

ANDRE NORTON

A Profile by Lin Carter

For at least three reasons, Andre Norton is something of a phenomenon in science fiction today. Ostensibly a juvenile author, she happens also to be very popular with adult readers. A full-time science fiction professional, she is *never* published in the magazines. And—despite her undeniable gift for colorful prose, exciting narrative that is entertaining and told with verve and gusto, not to mention the consistently high level of imaginative invention that runs throughout her work—she is largely ignored by “serious” reviewers, and, when discussed at all, usually underrated. I mention these somewhat puzzling factors in her career without attempting to explain them. Nevertheless, they do tend to render her unique among modern science fiction writers and worthy of this inquiry.

She is also extraordinarily prolific. In fact, by the end of 1966 she had published over fifty-two books.

Her real name, no great secret, of course, is Alice Mary Norton. She was born about fifty years ago in Cleveland and has spent most of her life there. Her first love seems to have been, appropriately enough, science fiction. And, although she has written stories of many different moods and manners—pirate yarns, a murder mystery, fairy-tale romances, Civil War stories, children’s fantasies, Westerns, and straight adult fantasies—well over half of her work to date has been devoted to our field.

She has told me she encountered Edgar Rice Burroughs and Ray Cummings at an early age, and decided almost on the spot that she wanted to write in their style . . . which, in a way, she does. Like their novels, her books are fast-moving fantastic romances dealing with the primary emotions, easily comprehensible by the teen-age readers. She tells me: “My first book—which was later rewritten and appeared as my second (*i.e.*, *RALESTONE LUCK*, Appleton Century, 1938)—was written in high school and my first book was published before I was out of my teens.”

This may help to explain the sympathy between her work and her (predominately) juvenile audience. She has also been a children’s librarian in Cleveland, which was probably a factor in her decision to publish primarily for the older kids. At any

rate, when Miss Norton entered the field of juvenile science fiction, the market—what little there was, and there wasn't much—was largely the unchallenged domain of writers of what you might call limited powers. I am referring to the Carl H. Claudys and Roy Rockwoods and Victor Appletons. There just was no precedent for inventive, truly imaginative juvenile science fiction of adult calibre when she began publishing. Things stayed about at the Claudy-Rockwood-Appleton level of maturity until Robert Heinlein busted in and showed publishers, editors, and reviewers that you could *too* write good, solid, intelligent science fiction for kids.

52 BOOKS IN 32 YEARS

Andre Norton's first book, *THE PRINCE COMMANDS*, was straight adventure rather than science fiction. Appleton brought it out in 1934. The first eight of her books came slowly, paced out over fifteen years. Among those was *HUON OF THE HORN* (Harcourt, Brace, 1948), a luminous, graceful retelling of the Old French *chanson de geste* about Huon de Bordeaux, a Carolingian fantasy laid in the days after Roland and Oliver got theirs in the Pyrenees. Young Huon zips about from Hither to Thither (in the approved style of the classical *chanson*), accepts a dare to pull out the beard of the King of Babylon, makes off with his daughter, meets Shakespeare's Oberon and eventually succeeds to the Throne of All Faerie when the Elf-King abdicates to spend an eternity-long vacation in Paradise, which seems to have been pictured by the Old French Romancers as a sort of Riviera of its day. It's a jolly good yarn, and I'm happy Ace Books brought it to our attention.

I suppose these first eight books helped mould Andre Norton's style. They certainly established her as a reliable producer of action yarns, and gave her a good publisher she was to continue to use for nearly twenty years.

Her first science fiction novel was *STAR MAN'S SON* (Harcourt, Brace, 1952), quickly paperbacked by Ace Books, under the title of *DAYBREAK—2250 A.D.* This paperback edition was doubtless a rather risky experiment on the part of Ace, for it must have been among the first juveniles between soft covers. But the fans liked it, reviewers were kind, and it sold like crazy. It was one of those experiments that paid off. Today, of all the authors Ace publishes (including most of the top writers in science fiction's history, from Burroughs and E. E. Smith, Heinlein and Van Vogt, on to Jack Vance and Henry Kuttner and Avram Davidson), Miss Norton is the top best-seller of them all.

After the success of this book, Miss Norton had some confidence in her favorite medium and her production began to pick up rapidly. From then to right now, she has averaged about three books a year—often enough, four—and this is as good as Burroughs was doing in the prime of his enormous popularity.

