

= Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell =

Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell is the 2004 debut novel of British writer Susanna Clarke . An alternative history set in 19th @-@ century England around the time of the Napoleonic Wars , it is based on the premise that magic once existed in England and has returned with two men : Gilbert Norrell and Jonathan Strange . Centred on the relationship between these two men , the novel investigates the nature of " Englishness " and the boundaries between reason and unreason , Anglo @-@ Saxon and Anglo @-@ Dane , and Northern and Southern English cultural tropes / stereotypes . It has been described as a fantasy novel , an alternative history , and a historical novel . It inverts the Industrial Revolution conception of the North @-@ South divide in England : in this book the North is romantic and magical , rather than rational and concrete . It can be usefully compared and contrasted with Elizabeth Gaskell 's attempts at synthesising a unitary English identity in her fiction .

The narrative draws on various Romantic literary traditions , such as the comedy of manners , the Gothic tale , and the Byronic hero . The novel 's language is a pastiche of 19th @-@ century writing styles , such as those of Jane Austen and Charles Dickens . Clarke describes the supernatural with mundane details . She supplements the text with almost 200 footnotes , outlining the backstory and an entire fictional corpus of magical scholarship .

Clarke began writing Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell in 1992 ; ten years later she submitted the manuscript for publication . It was accepted by Bloomsbury and published in September 2004 , with illustrations by Portia Rosenberg . Bloomsbury were so sure of its success that they printed 250 @,@ 000 hardcover copies . The novel was well received by critics and reached number three on the New York Times best @-@ seller list . It was longlisted for the 2004 Man Booker Prize and won the 2005 Hugo Award for Best Novel .

= = Plot summary = =

= = = Volume I : Mr Norrell = = =

The novel opens in autumn 1806 in northern England with The Learned Society of York Magicians , made up of " theoretical magicians " , who believe that magic died out several hundred years earlier . The group is stunned to learn of a " practising magician " , Mr Gilbert Norrell , who owns a large collection of " books of magic " , which he has spent years purchasing to keep them out of the hands of others . Norrell proves his skill as a practical magician by making the statues in York Cathedral speak . John Childermass , Mr Norrell 's long @-@ time servant , convinces a member of the group , John Segundus , to write about the event for the London newspapers .

Segundus 's article generates considerable interest in Mr Norrell , who moves to London to revive practical English magic . He enters society with the help of two gentlemen about town and meets a Cabinet Minister , Sir Walter Pole . To ingratiate himself , Mr Norrell attempts to recall Sir Walter 's fiancée , Emma Wintertowne , from the dead . He summons a fairy ? " the gentleman with thistle @-@ down hair " ? who strikes a bargain with Mr Norrell to restore Emma : half of her life will be spent with the fairy . After news spreads of Emma 's resurrection and happy marriage to Sir Walter , magic becomes respectable ; and Mr Norrell performs various feats to aid the government in their ongoing war against Napoleon .

While living in London , Mr Norrell encounters Vinculus , a street @-@ magician , who relates a prophecy about a nameless slave and two magicians in England , but Norrell dismisses it . While travelling , Vinculus later meets Jonathan Strange , a young gentleman of property from Shropshire , and recites the same prophecy , prompting Strange to become a magician . Meanwhile , the gentleman with thistle @-@ down hair takes a liking to Stephen Black , Sir Walter 's capable black butler , and promises to make him a king . Emma (now Lady Pole) lapses into lassitude . She rarely speaks , and her attempts to communicate her situation are confounded by magic . No doctor can cure her , and Mr Norrell claims that her problems cannot be solved by magic . Without the

knowledge of the other characters , each evening she and Stephen are forced to attend balls held by the gentleman with thistle @-@ down hair in the Faerie kingdom of Lost @-@ Hope , where they dance all night long .

