

ANDRE NORTON III

There are some things that all exceptional writers have in common. It is the fact that they are seldom static, that they go through various stages of development in their careers.

The classic example in English literature is the life/career of W. B. Yeats. His entire body of poetry, which is assuredly the best lyric poetry in our language, is divided into four distinct epochs. During each of his periods, he was very wholeheartedly devoted --in mind, body & soul-- to the particular beliefs of that period. When he was involved with the occult and Madame Blavatsky, he was totally committed to it -- his poetry reflected it. When he was totally involved with Irish nationalism, Lady Gregory, the Irish Theatre and Maude Gonne, he was totally consumed by words and actions to that cause. As a result of his extensive soul-searching, and consequent re-evaluation between each period, we have a man who was in concert with himself, and with his art. The results speak for themselves.

The formula of ever-present change to find concreteness in expression in the arts while integrating that art with oneself is a simple one, supported by every Great we could name. William Blake was involved with this, but eventually lost his grasp on the concept by losing his commitments, and consequently lost his art; more recently, we can see the progression in Philip Roth: his LETTING GO was exceptional for a writer his age, but his PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT is an almost complete departure from that form, and is certainly much closer to a work of art than his earlier novels.

In science fiction there are examples, too. Ray Bradbury is a case in point. Read his early work, read his middle works, and read what he writes now: there is a very distinct sense of movement, of development, of maturity, of new horizons glimpsed and acquired. Robert Heinlein is another example of a writer who keeps moving forward (although he takes some tangent trips on occasion, which do nothing to advance his art). Harlan Ellison does this in jumps and starts, but always seems to fall just a shade short of what he himself is looking for. Roger Zelazny is moving forward, slowly, for he was a good ways advanced along his own trail to his art when he broke into the field, and has since slowed his pace.

Classic examples of not moving ahead but of still having a place in English literature are John O'Hara, Marcel Proust, John Galsworthy, Thomas Wolfe, and more recently Pearl S. Buck.

Corresponding to the static writers of English lit, there are many in sf. Edmond Hamilton. E. E. Smith. Keith Laumer. John W. Campbell. Isaac Asimov. A. E. van Vogt. Frank Herbert (except for a relatively few shots in the dark he's made toward something beyond mundania).

Of the classic sf writers, Jules Verne was static, H. G. Wells active.

Andre Norton, whom sf readers have either a disdain for or a great loyalty toward, has been doing some very interesting things with her work in the past twenty years.

Hers is a seemingly planned progression, much like a mountain climber. She begins in a new venture, thereby gaining the plateau; she then begins a systematic campaign of conquering that plateau, and eventually moves on to another cliff wall, scaling it successfully to encounter another plateau; she repeats the process, conquering that obstacle totally, and then moves on once again -- higher each time.

Her first cliff face was not the easiest in the world. But it was one shared with almost every novelist. She had been working as a librarian, spending free time working on novel ideas. Her first efforts proved failures. A second try failed. Eventually, though, she made a perch for herself on the edge of the plateau of science fiction juveniles.



4. the DIPPLE CHRONICLE, Apr./June, 1971

STAR MAN'S SON was published by Harcourt, Brace and Co. in 1952; STAR RANGERS followed in 1953.

In the words of Groff Conklin (GALAXY, April, 1954):

"A new writer of science fiction juveniles is always welcome -- particularly when his (or, in this case, her) stories are of high quality. Indeed, these two tales are sufficiently well done to hold the attention of any adult who wants to relax in some high (and often a bit bloody) adventures in distant tomorrows..."

Sf juveniles that could capture an adult market were not exactly falling like ripe apples from trees at that time. In the following years, Miss Norton polished the sf juvenile to such a point that her hold on that particular facet of the genre has not been challenged (Excepts, perhaps, by Robert Heinlein's 'juvenile' series). She walked the length of the plateau, leaving her flag planted firmly.

Crossing the plateau, however, there was another mountain to be assailed.

Throughout much of her 'juvenile' work, Miss Norton had played around with ESP, man teaming with animals, and a bit of sorcery.

The sorcery bit enthralled her very much, and she spent much of her time during the very early '60s on research in the field of the occult.

The culmination of that research was presented in April of 1963, when Ace Books published the now-famous WITCH WORLD (Ace Books, F-197, 40 cents). It was consequently nominated for a Hugo for best novel of the year; it became the first book in a series of Ace originals by Norton set on the Witch World.

Norton began adding more and more witchcraft into her offworld settings as she continued to publish her particular brand of adventure novels. (JUDGMENT ON JANUS, VICTORY ON JANUS, etc.)

The sorcery plateau has apparently been conquered to her liking. At least there is no one turning out the quality of witch and warlock novel today that she is. (I'm sure, however, that Miss Norton would take exception to the inference that I have made that she is trying to compete with any other writer in the genre; I am using the competition comparatives merely for reference's sake.)

HIGH SORCERY (Ace Books, 33700, 60 cents, 1970) is Miss Norton's scaling pins for moving over the edge of another plateau.

The book contains two sword & sorcery pieces ("Wizard's World" and "Toys of Tamisan"). They are not unlike her Witch World series in quality and execution.

The book also contains three previously unpublished short stories.

They constitute what seems to me to be the third phase of Andre Norton's rise as a writer, and I think that they will serve (if developed and expanded upon by subsequent tales) as her springboard into mainstream (That term runs some treacherous rapids.) popularity, much as Bradbury and Clarke

before her.

