

ANDRE NORTON: Humanity Amid the Hardware

Andre Norton (born 1912), along with C. L. Moore, Leigh Brackett, and Judith Merril, began an explosion of women science fiction writers in the 1950s that is still continuing. Norton and her fellow pioneers opened the way for the many major writers that have followed. Norton, however, has had a far more varied writing career than many of her colleagues and has appealed to a wider spectrum of readers. She was incorrectly known primarily as a juvenile writer by some (a career she did consider when she began to write), but her numerous adventure stories have pleased readers of all ages for over forty-five years and continue to do so. Evidence of this is the numerous librarians who testify to the high circulation of her works among children and adults and by the continual in-print status of large numbers of her works. The telltale observations are that readers of her gothics are often surprised that she writes science fiction, young people are stunned by her following among adults, and adults are astonished to discover her popularity among young people.

Andre Norton's literary career began in 1934 with her first publication, *The Prince Commands, Being the Sundry Adventures of Michael Karl, Sometime Crown Prince & Pretender to the Throne of Morvania*, a juvenile historical novel. In 1938 she published *Ralestone Luck*, another historical adventure for younger readers. These two novels marked Norton's legal name change from her birth name of Mary Alice to Andre, a change occasioned by her planned entry into the male-dominated field of juvenile adventure fiction (not into science fiction) and inspired by

her genuine affection for the name Andre. Thus, the many citations to "Andre" as a pseudonym are incorrect.*

Having produced some ninety-eight novels, thirty short stories, six collections, seven edited anthologies, numerous book reviews, non-fiction writing, and three poems, Norton is now entering her fifth decade of writing an unusual variety of fiction. Just a brief look at her book publications from 1979 to late 1981 reveals her varied abilities: *Seven Spells to Sunday*, a juvenile fantasy written in collaboration with Phyllis Miller; *Snow Shadow*, an adult gothic; *Star Ka'at and the Plant People*, juvenile science fiction written in collaboration with Dorothy Madlee and the third in a series; *Iron Butterflies*, an adult gothic; *Lore of the Witch World*, a collection of short stories and part of her famed fantasy series set on the Witch World; *Voorloper* and *Forerunner*, adult science fiction novels; and *Gryphon in Glory* and *Horn Crown*, two novels that are also part of the Witch World series.

The professional skills involved in such literary range are awesome. Yet, to a certain extent, they are predictable. Norton's rich and unusual childhood, which is detailed in this author's introduction to his *Andre Norton: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography*, provided her with the tools and disposition to pursue her career and avocation as a professional writer. Her mother, Bertha Stemm Norton (whose autobiography, *Bertie and May*, Andre finished and published in 1969), read to Andre before she could read herself. As a late child, born seventeen years after her sister, Andre developed relationships with her parents rather than with her contemporaries, and she benefited markedly from the greater sophistication and verbal skills her parents offered to her. Most significantly, her parents' book-rich home provided her with the life-long appetite for reading. Norton herself comments on this "curse" in her introduction to C. J. Cherryh's *Gate of Ivrel*:

There are those among us who are compulsive readers—who will even settle a wandering eye on a scrap of newspaper on the bus floor if nothing better offers. Books flow in and out of our lives in an unending stream. Some we remember briefly, others bring us sitting upright, tense with suspense, our attention enthralled until the last word on the last page is digested. Then we step regretfully from the world that the author has

* The only pseudonyms she has ever used are "Andrew North" for three of the Solar Queen novels and "Allen Weston" in her collaboration with Grace Allen Hogarth for *Murders for Sale* (London: Hammond, 1954).

created, and we know that volume will be chosen to stand on already too tightly packed shelves to be read again and again.