For a sample of the variety in subject and form that are typical of Andre Norton, let's pick an average year, 1954. She had four new books on the market that year. The first one, *AT SWORD'S POINT*, from Harcourt, was a juvenile historical and a real rouser. The second, from her "alternate" publisher, World Publishing Company, was a science fiction anthology called *SPACE PIONEERS*. Number three, from Hammond, was her one and only mystery, *MURDERS FOR SALE*. And the fourth, also under the World imprint, was *THE STARS ARE OURS*, a science fiction novel, now an Ace paperback.

OPENING UP BRAND NEW MARKETS

In 1956, Andre Norton published her first paperback original. This was *CROSSROADS OF TIME*, a wild and woolly (and *adult*, not juvenile) cloak-and-dagger romp through parallel futures and alternate Earths. Even on rereading today (it has since been reissued by Ace), it stands up as one of the more enjoyable specimens of rip-roaring "time-opera."

New markets opened up for her material in foreign countries. Books with the Norton byline have since appeared in England, Germany, Italy, France, and Argentina. *THE PRINCE COMMANDS* had a Danish edition. Germany, in particular, seems to have gone Andre-Norton-mad: at least nine of her novels have been translated and published in that country, including *CROSSROADS OF TIME*, which did not have a hard-cover edition in this country.

And one of her novels had the rare distinction of being selected for a German book club—*SARGASSO OF SPACE*, the first of the two 'Solar Queen' books she wrote for Gnome Press under the "Andrew North" byline.

SERIES AND TRILOGIES

Andre Norton began experimenting a little in the 1950's—stretching her literary muscles a bit and limbering up her powers. The first of these stylistic ventures was writing sequels to some of her more outstanding novels, and later she even ex-

panded some of these into trilogies. As the author of two novels about the barbarian hero, Thongor of Lemuria, published by Ace, I know the temptation to follow up one novel with a sequel is well nigh an irresistible one to most writers (after all, the major portion of the inventive work needed for any science or fantasy fiction novel is *background detail and cultural lore* and once you've invented that, it's easy to spin more plots within this pre-completed frame). Publishers, however, and juvenile publishers in particular, tend to shy away from sequels. They think libraries don't like "series" yarns. That her publishers permitted her to turn out sequels galore, is an indication of the popular reception Miss Norton's novels must have received.

For an example of one of her series, let's look briefly at one of her ventures into the field of the time-travel yarn—Miss Norton's "Time Agent" series. This trilogy started off (with a bang) in *THE TIME TRADERS* (1958). It continued with *GALACTIC DERELICT* (1959), and was concluded (we all thought) in *THE DEFIANT AGENTS* (1962). However, Andre Norton decided to turn this trilogy into the first of her tetralogies, with the publication of a fourth novel in the series, called *KEY OUT OF TIME* (1963). Now, this particular series is made up of several interweaving plots. One of them is the struggle between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. to colonize a key planet on the galactic frontier. The gimmick that makes things so lively is briefly stated: because this particular world is a mid-dlin' rugged, wilderness-type world, each side comes up with a clever method of what you might call "temporal regression" on their would-be colonists. They bring up out of each colonist's store of racial memory, the ego of a hardy ancestor from the Good Old Days—the Russkies revert to the Golden Horde of Genghis Khan, and the Americans (who are American Indians) rouse up the spirits of their tough-minded Apache forebears.

Speaking of Amerindians, Andre Norton seems very fond of them in hero-roles for her fiction. She has another series concerning a Navaho named Hosteen Storm. Hosteen's saga opened up with a novel called *THE BEAST MASTER* in 1959 and continued with 1962's *LORD OF THUNDER*. If there was a third novel in this very interesting series, I must have overlooked it.

Hosteen's problem is a rather awesome one. His home-world, which is Terra, naturally, has been *destroyed* in a war with the non-humans Xiks. Hosteen gets a job on the frontier planet of Arzor as a member of the Beast Service. He is a natural for this outfit as he has a rare semi-telepathic ability to communicate with animals. In Miss Norton's universe, people with this uncanny skill form man-and-critter scouting teams.

Our hero, Hosteen, is part of a team that consists of Baku the eagle, Surra the dune-cat, and a couple of creatures called Ho and Hing. This subplot of a future man/animal telepathic symbiosis is a favorite device with Andre Norton, and it crops up quite frequently in other books not in this Hosteen Storm series. As a dyed-in-the-fur animal lover myself, I love the idea and wish she'd go into it a bit more deeply.

