

# SF: ANDRE NORTON

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Imagine a writer, a woman, who has written scores of books for children and adolescents, books easily read and enjoyed by readers willing to live for a while in a world of the imagination. Though most libraries contain several of her books and paperback stores have her writings in stock, she is largely ignored by serious critics, writers, and science fiction readers. Obscurity covers her; you mention her name in passing and the only response you receive is "Who?". Sounds like your classic woman writer struggling to express herself but not finding acceptance in the male world of literature, doesn't it? However, such a woman exists, and her name is Alice Mary Norton; pseudonyms — Andre Norton and Andrew North.

The question arises if it is the quality of her work or some other reason that keeps her from becoming better known. As a Norton fanatic, I would be inclined to discredit the first reason. True, those who wish for three and four

levels of meanings in all their reading material will shrug her novels off as frivolous and worthless, but those whose desire is simply to live for a while in another world of magical powers and clear forces of evil and good, Norton is just the thing. The romantic will revel in these tales of love unshadowed by overwhelming sex drives, of faithfulness and honor, and in the mystery surrounding her Forerunner ruins which seem to find their way into every book. As for her characters, they are not creations of genius; yet they are believable, having the fears, jealousies, vanities, and faults of all humanity.

If Norton's problem is not the quality of her writing, then what is it? I think there are three reasons responsible. One, she hasn't written for magazines, the majority of her works being full-length novels. Two, as I mentioned before, her works lack great hidden meanings. Three, most people find it difficult to classify her works, and this includes the librarians who decide whether she belongs in the youth or adult sections of libraries.

Considering the first problem, many big name writers like Isaac Asimov got started by writing for magazines. This gave the subscribers and critics of whichever magazine it was the chance to become acquainted with them. Since these magazines were for adults, the authors did not earn the stigma of writing immature works. Andre Norton, however, got started by writing children's books. Few adults or critics (many consider it debatable whether or not critics are adults) will take children's books seriously, unless they are written by someone who has already made a name for himself in another field. Later, when Norton began writing books for more adult audiences, people couldn't be brought to understand that these weren't just for kiddies.

Of course, her beginnings as a children's writer is not the only reason so few seem to take her seriously. Literary tastes swing from extreme to extreme. Nowadays there is a renewed search for the essence of self and human experience, revealed in the type of works considered masterpieces. This is the day of James Joyce, Hermann Hesse, Joseph Conrad, **The Prophet**, and free verse poetry truly understood only by the authors. Eastern religion and wisdom are the latest things in philosophy. To be considered a work of

near or true genius, a book must contain passages on the darkness and passion of the human soul. Dilemmas and inner turmoil are faced and usually not overcome. Gloom pervades many an ending. Andre Norton's works, on the other hand, are basically adventure stories. Quandaries are not psychological but physical. As a consequence, there are those who wouldn't be caught dead reading one of her books.

Neither does Andre Norton follow in the footsteps of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Philip Roth, and science fiction writers like Heinlein and the author of **The Age of the Pussyfoot** (whose name I cannot remember -- it wasn't worth it) who write on the subject of the decadence of society. Not for Andre Norton the perversions of **Once is Not Enough** (Jacqueline Susann). Love plays a part in many of her novels but sex is relegated to a back seat.

Andre Norton writes adventure stories. But are they fantasy or science fiction? With some it's not too difficult to tell. For instance, **Huon of the Horn**, a translation of a tale from the French Carolingian Cycles. Science has no part in this story of elves, magic swords, and wondrous bravery. **The**

**Ice Crown**, on the other hand, concerns a world controlled by the machines of long-dead Psychocrats (power-crazy psychiatrists who ruled the galaxy at one time). What magic there is arises from these machines. Then, however, we face books such as the Witch World series, and the Warlock series, containing elements of both science fiction (machinery) and fantasy (magic). In the first two books of the Witch World series we are presented with the Kolder, a people possessed of an immense technology. In fact, they have developed into part of their machines, so dependent have they become. Opposed to the Kolder we have the Witches of Estcarp, mistresses of illusion, wind, and wave. The Warlock series also shows two different cultures--the Federation with technology, and the Wyverns with magic again. True blue science fiction readers shy away from hints of the fantastic and fantasy readers from the taint of machinery.

For all these reasons, Andre Norton has not achieved the popularity she deserves. Her books are interesting; does it matter that they are not difficult to understand or can't be exactly classified? However, don't just take my word on their quality, read them! ◀

### IN SFORUM 3

"The Computer: From Super Power to Christ Figure"  
by Alice Carol Gaar

"Theological Overtones in Science Fiction"  
by Enola Borgh

Book Discussion: Stranger In A Strange Land, Part 1