Among those authors whom Norton "read again and again" were Edgar Rice Burroughs, H. Beam Piper, Dornford Yates (a pseudonym for Cecil W. Mercer), Ruth Plumly Thompson, Talbot Mundy, William Hope Hodgson, and the nineteenth-century British novelists. Their works are of particular note because they shaped her commitment to the swiftly moving and entertaining plots that are so obvious in her writing. In addition, Norton added to her affections a deep love for thorough and meticulous research. A quick survey of the sources of some of her science fiction novels reveals the erudition and scope of her pursuits for backgrounds and accuracy. William Hope Hodgson's *The Nightland: A Love Tale* (1912), a work she was instrumental in having included in Lin Carter's Adult Fantasy Series, is the direct source for *Night of Masks*. Norton's novel resulted from her fascination with Hodgson's future, sunless world; her modification was the innovative creation of a world lit by an infrared sun. *Dark Piper* is based on the folktale of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, and *Star Guard* includes a retelling of Xenophon's *Anabasis*. The strange, oversized ring in *The Zero Stone* was inspired by the description of an odd piece of jewelry, meant to be worn over armor, in the off-beat *The Hock Shop* (1954) by Ralph Simpson, and its use is characteristic of the pieces of jewelry that frequently occur in Norton's works as plot devices, symbols, and images. Her Time War Novels—*The Time Traders*, *Galactic Derelict*, *The Defiant Agents*, and *Key Out of Time*—are based on the meager history of the prehistoric Beaker Traders as described in Paul Herrmann's *Conquest by Man*. To convert a western into science fiction and write *The Beast Master* and its sequel, *Lord of Thunder*, Norton consulted Navaho phrase books and linguistic studies. *Merlin's Mirror*, like the juvenile fantasy *Steel Magic*, was inspired by the Arthurian legends.

An additional major body of influence comes from Norton's skeptical fascination with the pseudoscience psychometry. Psychometry is the belief that physical objects retain memories of their pasts that can be read by human sensitives. A good portion of her information about this comes from the works of T. C. Lethbridge, notably *ESP: Beyond Time and Distance*, *The Monkey's Tale: A Study in Evolution and Parapsychology*, *A Step in the Dark*, and *The Legend of the Sons of God: A Fantasy?* Psychometry is most obvious in Norton's *Forerunner Foray*, *Wraiths of*

Time, and the aforementioned *Merlin's Mirror*. Ziantha, the female protagonist of *Forerunner Foray*, demonstrates the nature of the pseudoscience as it functions in Norton's fiction:

For a long time it had been a proven fact that any object wrought by intelligence (or even a natural stone or similar object that had been used for a definite purpose by intelligence) could record. From the fumbling beginnings of untrained sensitives, who had largely developed their own powers, much had been learned. It had been "magic" then; yet the talent was too "wild," because all men did not share it, and because it could not be controlled or used at will but came and went for reasons unknown to the possessors.

Interestingly, the belief that the power of the human mind can plumb the depths of the memories contained in objects is a critical element in understanding Norton's science fiction. Effective plotting is her predominant stylistic skill, and her complete devotion to the individual and the powers of the individual is the primary characteristic of her content. While hard science fiction writers like Larry Niven and Hal Clement pursue the technologies of new ages and galactic interchange, Norton embraces and stresses an older, timeless view in creating her characters. They are almost without exception portrayed with compassion, producing a poignancy that Norton's readers have long felt and loved. However, her affection does not extend to humankind and its products in general, and her novels are filled with the evils of vast power structures and mindless, threatening forces—all sadly human constructs. A sampling of a few titles affirms this.

In *Eye of the Monster*, the large evil forces are rampaging, reptilian aliens and an apathetic Earth government. Automatic controls take the three main characters on a blind flight to potential exile on a long-dead planet in *Galactic Derelict*. *The Beast Master's* young American Indian protagonist must suffer in a society that neither understands nor cares about him, and like many Norton protagonists, he finds empathy and sympathy with aliens and animals. In the Solar Queen Series—*Sargasso of Space*, *Plague Ship*, *Voodoo Planet*, and *Postmarked the Stars*—Dane Thorson becomes an intergalactic outlaw because of power groups that constantly strive to limit his freedom. While some may interpret Norton's stance as paranoia or distrust, to do so is to fail to understand her emphasis. The distrust of the mega-establishments of humanity comes not from a stress on the groups themselves, rather, it originates in the value placed on the individual and the dangers that threaten the individual.

Thus, it is no surprise that all Norton titles feature at least one unusual individual whose uniqueness draws authoritarian attempts at control. Their distinct gifts or talents attract restriction just as surely as innocence draws satanic evil. Even the enlightened and admirable Star Men of *Star Man's Son 2250 A.D.*, Norton's first science fiction novel (which is set in her native Cleveland) distrust the protagonist because he is a mutant. When Fors is refused entry into the Star Men brotherhood of seekers, he must try to fulfill his father's legacy and explore the shattered, wasted world alone. His silver-white hair, extraordinary night sight, and too-keen hearing separate him from his community; however, they also help him achieve goals that no one else can.