= = = Volume II : Jonathan Strange = = =

Volume II opens in Summer 1809 with Strange learning of Mr Norrell and travelling to London to meet him . They immediately clash over the importance of John Uskglass (the legendary Raven King) to English magic . Strange argues that " without the Raven King there would be no magic and no magicians " while Norrell retorts that the Raven King made war upon England and should be forgotten . Despite their differing opinions and temperaments , Strange becomes Norrell 's pupil . Norrell , however , deliberately keeps some knowledge from Strange .

Lady Pole and Strange 's wife , Arabella , become friends ; several times Lady Pole attempts to tell Arabella about her forced nights of dancing at the fairy 's castle in Lost @-@ Hope , but each time she tells an unrelated story . Arabella also meets the gentleman with thistle @-@ down hair at the Poles ' , but she assumes he is simply a resident . Without her husband 's knowledge , the fairy plots to enchant her , although Stephen Black continually attempts to dissuade him .

The Stranges become a popular couple in London . The Cabinet ministers find Strange easier to deal with than Norrell , and they send him to assist the Duke of Wellington on his Peninsular Campaign . For over a year , Strange helps the army : he creates roads , moves towns , and makes dead men speak . After he returns , he fails to cure George III 's madness , although Strange manages to save the king from becoming enchanted by the gentleman with thistle @-@ down hair , who is determined to make Stephen a king . Strange then helps defeat Napoleon at the horrific Battle of Waterloo .

Frustrated with being Norrell 's pupil , Strange pens a scathing review of a book outlining Norrell 's theories on modern magic ; in particular , Strange challenges Norrell 's views of the Raven King . The English public splits into " Norrellites " and " Strangites " ; Norrell and Strange part company , although not without regret . Strange returns home and works on his own book , The History and Practice of English Magic . Arabella goes missing , then suddenly reappears , sick and weak . Three days later she dies .

= = = Volume III : John Uskglass = = =

Volume III opens in January 1816 with Childermass experiencing strong magic that is not produced by either Norrell or Strange . At the same time , Lady Pole attempts to shoot Mr Norrell as he is returning home . Childermass takes the bullet himself but is not killed . Afterwards , Lady Pole is cared for in the country by John Segundus , who has an inkling of the magic surrounding her . During travels in the north , Stephen meets Vinculus , who recites his prophecy : " the nameless slave shall be a king in a strange country ... " Stephen believes it applies to him , but the gentleman with thistle @-@ down hair argues that it applies to the Raven King .

Strange settles in Venice and meets Flora Greysteel . They become fond of each other and Strange 's friends believe he may marry again . However , after experimenting with dangerous magic that threatens his sanity to gain access to Faerie , he discovers that Arabella is alive and being held captive . Immediately after he discovers this , the gentleman with the thistledown hair curses him with Eternal Night , an eerie darkness that engulfs him and follows him wherever he goes . Thereafter , Strange 's strenuous efforts to rescue her take their toll , and his letters to friends begin to appear crazed . At Strange 's request , Flora moves with her family to Padua and secludes herself inside her home , along with a mirror given to her by Strange . Drawlight is sent by Lascelles and Norrell to Venice to only enquire about Strange but is brought before him by Strange 's magic . Strange instructs Drawlight with several tasks and re @-@ invokes the old alliances within England between the forces of nature and John Uskglass . In England , this reawakening sparks a magical renaissance , but Norrell fails to grasp its significance . Strange returns and gives Childermass instructions which allow him to free Lady Pole from the fairy 's enchantment . Strange , bringing "

Eternal Night " with him , asks Norrell to help him undo Arabella 's enchantment by summoning John Uskglass .

Childermass meanwhile indirectly receives the message meant for him by Strange and uses it to break the enchantment over Lady Pole . Enraged by this the gentleman with the thistledown hair first murders Vinculus forcing Stephen Black to watch . Then after begins to place a second curse upon Lady Pole that would lead to her imminent death for cheating him of his prize . In parallel , Norrell and Strange attempt a spell intended to pay homage from the forces of England to John Uskglass . Their same belief as the gentleman with the thistledown hair that the ' nameless slave ' applies to Uskglass ends up in them devoting their power to Stephen who uses his momentary control of England to destroy the man with the thistledown hair . Amongst the confusion , Stephen leaves down one of the newly opened Faerie roads , and becomes the new king of the now blossoming Lost @-@ Hope .