In my opinion, for what it's worth, these two 'Hosteen Storm' novels are quite possibly her very best science fiction published to date. The boy has genuine human problems to handle, above and beyond the temporary emergencies generated within the structure of her plots. Because of his Navaho ancestry, he feels like an outsider among the predominately Anglo-Saxon colonists. And the feeling of loneliness, or, more properly, alone-ness, this generates in Hosteen is considerably worsened by the help-less feeling of being lost in an alien world, caused by his root-less and wandering life followed since the total destruction of his home planet. His isolation, only partially self-imposed, causes him to draw into an even closer and more intimate relationship with his animal team-mates and lends strong credence to the author's concept of the telepathic/symbiotic animal-man teams used in her future.

In other words, we have in these two novels a rather rare thing in modern science fiction: a very real person with very real problems with which he must learn to cope. And I mean *real* problems, for Hosteen's rootlessness is caused by the destruction of the Earth, which is not an artificial plot-problem which he will be able to circumvent and put straight by the last chapter. This is worlds above and beyond the phoney fictional problems most science fiction heroes are pitted against . . . the O-God-will-we-ever-lick-them-evil-wicked-bad-horrid-monsters-from-Boskone kind of problem.

I find it a mark in her favor, that characters in an Andre Norton novel quite often have credible problems to deal with—problems that do not entirely derive from the science-fictional future of the story, but of the kind and calibre many of us are struggling with today. After all, is Hosteen's trouble particularly different from that of any one of the millions of Displaced Persons rendered homeless—for good—by World War II? You just don't expect to find situations of this seriousness and what you might call 'maturity' right smack in the middle of what is, after all, nothing more pretentious than a good juvenile s-f adventure yarn offering fast-action entertainment. More power to her for such as this, says I!

An even more interesting (and probably even more permanently valuable) experiment than merely trilogizing—if there

is such a word, and I don't think there is—hit the newsstands in 1963. I am referring to one of the best and most important of all the paperback originals Ace Books has published—Andre Norton's rich, brilliant, superbly imaginative and fully adult *pure fantasy* novel, WITCH WORLD.

Frequently in the past, Miss Norton's books have teetered giddily on the razor-thin edge between straight science fiction and full-blooded fantasy. JUDGMENT ON JANUS, for example, was a study in ambiguity: it contained just about as much of a fantasy element as of an element of science. But, with the unexpected publication of WITCH WORLD, Miss Norton took the plunge.

You are probably familiar with the story. If not, by all means read it. The plot is simple: Simon Tregarth, a renegade U.S. Army Colonel goes into a feudal world of magic and mystery by ways devious and strange, which involve a "stone of power"—an ancient magical talisman which Miss Norton labels the "Siege Perilous," and which those who know their *King Arthur* will recognize as the chair Merlin the Magician set up at the Round Table with the warning that only one knight in all the world would sit in it without peril (he was predicting the coming of Sir Galahad, the son of Lancelot du Lac, the knight chosen to achieve the Holy Grail). Well, Tregarth goes into the "Witch World" and gets caught up in the medieval struggle between the three countries of Kolder, Alizon, and Estearp. This three-way war starts out like a just plain ordinary war, but it soon develops undertones of alien invasion and evil magic, as in the struggle between Gondor and Mordor in THE LORD OF THE RINGS, which was published some years before Miss Norton wrote her splendid WITCH WORLD.

Most people would agree with my estimate that WITCH WORLD is the single best, most "important" and probably most permanent book Andre Norton has written yet. If she is to be remembered and still read by our grand-children, and she has a chance at this mild degree of immortality if she works at it, it will most likely be for WITCH WORLD or something of comparable merit. It's a bloody good yarn, filled with color and excitement, an heroic saga of sorcery and swashbuckling sword-play in the Grande Tradition. The prose is very different and much better than her usual—slower, more thoughtful, polished to a higher gloss, more richly textured and subtly colored. An evocative, even a poetic prose, lightly salted with echoes of Robert E. Howard and the rousing 'Conan' stories. With just a savory hint of J. R. R. Tolkien, and quite a healthy dash of that marvelous Old Master of the fantasy novel, A. Merritt, whom Miss Norton does not list as being among her early loves, along

with Burroughs and Ray Cummings, but who probably exerted a formative influence on her work as he did on the writings of Robert E. Howard, Leigh Brackett, Edmond Hamilton, Jack Williamson, Henry Kuttner, Marion Zimmer Bradley, and just about all of us who have specialized in the more adventurous brand of story-telling (yes, on Lin Carter, too).

