simon Tregarth, with his Cornish second sight, and his wife, Jaelithe, who surrenders her virginity, but not her magic. Into it walk the triplets, their children, who can link together. And into it also come later pairs of people who have overcome prejudices to be together: Tanree of the Sulcars and the Falconer Rivery, who has seen the curse that turned the Falconers into misogynists broken in "Falcon Blood"; Tirtha and the Falconer Nirel in *Ware Hawk;* Dairine, who escapes the horrific female chauvinism of the weaving spiders, to renew the spirit of another exile in "Spider Silk."

Nor does Norton tolerate vindictiveness. In "Toads of Grimmerdale," Hertha seeks to destroy a man she believes is her rapist, but must ultimately fight to save him because there are things no human may be tossed to. And turning to her science fiction novels, we see Hosteen Storm of the Beastmaster books planning to avenge himself, his father, and his grandfather upon Brad Quade, who ultimately becomes a father-figure for him. Nik Kolherne has been used and manipulated in "Night of Masks," but when he is critically injured, he still tries to save the man who exploited him from an alien terror. Andre Norton insists that we see straight. Certainly, people have legitimate grievances. But there are things greater than grievances, and we'd best remember it.

It's a critical commonplace to observe that throughout the past decade, at least, Andre Norton's books have "darkened" greatly. And yet, even in dark stories like *Dread Companion* and *Dark Piper*, during which we see star-spanning civilizations collapse past the power of individual people to restore, there is still hope, a chance for a new start, a fresh beginning that may take the descendants of Norton's characters back to the stars and maybe beyond this time . . . if they do it right. Barbara Tuchman once wrote of humanity's capability to "muddle through" as the thing that might save it. Norton's characters raise that to a moral imperative and show us how, too.

In their low-key, unobtrusive ways, Norton's characters are both fine and tough. If we wish them well—and we usually do—we also feel that they're good people to introduce our friends to. As C. J. Cherryh points out in her introduction to *Lore of the Witch World:*

> Andre's books are the ones they're going to put into the hands of their own sons and daughters and say with that special, waited-for hope: "I think you might like this. It's good."

We can trust them to get people started off into the right Gates: to dream without giving up the capacity for action, to be strong but not brutal, to plan but to be realistic, to be kind, to love, and never to give up hope. Something, some solution, some act, is always possible throughout her work; Andre Norton raises the level of what is possible to a gentle art.

This art is what is good to remember when we close the book, turning back through whatever Gate we've entered to our ordinary lives.

As a writer, too, Andre Norton is a mistress of the possible. She does not attempt to overwhelm readers with polemics or special pleadings, and therefore her own strong views on the treatment of animals, on warfare, on feminism, and other issues pass almost unnoticed. Nor does she seek to

impress readers by deliberately abstruse reasoning or by cooking up odd theories. Why should she? Her characters already have a universe to travel in and magic to learn. Her style doesn't incline to pyrotechnics, but instead to spare, eloquent narrative that conveys mood and character without demanding the reader's applause at every neatly turned epigram.

Her skills as a writer have special meaning to those of us who read her and decided that we too wished to open Gates. Her spare, elegant simplicity in storytelling made us believe that writing *was* a possible goal . . . until we tried it and learned that while it was still possible, it wasn't nearly as easy as it looked. Still, what we'd learned from Andre Norton's books made it unlikely that we would give up. So we tried again, painfully, and worked on it—sometimes with her encouragement—until we started to get it right. All of the writers in this book are working on "getting it right" and have been doing so all their lives. Just like Norton characters.

Ultimately, Andre Norton's "achievement" may be even more a triumph of character than of narrative alone. After all, her stories exist because she decided that they were going to exist, that she had something to say that people needed to hear—and then she wrote them and kept on writing. Like her characters, Andre Norton cares, and out of caring, has made us all a great gift.

It is only natural that people who have passed through Gates—hers or their own—need to return to their own world and time, bringing gifts that will enable all of us to thrive and repay some old obligations. Here, then, are stories of forests and of hunts, of young children and wise animals and wizards, of love, law, and magic, of healing and laughter and tears . . . in short, about all the things that Andre Norton has spent so many years writing.

The participants in *Moonsinger's Friends* want to thank Andre Norton in their own words for all of us. It's proper that they do so. But as befits people who have guested in *her* worlds, they had also best thank her in her own words, by the very customs she has created. And so:

To the giver of the feast, thanks, fair thanks. For the welcome of the gate, gratitude. To the rulers of this house, fair fortune and bright sun on the morrow.

Accept our thanks, Andre, and the welcome of these gates.