Between the death of Vinculus and the gentleman with the thistledown hair , Childermass notes that tattooed upon Vinculus 's body is the last works of John Uskglass . As he tries to preserve the tattoos in memory , a man appears . Between calling Childermass his servant (leading him to believe it is Norrell in disguise) and trivially performing other feats of great magic , the unknown man brings Vinculus back to life .

As a result of the imprecision of the fairy 's curse , which was placed on " the English magician , " Norrell is trapped along with Strange in the " Eternal Night , " and they cannot move more than a certain distance from each other . Upon the gentleman with the thistledown hair 's death , Arabella comes through the mirror in Venice , where Flora is waiting for her upon instruction of Strange . The penultimate scene is of the now infamous Childermass releasing the contract upon The Learned Society of York Magicians , telling them they can study magic again , and showing the now restored Vinculus as proof that one last book remains , tattooed upon his body . Two months later , Strange has a conversation with the now stronger Arabella still living in Venice , explaining that he and Norrell are working to undo the eternal darkness they are both trapped in , but are planning to adventure into other worlds . Neither wish to take her to Faerie again , so he instead promises to return to her when he dis @-@ spells the darkness and tells her not to be a widow till then , which she agrees to .

= = Composition and publication = =

Clarke first developed the idea for Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell during a year spent teaching English in Bilbao , Spain : " I had a kind of waking dream ... about a man in 18th @-@ century clothes in a place rather like Venice , talking to some English tourists . And I felt strongly that he had some sort of magical background ? he 'd been dabbling in magic , and something had gone badly wrong . " She had also recently re @-@ read J. R. R. Tolkien 's The Lord of the Rings and afterwards was inspired to " trying writing a novel of magic and fantasy " .

After she returned from Spain in 1993 , Clarke began to think seriously about writing her novel . She signed up for a five @-@ day fantasy and science @-@ fiction writing workshop , co @-@ taught by writers Colin Greenland and Geoff Ryman . The students were expected to prepare a short story before attending , but Clarke only had " bundles " of material for her novel . From this she extracted " The Ladies of Grace Adieu " , a story about three women secretly practising magic who are discovered by the famous Jonathan Strange . Greenland was so impressed with the story that , without Clarke 's knowledge , he sent an excerpt to his friend , the fantasy writer Neil Gaiman . Gaiman later said , " It was terrifying from my point of view to read this first short story that had so much assurance ... It was like watching someone sit down to play the piano for the first time and she plays a sonata . " Gaiman showed the story to his friend , science @-@ fiction writer and editor Patrick Nielsen Hayden . Clarke learned of these events when Nielsen Hayden called and offered to publish her story in his anthology Starlight 1 , which featured pieces by well @-@ regarded science @-@ fiction and fantasy writers . She accepted , and the book won the World Fantasy Award for best anthology in 1997 .

Clarke spent the next ten years working on the novel in her spare time , while editing cookbooks full

@-@ time for Simon & Schuster in Cambridge . She also published stories in Starlight 2 and Starlight 3 ; according to the New York Times Magazine , her work was known and appreciated by a small group of fantasy fans and critics on the internet . She was never sure , however , if she would finish her novel or if it would be published . Clarke tried to write for three hours each day , beginning at 5 : 30 am , but struggled to keep this schedule . Rather than writing the novel from beginning to end , she wrote in fragments and attempted to stitch them together . Clarke , admitting that the project was for herself and not the reader , " clung to this method " " because I felt that if I went back and started at the beginning , [the novel] would lack depth , and I would just be skimming the surface of what I could do . But if I had known it was going to take me ten years , I would never have begun . I was buoyed up by thinking that I would finish it next year , or the year after next . " Clarke and Greenland fell in love while she was writing the novel and moved in together . Greenland did not read the novel until it was published .