WITCH WORLD is truly a first-rate job, and if the subsequent publication of WEB OF THE WITCH WORLD and THREE AGAINST THE WITCH WORLD and YEAR OF THE UNICORN have rendered invalid my remark above that this experiment was a more interesting one than "merely writing sequels" I am willing to sacrifice a point in order to have these delightful adult fantasies on my Norton shelf.

Now, back at the beginning of this profile, I mentioned the lack of attention critics and reviewers of science fiction have paid to Miss Norton. When it first became known in the science fiction field that I was doing some research and gathering information towards a brief and informal study of Andre Norton, some people—both readers and, I'm sad to say, a couple of rather "important" professional science fiction writers—asked me why on earth I was wasting time on the work of a writer of "minor or peripheral value, at best." I frankly didn't have a good answer ready at the time. But, while this study was taking shape, I suddenly realized not only why I was interested enough in Andre Norton to study her work, but also why—subconsciously—I knew she was "significant" in the full Lit'ry Critic's sense of the term.

The answer runs something like this. Anyone who has read science fiction at all in a systematic fashion or continuously over a decade or so, knows that science fiction goes by trends or fads or schools of writing. Andre Norton—be she or be she not "minor"—is a good example of a trend that has been growing steadily stronger over the last few years and may, I suspect, be the dominant style of the science fiction of the future.

I will even go a little further, and say that each *decade* in the history of science fiction from the inception of the pulp magazine of s-f in 1926 has been dominated by a single "style" of science fiction story—and that the Andre Norton story may be the dominant style of the 1960s.

Now here's what I mean.

From 1926 to the middle 1930s (roughly speaking), science fiction was under the powerful influence of Hugo Gernsback, who founded the first three magazines devoted entirely to this form of entertainment, *Amazing Stories*, *Astounding Stories* (now *Analog*, after several title-changes), and *Wonder Stories* (which went through even more title-changes than *Astounding*). Gerns-

back's trend was towards the gadget. Your typical yarn of that remote and (by me, at least) unlamented era, went something along these lines—and I only exaggerate a little: "Professor Garglezofter has invented the Electro-Robotic Chicken-Plucker!"—(Sensation.)—"Now the Herr Professor will tell us all exactly how this miraculous new scientific advance works—" . . . and he does, for about fifteen thousand very dull words.

Then came the 1940s—the "Golden Forties"—and science fiction fell under (or, more correctly, *rose* under) the guiding hand of John W. Campbell, Jr., editor of ASF. Campbell had an exciting new idea. He would say, in effect, to one of the new writers he was busy discovering (like A. E. Van Vogt, Robert Heinlein, L. Sprague de Camp, Isaac Asimov, James Blish, Clifford D. Simak, L. Ron Hubbard, James H. Schmitz, Henry Kuttner, *et cetera*): "Okay, kid, we grant you your robot chicken-plucker. Forget about giving us a verbal blueprint. Forget about how it works. Just go home and figure out what it would mean to *people*. How would it pose a problem to the now-unemployed *human* chicken-plucker?" And so on. And we got a decade of great and good yarns, still heavy on the technology, but with the *primary emphasis* on human beings and of the impact on their lives made by this or that mechanical marvel.

In the 1950s, a couple of brilliant new magazines called *Galaxy* and *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* came along and founded yet another major story-trend. I call this the Pohl-and-Kornbluth story, after the two very able and respected writers who kicked the whole cycle off. Primary emphasis shifted again. Instead of the gadget—instead of the people—writers who followed the path well-beaten by Cyril M. Kornbluth and Frederik Pohl were mostly interested in the society in which a technological advance had occurred. Their stories illustrated how *the culture* was changed by the impact of something new and different. And we had any number of good yarns in which the future (the *near* future) was taken over by advertising men (THE SPACE MERCHANTS)—insurance agencies (PREFERRED RISK)—"senior citizens" (the second part of SEARCH THE SKY)—department stores (HELL'S PAVEMENT)—new religions (MESSIAH, and ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT)—and just about everything, including, somewhere or other, the Garglezofter Electro-Robotic Chicken-Plucker Corporation. Good stories, too, most of 'em.