The deviations of Norton's characters from social norms make them barely tolerated aliens. Some of this stress may be explained by Norton's isolated childhood and her alienation from her peers. However, a far greater reason is Norton's reverence for the self, especially as it seeks to realize its potentials. This is one of the major reasons why her plots are always so exciting. Her protagonists have to deal not only with dangerous external forces but also with their own maturation and personal challenges. These external and internal processes find their realization through quests in her fiction, and the quests are most frequently set amid cosmic arenas. Intriguingly, at the end of these adventures, protagonists and readers alike are left with only the promises of future successes. For example, Furtig, the mutated cat of *Breed to Come*, must overcome the mythology surrounding his departed human masters if he is to survive their return; and his own self-realization extends far beyond the ending of the novel. In *Android at Arms*, Andas Kastor must discover whether he is an android or a human if he is to save his world, and his rites of passage are just beginning at novel's end.

These quests and rites of passage occur because Norton's characters are creatures of process and action, not ending and resting. Their searches are valuable in and for themselves. Kincar, the main character of *Star Gate*, muses on this active state as his hideous pet and friend Vorken squats on his shoulder:

Sometimes he thought that an endless quest had been set them for some purpose, and that the seeking, not the finding, was their full reward. And it was good.

In sharp contrast to Norton's compassion for her characters and

suspicion of establishments is her raw antagonism toward technology. This may seem odd for one of the twentieth century's major science fiction writers; yet her contempt for science and its products is obvious throughout her works. Aunt Margaret, one of the main characters in the juvenile fantasy *Octagon Magic*, speaks for Norton when she says:

But in the name of progress more than one crime is committed nowadays. I wonder just who will rejoice when the last blade of grass is buried by concrete, when the last tree is brought down by a bulldozer, when the last wild thing is shot, or poisoned or trapped.

If there is any doubt, Norton is much more emphatic when she speaks directly:

Yes, I am anti-machine. The more research I do, the more I am convinced that when western civilization turned to machines so heartily with the industrial revolution, they threw away some parts of life which are now missing and which the lack of leads to much of our present frustration.

While Norton's fiction does not fully commit to technophobia and while she distrusts technology more than science, the mechanisms and tools of science are reduced to minor importance in many of her works. This orientation plays a major role in the nature of *Moon of Three Rings*. Long mislabeled as science fiction, it is more correctly a fantasy. Its concern with spaceships and alien planets is only a frame for an adventure based on the transference of human identities and personalities into animal bodies by the power of moon magic. John Rowe Townsend, in *A Sense of Story: Essays on Contemporary Writers for Children*, does an admirable job of describing Norton's use of machines in her works:

Miss Norton handles her gadgetry with great aplomb. She never draws special attention to it; it is simply there. Spaceships are as ordinary as buses. Flitters for moving around in; stunners and blasters and flamers for dealing with your enemies; and "coms" of all kinds for getting in touch with people are, with countless other devices, casually mentioned in passing without any nudge to the reader.

Thus, the major thrusts of Norton's science fiction must be grouped with those of other such luminaries as Frank Herbert, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Gene Wolfe. They all write what could be variously labeled as "social," "humanistic," or "soft" science fiction. While all their works

contain the extrapolated factual material characteristic of science fiction, they really focus on the future of humanity and its possible future traits and societies. Norton comes to this type of writing with a disposition that makes her seek admirable individuals amid future uncertainty (an uncertainty produced in large part by present fascination with technology) and with a triumphant commitment to research that gives her work thorough, but unobtrusive, detail and credibility. In this environment, she produces characters that are, despite their quality, not fully heroic or superhuman, as Frank Herbert's are in *Children of Dune* and *The God-Emperor of Dune*. More realistically, her protagonists have their weaknesses and their foibles. Much of the extreme popularity of her works and much of her successes can be traced to these human creations.

They are souls lost among terrifying forces. As such, they are close enough to readers to encourage empathy and yet special enough to draw admiration. Modern readers can join with the estranged Merlin in *Merlin's Mirror* and sympathize with the circumstances that present us with an unavoidable task that is so isolated that we are left with only a raven as a friend. There is shared revelry in the transformation of Eet in *Uncharted Stars* when we learn that Eet and Murdoc Jern may now consummate their dynamic relationship, which seemed frozen by their differences in shape. Readers may also share in the glory of freedom from prejudice as Kana, in *Star Guard*, fulfills the yet unrealized hope of the twentieth century by his willingness to meet any being as an equal. Just as easily, frustration and sadness may result as Kilda c'Rhyn, in *Dread Companion*, confronts the force of still virulent sexism.