Around 2001 , Clarke " had begun to despair " , and started looking for someone to help her finish and sell the book . Giles Gordon became her agent and sold the unfinished manuscript to Bloomsbury in early 2003 , after two publishers rejected it as unmarketable . Bloomsbury were so sure the novel would be a success that they offered Clarke a £ 1 million advance . They printed 250 @, @ 000 hardcover copies simultaneously in the United States , Britain , and Germany . Seventeen translations were begun before the first English publication was released . Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell was first published in the United States on 8 September 2004 , in the United Kingdom on 30 September , and in other countries on 4 October .

= = Style = =

Clarke 's style has frequently been described as a pastiche , particularly of nineteenth @-@ century British writers such as Charles Dickens , Jane Austen , and George Meredith . Specifically , the novel 's minor characters , including sycophants , rakes , and the Duke of Wellington , evoke Dickens ' caricatures . Laura Miller , in her review for Salon , suggests that the novel is " about a certain literary voice , the eminently civilized voice of early 19th century social comedy " , exemplified by the works of Austen . The novel even uses obsolete spellings ? chuse for choose and shewed for showed , for example ? to convey this voice as well as the free indirect speech made famous by Austen . Clarke herself notes that Austen 's influence is particularly strong in the " domestic scenes , set in living rooms and drawing rooms where people mostly chat about magic " where Dickens 's is prominent " any time there 's more action or description " . While many reviewers compare Clarke 's style to that of Austen , Gregory Feeley argues in his review for The Weekly Standard that " the points of resemblance are mostly superficial " . He writes that " Austen gets down to business briskly , while Clarke engages in a curious narrative strategy of continual deferral and delay . " For example , Clarke mentions Jonathan Strange on the first page of the novel , but only in a footnote . He reappears in other footnotes throughout the opening but does not appear as a character in the text proper until a quarter of the way through the novel .

In Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell , Clarke infuses her dry wit with prosaic quaintness . For example , the narrator notes : " It has been remarked (by a lady infinitely cleverer than the present author) how kindly disposed the world in general feels to young people who either die or marry . Imagine then the interest that surrounded Miss Wintertowne ! No young lady ever had such advantages before : for she died upon the Tuesday , was raised to life in the early hours of Wednesday morning , and was married upon the Thursday ; which some people thought too much excitement for one week . " As Michel Faber explains in his review for The Guardian , " here we have all the defining features of Clarke 's style simultaneously : the archly Austenesque tone , the somewhat overdone quaintness (" upon the Tuesday ") , the winningly matter @-@ of @-@ fact use of the supernatural , and drollness to spare . " Gregory Maguire notes in The New York Times that Clarke even gently ridicules the genre of the novel itself : " [A gentleman] picks up a book and begins to read ... but he is not attending to what he reads and he has got to Page 22 before he discovers it is a novel ? the sort of work which above all others he most despises ? and he puts it down in disgust . " Elsewhere , the narrator remarks , " Dear Emma does not waste her energies upon novels like other young

women . " The narrator 's identity has been a topic of discussion , with Clarke declaring that said narrator is female and omniscient rather than a future scholar from within the real storyline as some had suggested .

Clarke 's style extends to the novel 's 185 footnotes , which document a meticulous invented history of English magic . At times , the footnotes dominate entire pages of the novel . Michael Dirda , in his review for The Washington Post , describes these notes as " dazzling feats of imaginative scholarship " , in which the anonymous narrator " provides elaborate mini @-@ essays , relating anecdotes from the lives of semi @-@ legendary magicians , describing strange books and their contents , speculating upon the early years and later fate of the Raven King " . This extensive extra @-@ textual apparatus is reminiscent of postmodernist works , such as David Foster Wallace 's Infinite Jest (1996) and Thomas Pynchon 's Mason & Dixon (1997) , particularly as Clarke 's notes humorously refer to previous notes in the novel . Clarke did not expect her publisher to accept the footnotes .

