

Lavender-Green Magic Short Guide

Lavender-Green Magic by Andre Norton

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Overview

In the fantasy novel *Lavender-Green Magic* the three Wade children, Holly, Judy, and Crockett, must deal with the loss of their father, who is reported missing in action during the Vietnam War.

They move from their home in Boston to stay with grandparents they barely know, while their mother holds down a job at a nursing home. The novel deals with the children's fear, loneliness, and anger when faced with such drastic changes in their lives. The reactions of Holly, Judy, and Crockett are varied and believable, and as they confront their situation, they must learn to face the prospect of change and growth.

The conflicts they face become even more dramatic when they journey through a garden maze and travel back through time to the seventeenth century. During their magical adventures they meet Tamar and Hagar, sisters who are being persecuted for being witches.

Only if the children learn to work together and overcome their anger and jealousies will they be able to save Tamar and thwart the evil that may enter their world. In both the past and present, the struggle is between good and evil, generosity and greed, acceptance and prejudice. *Lavender-Green Magic* is a powerful novel that presents the idea that, even when faced with a seemingly hopeless situation, a person's "will" can make changes—for the better or for the worse.

About the Author

Born on February 17, 1912, in Cleveland, Ohio, Alice Mary Norton began writing as a teen-ager. By age twenty-one she had published her first book, *The Prince Commands* (1934), a historical novel for adults. After attending Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Norton became a children's librarian in the city's public library, a job she held from 1932 to 1950. She then accepted a job with the Library of Congress, and continued to write in her spare time, but by mid-decade the increasing popularity of her books persuaded her to devote all of her time to writing.

Norton's publishers warned her that readers would be reluctant to purchase adventure tales—traditionally focused on male protagonists, and targeted at a male audience—authored by an "Alice Mary." Norton adopted the pseudonym of "Andre Norton" for her works of fantasy and historical adventure; she began writing science fiction in 1947 as "Andrew North," but soon abandoned this pen name in favor of the other.

Although Norton has written fourteen historical novels and eight books of legends and magic for children, she is best known for her science-fiction and fantasy novels. She has written two or three books a year since becoming a full-time writer, and has published more than one hundred books over the course of her career. Although she has not achieved the critical recognition of other authors, Norton was honored by the World Fantasy Convention in 1987 for lifetime achievement. When *Lotus* magazine conducted a poll in 1987 asking readers to identify the best fantasy writers of all time, Norton tied for twenty-third place.

Norton has suffered from ill health since the 1950s, and spent many years as an invalid. She currently lives in Florida and, as a result of new medication, is able to travel to science-fiction conventions occasionally.

Setting

The story takes place in 1970. Staff Sergeant Joel Wade has been reported missing in action in Vietnam, and his children, Holly, Judy, and Crockett, must move from Boston to live with their grandparents in Sussex, Massachusetts, a small town with a rich history.

The grandparents, Mercy and Lute, live by the village junkyard on the remains of the old Dimsdale estate. Their house does not have electricity or running water, but it is a cozy, loving home, cluttered with odds and ends and objects awaiting repair.

A garden maze planted in 1683 by Master Truelow still stands, now overgrown and abandoned, on the Dimsdale estate. By sleeping on a magic pillow, the children find the entrance to this maze, and as they journey within it, they visit an earlier century and meet Tamar and Hagar, the daughters of Master Truelow.

During the late seventeenth century, a witch-hunting panic spread throughout New England. Many people were accused, tried, and executed as witches. In Salem, Massachusetts, for example, twenty people were killed as witches, and many more were imprisoned. The accusations were unfounded, often caused by hysteria or the fear of anyone different. It is this era of witch-hunting that serves as a setting for the children's fantastic adventures in the past.

When they follow the "right" path into the maze, they find themselves at the home of Tamar. The house, with its door standing open to welcome the visitors, is in the middle of an elaborate garden of beautiful scented flowers. Later, when they travel the "left" path to visit Hagar, the maze is "chill and damp." Instead of flowers, there are "toadstools . . . growing larger and more evil-looking all the time." From these plants there comes a smell so awful that the "children might as well have been in a pit filled with garbage." "Horrible animals" watch them from behind bushes. The door of Hagar's house is closed and above it stands a row of small gray-white animal skulls. The different settings for each house establish mood and also illustrate the good or evil nature of each inhabitant.



Social Sensitivity

Norton deals very honestly and sensitively with the problems the Wade family face over the loss of their father. The move to a new place and the resentment and uncertainty of what will happen next are aptly depicted, especially in the characterization of Holly. While the youngsters' secure home life seems to have been shattered, Lavender-Green Magic strongly affirms the security that flows from self-confidence and the acceptance of others.

