

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

# JONATHAN STRANGE

# &

# Mr NORRELL

a novel



# Susanna Clarke

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## **Praise for *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell***

“Combining folklore and fantasy with horror-story imagination, [Clarke] creates a Napoleonic-era England alive with the promise—and danger—of uncontrollable forces . . . Clarke’s sober style keeps the fantasy grounded, and meticulous historical research brings the magical episodes to terrifying life.” —*People* (Critic’s choice, four stars)

“What kind of magic can make an 800-page novel seem too short? Whatever it is, debut author Susanna Clarke is possessed by it.” —*USA Today*

“Clarke’s imagination is prodigious, her pacing is masterly and she knows how to employ dry humor in the service of majesty.” —*The New York Times*

“Immense, intelligent, inventive . . . Clarke is a restrained and witty writer with an arch and eminently readable style.” —*Entertainment Weekly*

“Over the course of nearly 800 pages Clarke channels the world of Jane Austen, the Gothic tale, the Silver-Fork Society novel, military adventure à la Bernard Sharpe or Patrick O’Brian, romantic Byronism and Walter Scott’s passion for the heroic Northern past. She orchestrates all these fictive elements consummately well. . . Many books are to be read, some are to be studied, and a few are meant to be lived in for weeks. *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* is of this last kind.” —*The Washington Post*

“The most sparkling literary debut of the year.” —*Salon*

“Here is a writer who remembers that true fairy tales carry a sting and the creatures themselves were never properly domesticated to the nursery. Her

uncanny book is an object lesson in the pleasures—and risks—of enchantment.” —*Village Voice*

“A terrific, phenomenally ambitious book . . . Gorgeous.” —*The Onion*

“Witty dialogue, cunning observations and intriguing footnotes . . . [A] sweeping adventure full of telling details, mixing history and fantasy to create worlds of deep imagination that seem as real as our own.” —*San Francisco Chronicle*

“Utterly enchanting. [Clarke’s] union of historical fiction and fantasy is fresh, it is surprising, and it will appeal to those who want nothing more than to be carried away to a world crafted by a superb storyteller.” —*Denver Post*

“Extraordinary ...If Harry Potter is the kind of book that makes you want to be a kid again, *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* is the kind of novel that will remind you that being an adult should be a whole lot more fun.” —*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

“This 800-page work of fantasy—think Harry Potter sprinkled with the dust of Tolkien and Alasdair Gray—posits an extraordinary alternative history of England where magic, fairies, spirits and enchantments were once part of everyday life . . . This incredible work of the imagination, which took Clarke more than 10 years to write, ends all too soon.” —*New York Post* (four stars)

“Combines the wit of Jane Austen with the subterranean spookiness of the works of Arthur Conan Doyle.” —*Seattle Times*

“An enthralling, unique read.” —*The Baltimore Sun*

“While *Jonathan Strange* is every bit as whimsical and playful as the Harry Potter books, it is also grave and upsetting, the very opposite of comforting children’s entertainment . . . Clarke has delivered a book of universal truths and unexpectedly heartbreaking acuity.” —*Star-Telegram* (Fort-Worth)

“Mesmerizing.” —*Harper’s Bazaar*

# **JONATHAN STRANGE & Mr NORRELL**

**Susanna Clarke**

**Illustrations by Portia Rosenberg**

B L O O M S B U R Y

NEW YORK • LONDON • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

In memory of my brother,  
Paul Frederick Gunn Clarke, 1961–2000



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By the Same Author



## Preface

It is January and I am arriving at an English country house in Yorkshire. Fog and rain shroud the park. The interior is a dim labyrinth of splendid but desolate rooms, full of winter shadows and echoing footsteps.

It is everything that pleases me best: the perfect setting for a pseudo-nineteenth-century novel.

The phone conversations about a possible television series of *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* stretch back years, but now that the moment has come, now that I am actually here at Wentworth Woodhouse, I lose my bearings. It is not just the scale of the thing that is unnerving. (Look at that positive battalion of lorries drawn up in front of the house – perhaps I should find someone and apologise for all the trouble?) Nor is it simply the sense of other-worldliness, of reality out of joint with itself – I imagine all film sets have something of that quality. (Look at the miles of electrical cable that wind up and down stone staircases and disappear, serpent-like, into the darkness of one of a hundred nameless rooms.) No, what I find most bewildering are the people with early-nineteenth-century hairstyles and early-nineteenth-century clothes. I suppose I ought to have expected them and it's not that there are so many really, not in comparison with the film crew.

But nothing, I find, has prepared me for the sight of my own characters walking about. A playwright or screenwriter must expect it; a novelist doesn't and naturally concludes that she has gone mad. (What do they need so many umbrellas for? Don't they realise that they are imaginary?)

In the part of Wentworth Woodhouse that is currently standing in for the House of Commons, Sir Walter Pole smiles and saunters over to speak to me. In a ballroom of immense magnificence Lady Pole and Mrs Strange perform a dance of their own invention; it is both graceful and funny. (Later someone will give me a photograph of it.) Stephen Black looks grave and self-possessed and keeps to the shadows. Childermass – in straightforward Yorkshire fashion – shows me his tarot cards and lets me hold them for a moment: they feel warm and pleasantly rough in the hand. Out of the assembled ranks of fairy dancers the gentleman with the thistle-down hair gives me a friendly wave. (This last, I am willing to admit, is not the least in character.)