Feeley explains that Romantic poet John Keats 's " vision of enchantment and devastation following upon any dealings with faeries " informs the novel , as the passing reference to the " cold hillside " makes clear . The magic in Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell has been described as " wintry and sinister " and " a melancholy , macabre thing " . There are " flocks of black birds , a forest that grows up in the canals of Venice , a countryside of bleak moors that can only be entered through mirrors , a phantom bell that makes people think of everything they have ever lost , a midnight darkness that follows an accursed man everywhere he goes " . The setting reflects this tone , as " dark , fog , mist and wet give the book much of its creepy , northern atmosphere . " According to Nisi Shawl in her review for The Seattle Times , the illustrations reinforce this tenor : " Shadows fill the illustrations by Portia Rosenberg , as apt as Edward Gorey 's for Dickens ' 'Bleak House ' . " Author John Clute disagrees , arguing that they are " astonishingly inappropriate " to the tone of the novel . Noting that Clarke refers to important nineteenth @-@ century illustrators George Cruikshank and [Thomas Rowlandson] , whose works are " line @-@ dominated , intricate , scabrous , cartoon @-@ like , savage and funny " , he is disappointed with the " soft and wooden " illustrations provided by Rosenberg .

= = Genre = =

Reviewers variously describe Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell as a fantasy novel , an alternative history , a historical fiction , or as a combination of these styles . Clarke herself says , " I think the novel is viewed as something new ... blending together a few genres ? such as fantasy and adventure and pastiche historical ? plus there 's the whole thing about slightly knowing footnotes commenting on the story . " She explains in an interview that she was particularly influenced by the historical fiction of Rosemary Sutcliff as well as the fantasies of Ursula K. Le Guin and Alan Garner , and that she loves the works of Austen .

In his review for The Boston Globe , John Freeman observes that Clarke 's fantasy , like that of Franz Kafka and Neil Gaiman , is imbued with realism . He argues that the footnotes in particular lend an air of credibility to the narrative : for example , they describe a fictional biography of Jonathan Strange and list where particular paintings in Norrell ? s house are located . In an interview , Clarke describes how she creates this realist fantasy : " One way of grounding the magic is by putting in lots of stuff about street lamps , carriages and how difficult it is to get good servants . " To create this effect , the novel includes many references to real early @-@ nineteenth century people and things , such as : artists Francisco Goya , Cruikshank , and Rowlandson ; writers Frances Burney , William Beckford , Monk Lewis , Lord Byron , and Ann Radcliffe ; Maria Edgeworth 's Belinda and Austen 's Emma ; publisher John Murray ; politicians Lord Castlereagh and George Canning ; The Gentleman 's Magazine and The Edinburgh Review ; Chippendale and Wedgwood furnishings ; and the madness of King George III . Clarke has said that she hopes the magic is as realistic as that in Le Guin 's Earthsea trilogy . This realism has led other reviewers , such as Polly Shulman , to argue that Clarke 's book is more of an historical fiction , akin to the works of Patrick O 'Brian . As she explains , " Both Clarke 's and O 'Brian 's stories are about a complicated relationship

between two men bound together by their profession ; both are set during the Napoleonic wars ; and they share a dry , melancholy wit and unconventional narrative shape . " Shulman sees fantasy and historical fiction as similar because both must follow rigid rules or risk a breakdown of the narrative .