Norton asserts that prejudice results from people's insecurities. Because Tamar is different, because she is able to heal others, she is feared and labeled a witch. Although Holly fears racism in her nearly all-white school, it does not occur. Yet the issue itself is discussed by Grandma as she explains what it had been like when she and Lute first moved to Sussex. Further, as Holly notes, an inherent bias, whether racial or social, seems to be operating. The grandparents are called by their first names, yet they refer to other townspeople as "Miss" or "Mr." The issue of racism itself, as with the issue of witch-hunting or anger, exemplifies the need for selfresponsibility.

Norton is concerned with each person's responsibility to influence the world. Conflicts such as the witch hunts, or by association, war itself, are caused by people and can, therefore, be changed if people "will" it strongly enough. Norton's vision of true magic is the power to transform the self and by extension to transform the world.



Literary Qualities

The technique of visiting another time or magical world is frequently used in fantasy fiction. Often characters find a talisman or magical doorway that leads them to another world. Here, however, while the dream pillow is magical enough to show the children how to find the center of the maze, the children journey to that place themselves. As Holly realizes, it is not simply which side of the pillow one sleeps on, but "how you felt your ownself" that leads either to Tamar or to Hagar.

In some stories that feature journeys back through time, the characters find a treasure in the past that will help resolve a conflict in the present. In *Lavender-Green Magic* the process is more internalized. The characters have adventures and make choices that help them to deal with their problems and to develop as individuals.

Norton uses setting both to establish a mood and to represent the characters.

Tamar's and Hagar's homes clearly show the differences between Tamar's caring and Hagar's selfishness. The maze is symbolic of the puzzle of identity, and as Holly journeys through the maze, she learns to become a "new Holly Wade." The maze itself is also an apt illustration of Tamar's use of nature—a union of human talents and nature's beauty.

The different paths to the sisters' homes sharply define their opposition.

The ways of the left and right are clear symbols of evil and good. "Left," from its Latin derivation of "sinister," often means diabolic or witchlike and is often associated with evil. The "widdershins" that Crockett refers to means a circling counterclockwise, or to the left, a movement associated with evil purpose.

"Right" has the connotations of "skillful" or "clever" and can be used to describe that which is good or proper.



Themes and Characters

Lavender-Green Magic presents characters from both the present and the past. Even though they are from different centuries, the characters have similar conflicts and beliefs. Some issues are the same in each century: prejudice, the desire for power, and fear of those who are different. All the characters must deal with the question of how to live and with the conflict between good and evil.

Holly is the main character, and her struggles serve as the focal point of the novel. She deeply resents the changes that have taken place, and as the story begins, she feels alienated from everyone and everything. Because of her anger, Holly is ready to dislike Sussex and its people, even before she arrives there: "She was sure that Sussex was a very different kind of place to live. A place where she was not going to want to live!"

Holly is suspicious of anything different, and because the changes that have taken place in her old, safe world frighten her, she lacks self-confidence. When she discovers that she is the only black girl in her sixth-grade class, "Holly was sure her worst fears were proven true." Although her younger sister, Judy, quickly and easily makes friends with her schoolmates, Holly "did not try to join the other girls at recess or lunchtime, but hunted out Judy to stay with her." She tries to keep hold of "what had always been warm and secure" by keeping close to Judy and trying to exclude others. She wants to retain both a measure of power and the semblance of family by continuing in her role as eldest sister, but both Judy and Crockett are rebuilding their lives without Holly's direction.

Holly is inquisitive and intelligent, but her determination to direct her brother and sister makes her both jealous and angry when Judy leads the way into the maze. Holly's jealousy causes her to use the dream pillow, rather than accept Judy's independence. She visits Hagar because she knows "a witch lived in the maze—a witch with the power to wish anything she wanted to happen. Just wait until Holly could have that power."

It is only when Judy breaks Hagar's evil spell that Holly begins to recognize her own flaws, accept friendship, and relinquish her selfish desire to control others.

Judy and her twin brother, Crockett, are able to accept their new life in Sussex. Although they are also frightened and saddened by the changes in their lives, they accept the love of their grandparents and the friendship of schoolmates. Judy and Crockett work along with their grandparents on a school project and a costume party; only Holly chooses to work alone. While Judy, as younger sister, had always followed the directions of Holly, she now makes decisions for herself. The journeys of Holly and Judy into the maze are reflections of their own personalities. Judy's hope to make friends and to work with others is mirrored in the warmth and friendship of Tamar. Holly's anger finds a reflection in Hagar's obsession with power.

Like Holly and Judy, Tamar and Hagar are sisters. Tamar greets the Wade children warmly and bids them not to fear her. Although others accuse her of witchcraft for



growing herbs and making potions, she tells the children that she grows herbs because she enjoys the task and that the potions are medicinal. She tells them about the "law" to love nature, to be humble and patient, and not to hurt or wish harm upon others. In many ways she is similar to the Wade grandparents, who enjoy a life of tending plants and repairing broken objects found in the junkyard.