The two people I do *not* meet – slightly to my relief – are Jonathan Strange and Gilbert Norrell. I know that I do not meet them because the defining characteristics of Strange and Norrell are arrogance and self-regard. (I am sorry to have to say this about people I am related to but it is true.) The people I meet in their place – Bertie Carvel and Eddie Marsan – are nothing of the sort, being warm and delightful.

A month or so later and we are gathered in York outside the Minster. People are walking home from work, driving their cars through the city centre, eating in restaurants. Everything is quite as normal. Except that in just the one spot – before the great West Front—a snowstorm is blowing; and battling their way through it is a covey of black-coated magicians in three-cornered hats with lanterns in their hands. Mr Norrell is about to do magic in York Minster again. People stop and stare. In the middle of twenty-first-century York on an ordinary weekday evening there is suddenly a strange little bubble of nineteenth-century-England-that-never-was.

The next day I am walking with a friend outside the Minster. I look down and see some faint white traces in the cracks between the paving stones.

“Oh, look,” I say. “This is my snow.”

Susanna Clarke  
November, 2014

## **Volume I**

### **Mr Norrell**



He hardly ever spoke of magic, and when he did it was like a history lesson and no one could bear to listen to him.

# 1

## **The library at Hurtfew**

Autumn 1806–January 1807

Some years ago there was in the city of York a society of magicians. They met upon the third Wednesday of every month and read each other long, dull papers upon the history of English magic.

They were gentleman-magicians, which is to say they had never harmed any one by magic – nor ever done any one the slightest good. In fact, to own the truth, not one of these magicians had ever cast the smallest spell, nor by magic caused one leaf to tremble upon a tree, made one mote of dust to alter its course or changed a single hair upon any one's head. But, with this one minor reservation, they enjoyed a reputation as some of the wisest and most magical gentlemen in Yorkshire.

A great magician has said of his profession that its practitioners “... must pound and rack their brains to make the least learning go in, but quarrelling always comes very naturally to them,”<sup>1</sup> and the York magicians had proved the truth of this for a number of years.

In the autumn of 1806 they received an addition in a gentleman called John Segundus. At the first meeting that he attended Mr Segundus rose and addressed the society. He began by complimenting the gentlemen upon their distinguished history; he listed the many celebrated magicians and historians that had at one time or another belonged to the York society. He hinted that it had been no small inducement to him in coming to York to know of the existence of such a society. Northern magicians, he reminded his audience, had always been better respected than southern ones. Mr

Segundus said that he had studied magic for many years and knew the histories of all the great magicians of long ago. He read the new publications upon the subject and had even made a modest contribution to their number, but recently he had begun to wonder why the great feats of magic that he read about remained on the pages of his book and were no longer seen in the street or written about in the newspapers. Mr Segundus wished to know, he said, why modern magicians were unable to work the magic they wrote about. In short, he wished to know why there was no more magic done in England.

It was the most commonplace question in the world. It was the question which, sooner or later, every child in the kingdom asks his governess or his schoolmaster or his parent. Yet the learned members of the York society did not at all like hearing it asked and the reason was this: they were no more able to answer it than any one else.

The President of the York society (whose name was Dr Foxcastle) turned to John Segundus and explained that the question was a wrong one. "It presupposes that magicians have some sort of duty to do magic – which is clearly nonsense. You would not, I imagine, suggest that it is the task of botanists to devise more flowers? Or that astronomers should labour to rearrange the stars? Magicians, Mr Segundus, study magic which was done long ago. Why should any one expect more?"

An elderly gentleman with faint blue eyes and faintly-coloured clothes (called either Hart or Hunt – Mr Segundus could never quite catch the name) faintly said that it did not matter in the least whether any body expected it or not. A gentleman could not do magic. Magic was what street sorcerers pretended to do in order to rob children of their pennies. Magic (in the practical sense) was much fallen off. It had low connexions. It was the bosom companion of unshaven faces, gypsies, house-breakers; the frequenter of dingy rooms with dirty yellow curtains. Oh no! A gentleman

could not do magic. A gentleman might study the history of magic (nothing could be nobler) but he could not do any. The elderly gentleman looked with faint, fatherly eyes at Mr Segundus and said that he hoped Mr Segundus had not been trying to cast spells.

Mr Segundus blushed.

But the famous magician's maxim held true: two magicians – in this case Dr Foxcastle and Mr Hunt or Hart – could not agree without two more thinking the exact opposite. Several of the gentlemen began to discover that they were entirely of Mr Segundus's opinion and that no question in all of magical scholarship could be so important as this one. Chief among Mr Segundus's supporters was a gentleman called Honeyfoot, a pleasant, friendly sort of man of fifty-five, with a red face and grey hair. As the exchanges became more bitter and Dr Foxcastle grew in sarcasm towards Mr Segundus, Mr Honeyfoot turned to him several times and whispered such comfort as, "Do not mind them, sir. I am entirely of your opinion;" and "You are quite right, sir, do not let them sway you;" and "You have hit upon it! Indeed you have, sir! It was the want of the right question which held us back before. Now that you are come we shall do great things."

Such kind words as these did not fail to find a grateful listener in John Segundus, whose shock shewed clearly in his face. "I fear that I have made myself disagreeable," he whispered to Mr Honeyfoot. "That was not my intention. I had hoped for these gentlemen's good opinion."

At first Mr Segundus was inclined to be downcast but a particularly spiteful outburst from Dr Foxcastle roused him to a little indignation. "That gentleman," said Dr Foxcastle, fixing Mr Segundus with a cold stare, "seems determined that we should share in the unhappy fate of the Society of Manchester Magicians!"