As well as literary styles , Clarke pastiches many Romantic literary genres : the comedy of manners , the Gothic tale , the silver @-@ fork novel , the military adventure , the Byronic hero , and the historical romance of Walter Scott . In fact , Clarke 's novel maps the literary history of the early nineteenth century : the novel begins with the style and genres of Regency England , an " Austenian world of light , bright , sparkling dialogue and well @-@ mannered gentility " , and gradually transforms into a dark , Byronic tale . Clarke combines these Romantic genres with modern ones , such as the fantasy novel , drawing on the works of J. R. R. Tolkien , Philip Pullman , T. H. White , and C. S. Lewis . As Maguire notes , Clarke includes rings of power and books of spells that originate in these authors ' works . In contrast , Sacha Zimmerman suggests in *The New Republic* that while Tolkien 's world is " entirely new " , Clarke 's world is more engaging because it is eerily close to the reader 's . Although many reviewers compare Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell to the Harry Potter series , Annie Linskey contends in *The Baltimore Sun* that " the allusion is misleading " : unlike J. K. Rowling 's novels , Clarke 's is morally ambiguous , with its complex plot and dark characters .

= = Themes = =

= = = Friendship = = =

Reviewers focus most frequently on the dynamic between Norrell and Strange , arguing that the novel is about their relationship . In her review for the *Times Literary Supplement* , Roz Kaveney writes that the two illustrate Harold Bloom 's notion of the " anxiety of influence " in addition to romantic friendship . The two are a " study in contrasts " , with Norrell " exceptionally learned but shy and fussy " while Strange is " charming , young , fashionable and romantic " . As one reviewer remarks , " Clarke could have called the book *Sense and Sensibility* if the title weren 't already taken . "

= = = Reason and madness = = =

The novel is not about the fight between good and evil but rather the differences between madness and reason ? and it is the fairy world that is connected to madness (mad people can see fairies , for example) . Lady Pole , who is taken away into the fairyland of Lost @-@ Hope every night , appears insane to those around her . She is hidden away , like the character type examined by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their seminal book *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) . Developing a " divided consciousness " , she is passive and quiet at home at the same time she is vengeful and murderous in the fairy land .

= = = Englishness = = =

Clarke 's book is identified as distinctively English not only because of its style but also because of its themes of " vigorous common sense " , " firm ethical fiber " , " serene reason and self @-@ confidence " , which are drawn from its Augustan literary roots . The " muddy , bloody , instinctual spirit of the fairies " is equally a part of its Englishness , along with " arrogance , provincialism and class prejudice " . The fairy tradition that Clarke draws on is particularly English ; she alludes to tales from children 's literature and others which date back to the medieval period . As Feeley notes , " The idea of fairies forming a hidden supernatural aristocracy certainly predates Spenser and Shakespeare , and seems to distinguish the English tales of wee folk from those of Scotland and Ireland . " In these medieval English stories , the fairies are depicted as " capricious , inconsistent in their attitude toward humankind , [and] finally unknowable " , characteristics which Clarke

integrates into her own fairies . Clarke notes in an interview that she drew the idea of unpredictable , amoral fairies from the works of Neil Gaiman .

In an interview with *Locus* , Clarke explains why and how she integrated the theme of " Englishness " into *Jonathan Strange* : " I wanted to explore my ideas of the fantastic , as well as my ideas of England and my attachment to English landscape Sometimes it feels to me as though we don 't have a fable of England , of Britain , something strong and idealized and romantic . I was picking up on things like Chesterton and Conan Doyle , and the sense (which is also in Jane Austen) of what it was to be an English gentleman at the time when England was a very confident place " . In particular , " it 's the sort of Englishness which is stuffy but fundamentally benevolent , and fundamentally very responsible about the rest of the world " , which connects Conan Doyle 's Sherlock Holmes to Clarke 's *Jonathan Strange* .

= = = Historical otherness = = =

Using techniques of the genre of alternative history , Clarke creates events and characters that would have been impossible in the early nineteenth century . She also explores the " silencing " of under @-@ represented groups : women , people of colour , and poor whites . Both *Strange* and *Norrell* suppress the voices of these groups in their rise to power . Mr *Norrell* , for example , attempts to buy up all the books of magic in England to keep anyone else from acquiring their knowledge . He also barter away half of Emma Wintertowne 's (Lady Pole 's) life for political influence , a deal about which , due to an enchantment , she cannot speak coherently .