"Through the Needle's Eye" is a short story that cannot help but be compared with some of Shirley Jackson's pieces that appeared in the SATURDAY EVENING POST. It is cleverly done, well executed, and features just the right amount of the fantastic to appeal to a segment of the mainstream audience that never seems to make it over the threshold into the sf&f ranks. It is comparable to Jack Finney at his crest. Yet it is slightly unlike Jackson or Finney; it is uniquely Norton, but a Norton one sees in her letters rather than her previous works.

The exception is her NIGHT OF MASKS. In that book she depicted, with great deftness, the abject humility and withdrawal of a young man who had been badly scarred; in Needle's, she paints for us the portrait of a young girl who suffers from infantile paralysis: she does not attempt to overpower her reader with the suffering the girl might have felt; rather, it is a quiet resolution that our young heroine has that will not allow her to let it keep her down, and an endearing quality of humor that the girl has placed side by side with her handicap that every person like her must develop if he or she is to successfully cope with a particular deformity. The subject of handicaps seems to be an open book to Miss Norton.

In a very subtle way, the fantastic plot of the thing takes a back seat to the young girl's non-obsession with her handicap.

As an example:

... "Never let me hear you say a thing like that about Miss Ruthevan again. She has had a very sad life--"

"Because she's lame?" I challenged.

Cousin Althea hesitated; truth won over tact...

(The story is a triumph by its very simplicity -- by its truth over tact...)

"By a Hair" concerns the revenge of forgotten gods in a hidden hamlet following World War II, when it is suddenly occupied by people (from without and within) who do not appreciate its power to stay hidden and to protect its own. The tale has a certain quality of a Russian short story to it, which serves only to further enhance the impact of the piece, as the Russian motif certainly suits a story set on the borders of that literature-rich country.

The tale is a masterwork of understatement and simplicity; its subconscious impact manages to become somewhat complex.

"Uilly the Piper" is a folk fable. Nothing more, nothing less. It is told economically, with warmth and conviction, and is easily as good as "Rip Van Winkle." Having not had time yet to delve into the various examples of symbolism in "Uilly the Piper," it would be hard to make concrete statements on the impact of the two respective tales. Suffice it to say that I learned a long time ago that "Rip Van Winkle" isn't a tale to be slept through; it is richly endowed with layer upon layer of symbolic meaning, from the description of the valley up which Winkle travels to the relationship with his wife, and the figurative reincarnation of himself in his son.

The almost paganistic annual ritual of the young people in Ullly's story, and the site wherein Ullly meets his salvation, as well as the cart he gets around on, all bespeak several levels of meaning. Time and re-reading will bring them out, as well as will some research into the customs and traditions of Coomb Brackett (Aye, Leigh?), and its counterparts.

The three short stories take up only twenty per cent of the HIGH SORCERY book. What they say, how they say it, and what they mean to a future generation of Norton fans says much more than any number of past plateaus could possibly declare.

Whither next, Miss Norton?

A BOTTLE OF WINE, A LOAF AND YOU, SUGAR

Sugarloaf. A little hamlet in Northeastern Pennsylvania. An uncommonly refreshing rock group from Denver.

By this time most parts of the country have heard, digested, charted, and filed into the oldies' bin a song titled "Green-Eyed Lady." The song was shot, stuck somewhat, and then slithered down the fickle wall of pop fame. When it slithered, it took a hard-core group of "not always with-it" fans along. And when it hit the ground below the wall, only some of it went into the oldies' bin. The rest of it exploded into a supernova of fanatocism.

The song generated something very interesting in people who listen to rock just to listen to rock. It made them appreciate something the devotees apparently missed in their continuing search for a rock music status quo. It procured a lasting following.

The 45 rpm single was cool, groovy -- all those fine, overly used hip adjectives. The album, SUGARLOAF, is possible to describe as a very pleasurable experience. (And yes, rock haters, it is the type of music that cannot be appreciated at low decibel readings.)

The 6:49 minute rendition of "Green-Eyed Lady." on the album is a real treat. It is funky to a slight degree, allows a range of individual improvisation

between its predominant theme, and is quite a sensation-stimulating thing.

"The Train Kept A-Rollin' " is short, to the point, blasting rock; nothing fancy, more an interlude to try out the instruments than anything else, but uncommonly heavy.

The nine minute medley of "Bach Door Man" and "Chest Fever" that rounds out side-one is a revivifying mixture of organ solo a la mundane fooling around with the church organ after choir practice, mixed with some strains of music you'd expect to hear in The Phantom of the Opera; it is later joined by some rarefied guitar metre, with occasional intrusions of a single, repetative drum beat; all of this ultimately joined together by a quick disjointed harmony of pulse-beat integration, slipping in and out of themes, making the transitions with a smoothness that is often uncommon to rock musicians -- in direct opposition to Canned Heat, whose "Future Blues" album I bought at the same time.

The solo guitar improvisations of Bob Webber and the pulling together of the whole thing with Jerry Corbetta's organ work on side one make it the proverbial gas.

Side two is equally interesting, but in a different way.

"West Of Tomorrow" is a 5:25 piece that could have come off a Blood, Sweat & Tears or Chicago album, and might make its way onto one of the Chicago concerts someday. It is done in the same style, with much the same accomplishment, and half the personnel, which makes the piece something of an ultra-accomplishment.

Throughout the entire second side there is a very subtle hint of the old, zenith days of the Association, which had to be the prototype of all of the big sound and versitility rock groups today.

"Gold And The Blues" is a straight and simple jazz-oriented piece, which tears through to emotional limits by the painful guitar lead, backed by sustained