Hagar, however, greets the children with the invocation of hell's protectress of witches: "In the name of Hecate, I bid thee enter." She uses bribery, blackmail, and spells to accomplish her goals and offers Holly the power to use her wishes against people. She promises that whatever Tamar builds, she will destroy.

Nature and other people are not important to her, she will work only for her own benefit.

Although Tamar and Hagar are sisters, one is a healer while the other is a destroyer. Even the paths to their houses are opposite. To visit Tamar one follows the "right" way, representing all that is good; to visit Hagar one follows the "left" path, which represents the selfish desire for power over others. This contrast illustrates several themes, such as the proper use of nature, the importance of helping people, and the conflict between creation and destruction.

The most important arena for the struggle between good and evil is within the individual. Grandma Wade says, "A lot of bad things we bring on ourselves 'cause we have bad thoughts in our heads or hate in our hearts." Holly must come to accept the fact that her intentions, not the dream pillow, lead her to the evil Hagar. Holly can become a "new Holly Wade" but not through magic or spells. She must change the way she feels about herself. When Holly allows Judy to lead, accepts her own limitations, and becomes friends with others, she leaves behind her anger and resentment. Norton's view that people can transform themselves and change the world around them gives a sense of dignity and power to the individual.

Topics for Discussion

1. In chapter 1, how does the setting illustrate Holly's feelings? Is this use of setting effective?

2. What are the different reasons why Tamar and Hagar give plants to the children? What does each woman want and how does that reflect each personality?

3. Why does Holly think that Hagar is more powerful than Tamar? Why do her ideas change?

4. Tomkit seems a minor character, yet he is an important part of the story.

What are his different roles, with the grandparents, with Holly and Judy, and with the maze? What issues does Tomkit seem to suggest?

5. How are the three "gifts" or blessings that Tamar confers on the children appropriate?

6. How does the description and mood of Judy's planting differ from Holly's?

How does this reflect Tamar's and Hagar's personalities? Why does the author do this?

7. Holly wants to be leader of the group. Why? What are her intentions and her motivations? Do you sympathize with her character?

8. What different views of prejudice are depicted in the novel? Do you think those views are believably presented?

Are the proposed solutions believable?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Tamar says "As I will, it shall be done!" What does she mean? Cite some of the many examples of people's will overcoming their circumstances in this novel. What limitations are there to this viewpoint?

2. What comes to be the definition of a "leader" or of "power" in this novel?

When do characters best fit that definition? Why?

3. Norton is often concerned with the problem of preserving natural resources, especially in light of growing technology. How is this conflict demonstrated in the novel?

4. Past and present are closely interwoven in this novel. How is that demonstrated in the conflict and climax of the adventures? How is it depicted in the lives of Mercy and Lute Wade as they work in the junkyard? What other examples demonstrate the importance of the past?

5. What causes Holly's growing sense of isolation? How and why does she change?

For Further Reference

Kirkpatrick, D. L., ed. *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*. New York: St.

Martin's Press, 1983. The entry on Norton summarizes her career, lists her works, and gives a brief commentary.

Schlobin, Roger C. *Andre Norton: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography*.

Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980. This book includes important biographical information and a thorough listing of articles and books by and about Norton.

Spivack, Charlotte. *Merlin's Daughters: Contemporary Women Writers of Fantasy*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1987. The chapter on Norton includes an overview of her work for both adults and children. Spivack notes Norton's important themes and provides a critical discussion of her novels.

Townsend, John Rowe. *A Sense of Story: Essays on Contemporary Writers for Children*. Boston: Horn Book, 1971.

Townsend's essay on Norton emphasizes her science-fiction novels. A brief essay by Norton is included.



Related Titles

While most of Norton's work is science fiction, she has written several fantasy novels that focus upon journeys in time and the use of magic. *Octagon Magic*, *Dragon Magic*, and *Red Hart Magic* all contain a magical talisman that transports the characters to the past. In *Octagon Magic* young Lorrie Mallard travels back to the Civil War era; in *Dragon Magic* each of the four boys visits a different time in ancient history and myth, each time relating to the boy's own ethnic heritage. In *Red Hart Magic* a new stepbrother and stepsister find themselves in a situation in the past where their actions may mean life or death for others. In these stories the journey back in time allows the characters to fill new roles and to try other identities. This does not remove them from the problems of their own lives but instead gives them an opportunity to develop self-confidence, sympathy, and a sense of purpose. The conflicts in the past are often related to the problems each faces in the present. As in *Lavender-Green Magic*, Norton's other fantasy adventures emphasize the development of identity; her characters must overcome conflicts within themselves before they can truly be part of society.



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Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Editor

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Cover Design

Amanda Mott

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)

ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)

ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature—Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction—19th century—Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction—20th century—Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3—dc20 96-20771 CIP

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Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996