Clarke explores the limits of " English " magic through the characters of Stephen Black and Vinculus . As Clarke explains , " If you put a fairy next to a person who is also outside English society ... suddenly the fact that there is this alien race seems more believable , because you 've got another alien and the two of them can talk about the English in this very natural way . " The gentleman with the thistle @-@ down hair sees Stephen as a noble savage and enslaves him ? like Lady Pole , Stephen is silenced . Both " suffer under a silencing spell that mimics gaps in the historical record " . Furthermore , the gentleman 's desire to acquire Stephen for his dancing hall is reminiscent of the English objectification of black slaves . Stephen vows to hate all white Englishmen after he discovers that they enslaved his mother , but when the gentleman shows him the hanging of the white Vinculus , he weeps . Both *Strange* and *Norrell* see the essence of Englishness in the Raven King , a character who was raised by fairies and could not speak English . As Elizabeth Hoiem explains , " The most English of all Englishmen , then , is both king and slave , in many ways indistinguishable from Stephen Black . This paradox is what ultimately resolves the plot . When *Strange* and *Norrell* summon ' the nameless slave ' , the Raven King 's powerful alliances with nature are transferred to Stephen Black , allowing Stephen to kill the Gentleman and free himself from slavery . " In the end , it is *Strange* and *Norrell* who are trapped in everlasting darkness while the silenced women , people of colour , and poor whites defeat the antagonist .

= = Reception = =

To promote *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* , Bloomsbury ? who also published the Harry Potter series ? launched what *The Observer* called " one of the biggest marketing campaigns in publishing history " . Their campaign included plans for newspaper serialisations , book deliveries by horse and carriage , and the placement of " themed teasers " , such as period stationery and mock newspapers , in United States coffeeshops . 7 @, @ 500 advance readers ' copies were sent out , a limited number wrapped in paper and sealed with wax . These sold for more than US \$ 100 each on eBay in England in the weeks leading up to publication . By 2005 , collectors were paying hundreds of pounds for signed copies of a limited edition of the novel .

The book debuted at No. 9 on the New York Times best @-@ seller list , rising to No. 3 two weeks later . It remained on the list for eleven weeks . Four weeks after the book 's initial publication , it was in Amazon 's top ten . Clarke went on a 20 @-@ city tour to promote the novel , after its near @-@ simultaneous publication in 20 countries . Endorsements from independent booksellers helped

the book sell out its first printing ; by the end of September 2004 , it had gone through eight printings

The novel met with " a crackle of favorable reviews in major papers " . The New Republic hailed it as " an exceptional work " , both " thoughtful and irrepressibly imaginative " . The Houston Chronicle described Clarke as " a superb character writer " , and the Denver Post called her a " superb storyteller " . The reviews praised Clarke 's " deft " handling of the pastiche of styles , but many criticised the novel 's pace , The Guardian complaining that " the plot creaks frightfully in many places and the pace dawdles " . In his review for Science Fiction Weekly , Clute suggested that " almost every scene in the first 300 pages should have been carefully and delicately trimmed " (emphasis in original) since they do little to advance the story . He argued that , at times , Clarke 's Austenesque tone gets in the way of plot development . On the other hand , The Baltimore Sun found the novel " a quick read " . Complaining that the book leaves the reader " longing for just a bit more lyricism and poetry " , The Washington Post reviewer noted , with others , that " sex plays virtually no role in the story ... [and] one looks in vain for the corruption of the innocent " . The New Statesman reviewer , Amanda Craig , praised the novel as " a tale of magic such as might have been written by the young Jane Austen ? or , perhaps , by the young Mrs Radcliffe , whose Gothic imagination and exuberant delicacy of style set the key . " However , she also criticised the book : " As fantasy , it is deplorable , given that it fails to embrace the essentially anarchic nature of such tales . What is so wonderful about magicians , wizards and all witches other than Morgan le Fay is not just their magical powers , but that they possess these in spite of being low @-@ born . Far from caring about being gentlemen , wizards are the ultimate expression of rank 's irrelevance to talent " . However , reviewers were not in universal agreement on any of these points . Maguire wrote in the New York Times :