Andre Norton, then, like all special writers, is more than just an author. She is a guide who leads us, the real human beings, to worlds and situations that we might very well expect to live in were we given extraordinary longevity. They are not utopias where all problems have been solved nor are they totally bleak and blighted. Rather, the Norton future is an exciting realm alive with personal quests to be fulfilled and vital challenges to be overcome. Is it any wonder that millions upon millions of readers, spanning three generations, have chosen to go with her in her travels?

PAGE	QUOTE	SOURCE
18	"There is no light"	C. L. Moore, "Black God's Kiss," in <i>Black God's Shadow</i> (West Kingston, Rhode Island: Donald M. Grant, 1977), p. 53. Original copyright 1934 by Weird Tales, Inc.
19	"all the ugliness of Guillaume"	<i>Ibid.</i> , p. 75.
19	"so just, yet so infinitely unjust"	<i>Ibid.</i> , p. 76.
20	"Why had she"	C. L. Moore, "Jirel Meets Magic," in <i>Black God's Shadow</i> , p. 115. Original copyright 1935 by Weird Tales, Inc.
20	"Rage at life" and "her own violence"	<i>Ibid.</i> , pp. 145-146.
20	"there is in you"	C. L. Moore, "The Dark Land," in <i>Black God's Shadow</i> , p. 163. Original copyright 1936 by Weird Tales, Inc.
20	"So I have taken you for my own"	Italics mine.
20	"I am not"	"The Dark Land," p. 177.
21	Lady Death	Nowhere is her name mentioned, but the description makes her identity obvious, especially as she lives in a Plutonian underworld of darkness and death.
21	"Let me slay"	<i>Ibid.</i> , p. 180.
21	"the Darkness was Rome"	<i>Ibid.</i> , p. 196.
22	"If I were a man"	<i>Judgment Night</i> , p. 10.
22	"To her mind"	<i>Judgment Night</i> , p. 14.
23	"Kleph's race"	C. L. Moore, "Vintage Season," in <i>The Best of C. L. Moore</i> , p. 362.
24	"Jirel shrugged"	"Jirel Meets Magic," p. 113.

3. Humanity Amid the Hardware (Schlobin)

26	"There are those among"	Norton, "Introduction," <i>Gate of Ivel</i> by C. J. Cherryh (New York: DAW Books, 1976), p. 7.
27	Xenophon's <i>Anabasis</i>	John Rowe Townsend, <i>A Sense of Story: Essays on Contemporary Writers for Children</i> (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1971), p. 145.
28	"For a long time"	Norton, <i>Wraiths of Time</i> (New York: Atheneum, 1976), p. 31.

PAGE	QUOTE	SOURCE
28	vast power structures	For a further discussion of Norton's attitude toward power structures, see Rick Brooks, "Andre Norton: Loss of Faith," <i>The Dipple Chronicle</i> 1 (November/December 1971), 12-30; reprinted in <i>The Many Worlds of Andre Norton</i> , Roger Edwood, ed. (Radnor, Pennsylvania: Chilton, 1974), pp. 178-200.
29	"Sometimes he thought"	Norton, <i>Star Gate</i> (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), p. 192.
30	"But in the name of"	Norton, <i>Octagon Magic</i> (Cleveland: World, 1967), p. 106.
30	"Yes, I am anti-machine."	Norton as quoted by Rick Brooks, in <i>The Dipple Chronicle</i> , p. 22; in <i>The Many Worlds of Andre Norton</i> , p. 191.
30	"Miss Norton handles"	Townsend, <i>A Sense of Story</i> , p. 148.
31	<i>Merlin's Mirror</i>	Andre Norton (New York: DAW Books, 1975). See p. 91 for an example of Merlin and the raven.
31	<i>Star Guard</i>	(New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955). See especially p. 151.

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4. C. J. Cherryh and Tomorrow's New Sex Roles (Brizzi)

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| 32 | epic heroines | For a partial list of SF works with heroines, see George Fergus, "A Checklist of SF Novels with Female Protagonists," <i>Extrapolation</i> 18:1 (December 1976), pp. 20-27. |
| 41 | "the stone or rock" | Matt. 16:18. |
| 42 | "sang a hymn" | Ibid., 26:30. |
| 42 | "kept his hands" | C. J. Cherryh, <i>The Faded Sun: Shon'jir</i> (New York: DAW Books, 1979), Ch. 5. |
| 42 | "as Christ was" | Matt. 4:1-11. |
| 42 | "The foxes have" | Ibid., 8:20. |
| 43 | "publicans and sinners" | Ibid., 9:10. |
| 43 | "I am the foretold" | C. J. Cherryh, <i>The Faded Sun: Kutath</i> (New York: DAW Books, 1980), Ch. 11. |