But, like all such trends, this one finally wore out and people started looking for something new. And here we are in the 1960s without a single new trend to our name . . . or *are* we?

I wonder. In the last year or two, Ace Books has been publishing a large quantity of a certain kind of story . . . one in which

the element of fantasy is intermixed with science fiction. Interplanetary adventure-yarns, in which we have spaceships and magicians simultaneously coexisting, as in Gardner Fox's WARRIOR OF LLARN, Don Wollheim's SWORDSMEN IN THE SKY, Marion Zimmer Bradley's FALCONS OF NARABEDLA, my own THE STAR MAGICIANS, Samuel R. Delany's THE JEWELS OF APTOR and CAPTIVES OF THE FLAME, Andre Norton's four stories of the WITCH WORLD, Henry Kuttner's THE DARK WORLD, Leigh Brackett's PEOPLE OF THE TALISMAN, Ursula K. LeGuin's ROCANNON'S WORLD, Miss Norton's JUDGMENT ON JANUS, Gardner Fox's ARSENAL OF MIRACLES, Robert E. Howard's ALMURIC and others too numerous to mention. They all, every last one of them, combine the elements of fast-action heroics of the sword & sorcery type, with a space or far future or science fictional locale.

And, besides the Howard, Kuttner and Wollheim books above, which are reprints of older stories, we have seen an amazing resurgence of interest in some of the old-time writers of pure fantastic adventure: Ace has done scores of reprints of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Otis Adelbert Kline, Jules Verne, Homer Eon Flint, Ray Cummings, and other writers of this variety. These reprints, to me, at least, indicate a general nostalgia for the lost age of the pulps, for the old fashioned mellerdrammer that we jaded connoisseurs once thought was "corny." And it indicates a general turning-away from the hyper-sophisticated science fiction of the 1950s towards something like the old fashioned adventure story, with trimmings of magic and fantasy, a hearkening back to the rip-roaring kind of science-fantasy, or scientific sword & sorcery, or better yet (if I may coin a phrase that seems to fit the *genre*), a new kind of fiction we might yet be calling *sword & science*.

If this is to be the dominant form of science fiction in the Sixties (and it looks like it from where I'm sitting), we'll see a new brand of science fiction which relies heavily on excitement, adventure, and exotic color, composed of less science and more adventure . . . something, perhaps, like the lead novels we used to see in the wonderful old (and, sadly, long since defunct) magazine, *Planet Stories*. Only, since we have, by and large, a more gifted and experienced crop of writers today, and a more sophisticated audience to write for, the new sword & science yarns will be more adroit and skillful, seasoned with mature and well-conceived imaginative invention.

The kind of fiction I envision as dominant in the 1960s is exemplified by Andre Norton. Her productions to date show this trend in a marked degree: the action-filled adventure science

fiction, gradually tending more and more towards pure fantasy, slowly getting further and further from "traditional" adventure s-f and drawing closer and closer to the border between science fiction and straight fantasy, until, at last, she has ventured across this border under full steam. And her recent novels, with their strong primary colors, struck through with "the sense of wonder," with the exotica and strangeness of new planets on the frontiers of the unknown, and with their emphasis on the personal heroism of the characters, illustrates something like what the science fiction of tomorrow may be like.

Prophecy is always a chancy business, and I am well aware I may turn out to be 101% wrong. But all the signs seem to point to a resurgence of the old *Planet Stories* kind of science-fantasy. On this point, I think it's highly significant that Ace Books has been publishing more and more of this kind of fiction in the last couple of years. Ace is, of course, the world's largest and most active science fiction publisher among either hard-cover or paperback houses, and regularly releases *more* science fiction than the other firms put together. And since the "lead" has long since been taken away from the science fiction magazines and gone to the paperbacks, where the best and most "important" fiction of the day is more often than not published *first*, this seems doubly significant.

If my attempt at a qualified prediction turns out to be correct, and Andre Norton is a pivotal figure and a prime example of the kind of interplanetary fantasy I see coming up big for this decade, then we can trace in her books alone this trend. *STAR MAN'S SON* is straight adventure science fiction. *JUDGMENT ON JANUS* is mostly fantasy, but laid against a science fiction backdrop. *WEB OF THE WITCH WORLD* is almost pure fantasy, with only touches of science fiction in the background.

Andre Norton may be riding the crest of the wave of the future. But, in any case, I wish her well.