What keeps this densely realised confection aloft is that very quality of reverence to the writers of the past . The chief character in Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell isn 't , in fact , either of the magicians : it 's the library that they both adore , the books they consult and write and , in a sense , become . Clarke 's giddiness comes from finding a way at once to enter the company of her literary heroes , to pay them homage and to add to the literature .

While promoting the novel , Neil Gaiman said that it was " unquestionably the finest English novel of the fantastic written in the last 70 years " , a statement which has most often been read hyperbolically . However , as Clute explains , what Gaiman meant was that Jonathan Strange is " the finest English novel of the fantastic since Hope Mirrlees 's great Lud @-@ in @-@ the @-@ Mist (1926) , which is almost certainly the finest English fantasy about the relationship between England and the fantastic yet published " (emphasis in original) . Clute writes that " a more cautious claim " would be : " if Susanna Clarke finishes the story she has hardly begun in Strange ... she may well have then written the finest English novel of the fantastic about the myth of England and the myth of the fantastic and the marriage of the two ever published , bar none of the above , including Mirrlees . "

= = Awards and nominations = =

= = Adaptations and sequel = =

= = = Film = = =

On 15 October 2004 , New Line Cinema announced that it had bought a three @-@ year option on the film rights to Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell . Clarke received an undisclosed " seven @-@ figure sum " , making the deal " one of the biggest acquisitions of film rights for a book in recent years " . New Line chose Christopher Hampton , whose adaptation of Dangerous Liaisons won an Academy Award , to write it ; New Line executives Mark Ordesky and Ileen Maisel were overseeing the production . On 7 November 2005 , The Daily Telegraph reported that Hampton had finished the

first draft : " As you can imagine , it took a fair amount of time to work out some way to encapsulate that enormous book in a film of sensible length ... [b] ut it was lots of fun ? and very unlike anything I have ever done before . " At that time , no director or cast had yet been chosen . As of June 2006 , Hampton was still working on the screenplay . Julian Fellowes then took over writing duties before the collapse of New Line Cinema .

= = = Television = = =

A seven @-@ part adaptation of the book by the BBC began broadcast on BBC One on Sunday 17 May 2015 . The book was adapted by Peter Harness , directed by Toby Haynes , and produced by Cuba Pictures and Feel Films . A number of co @-@ producers joined the project , including BBC America , Screen Yorkshire , Space and Far Moor , and it is to be distributed by Endemol Worldwide Distribution .

Pre @-@ production began in April 2013 , and filming later in the year , including locations in Yorkshire and Canada .

= = = Audio book = = =

The 32 @-@ hour audio book of Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell was released by Audio Renaissance in 2004 . According to a review in The Boston Globe , reader Simon Prebble " navigates this production with much assuredness and an array of accents Prebble 's full voice is altered to a delicate softness for young ladies of a certain breeding , or tightened to convey the snarkiness often heard in the costive Norrell . " Prebble interrupts the main text to read the footnotes , announcing them with the word footnote . According to the AudioFile review , the " narrative flow suffers " because of these interruptions and the reviewer recommends listening " with text in hand " . Each note is on its own track , so listeners have the option of skipping them without missing text from the main narrative . When doing public readings , Clarke herself skips the notes .

= = = Sequel = = =

In 2004 , Clarke announced that she was working on a book that begins a few years after Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell ends . It is intended to centre on characters such as Childermass and Vinculus who , as Clarke says , are " a bit lower down the social scale " .