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**Progress versus Tradition: Influence of Political
Philosophy on the Fantasy of *Jonathan Strange
& Mr Norrell***

Pokrok versus tradice: Vliv politické filosofie na fantasy
v románu *Jonathan Strange & pan Norrell*

Diplomová práce

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Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci na téma „Pokrok versus tradice: Vliv politické filosofie na fantasy v románu *Jonathan Strange & pan Norrell*“ vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

V dne

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INTRODUCTION

Many are the strange chances of the world and help oft shall
come from the hands of the weak when the Wise falter.

— J. R. R. Tolkien¹

Fantasy and more broadly speculative fiction is still frequently dismissed as a genre not worthy of critical attention, despite the growing number of monographies and journal articles devoted to this topic. It is frequently assumed that the novels in these genres are aimed primarily at children and young adults and therefore they do not have much literary or social value, and that they have no relation to or effect on the real world and its plethora of issues. Additionally, when these novels have a historical setting, whether accurate or inspired by real historical periods, it is frequently assumed that they hold the point of view prevalent at the time and are inherently conservative. This thesis sets out to challenge these preconceptions by focusing on the novel *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* (2004) by Susanna Clarke.

The aim of this thesis is twofold. The first is to provide a satisfactory answer to the question of what genre does *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* fall under, because it has been labelled as belonging to many different and sometimes even contradictory genres, most frequently being classified as fantasy or alternate history. This will be achieved by defining the characteristic features of these genres in order to apply them to this novel and analyse its genre characteristics. The second question is whether the historical setting and tone of the novel together with its genre identity warrant the belief that it is inherently conservative in its nature, or whether the influence of modern ideas and ideologies can be observed in the text. The concepts and key characteristics of conservatism and liberalism, in general as well as in literature and culture, will be defined. An analysis of the appearance and use of these characteristics within the novel will be undertaken, in order to see whether they are used to assert or dispute the assumed conservative point of view.

¹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999), 362.

This thesis consists of six chapters. The first four chapters will provide a theoretical background and characteristics which will be applied in the analysis of the novel. In the first chapter, the author, Susanna Clarke, as well as the novel *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* will be briefly introduced, focusing on providing a summary of the novel focusing on events pertinent to this thesis. The second and third chapters will provide an overview of liberalism and conservatism respectively, focusing on the fundamental principles and core tenets of each, firstly in general as part of their political philosophies, followed by their manifestations within culture and literature specifically. Chapter four will explore the theoretical background to the issue of genre, identifying the defining characteristics of fantasy as a subset of speculative fiction and of alternate history, as well as their relation to political theory and current issues.

The last two chapters will focus on analysis utilising the theoretical framework presented in the previous four chapters. In chapter five, the characteristics of the genres of fantasy and alternate history will be applied to and discussed in regard to their relevance to *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* in an attempt to define its genre identity. The sixth and final chapter will focus on the manifestation of liberalism and conservatism in this novel, specifically focusing on how various characters perceive and treat magic, whether their approach to it is informed more by conservatism or by liberalism. Then the role of minority characters will be analysed, focusing on characters of colour and on women. Lastly, an overview of liberal and conservative influences in the novel will be provided.

1. SUSANNA CLARKE'S *JONATHAN STRANGE & MR NORRELL*

1.1 Susanna Clarke

Susanna Clarke (b. 1959) is an English author best known for her debut 2004 novel, *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, which took over ten years to write and has received a multitude of literary awards, including the Hugo Award for Best Novel (2005), the World Fantasy Award for Best Novel (2005), and the Mythopoeic Award for Adult Literature (2005).

Her other works include *The Ladies of Grace Adieu and Other Stories* (2006), which is a collection of short stories set in the same universe as *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*. Her second novel, *Piranesi* (2020), is set in an alternate or parallel universe and the story is told through the notes or diary entries of the eponymous narrator who is attempting to reconstruct the story of his own identity as he explores the world, which consists of an infinite number of halls, vestibules, and statues.

1.2 *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*

In this section, the plot and key events of *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* will be summarised. Due to the sheer length of this novel and the incredible number of details, side characters, and diversions from the main plotline, this summary will focus only on the key events and those which pertain to this thesis.

Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell takes place between 1806 and 1817, during the Napoleonic Wars and it is set mostly in England and partly in Faerie, with some latter portions taking place in Italy. The narrator is not named and based on the years given to us of different publications or events, we can conclude that the earliest point at which it could have been written by this fictional writer/narrator is 1830. It appears as if the narrator was present for or lived through the events they describe. The novel is divided into three volumes.

The first volume, titled *Mr Norrell*, takes place between 1806 and 1808. In 1806, a York society of theoretical magicians learns of Norrell and his claim to be a practical magician, which he proves by bringing the statues in the York Cathedral to life. Norrell moves to London hoping to revive practical magic and to make it respectable, and with the help of Drawlight and Lascelles, he meets with many people, including a cabinet minister, Sir Walter Pole. To win his favour, he revives his fiancée, Miss Wintertowne,

with the aid of a fairy, striking a deal where the fairy, referred to as the gentleman with thistle-down hair, is promised half her life. News of his achievement spreads and the government seeks to make use of it in the war against Napoleon. Meanwhile the fairy he had summoned takes a liking to Stephen Black, Sir Walter's black butler and declares his intentions of making him a king. Each night, Miss Wintertowne, now Lady Pole, and Stephen are forced to attend balls held by the fairy in Lost-hope, his kingdom in Faerie.

The second volume, titled *Jonathan Strange*, takes place between 1809 and 1815. In 1809, due to his newly discovered magical abilities, Strange moves to London and becomes Norrell's pupil, despite their differing ideas of what magic is and what it should be. Norrell deliberately limits Strange's access to certain information, which leads to tensions between them. He is sent to assist Lord Wellington in the war against Napoleon, where he helps the army by creating roads, moving towns, and making dead men speak. Eventually, he helps defeat Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo. After his return, Strange challenges Norrell's views on the Raven King and on the utilization of fairies, decides to write his own book about the topic, and the public splits into "Norrellites" and "Strangites." Arabella, Strange's wife, suddenly reappears after having gone missing, but she is very sick and dies three weeks later.

The third and final volume, titled *John Uskglass*, which is a different name for the Raven King, takes place between 1816 and 1817. In 1816, Lady Pole attempts to shoot Mr Norrell, but his servant, Childermass is wounded instead. Lady Pole is sent to the countryside where she is cared for by John Segundus, who begins to suspect magic is involved in her condition. Strange travels to Venice, where he experiments with dangerous magic in order to summon a fairy and gain access to Faerie, where he discovers Arabella is being held captive alongside Lady Pole. The gentleman with thistle-down hair curses Strange and a pillar of darkness surrounds him. Nevertheless, he does not give up his intentions of rescuing his wife. Meanwhile, magic is starting to return to England in more obvious ways, with old fairy roads appearing and people being able to spontaneously do magic. Strange and Norrell reunite and attempt to summon the Raven King, urging England to lend her powers to him. In a moment of confusion, these powers are temporarily bestowed upon Stephen Black, who uses them to kill the gentleman with thistle-down hair, freeing himself and Arabella from his enchantment. In the end, Strange and Norrell leave England, both now trapped within the pillar of darkness.

2. LIBERALISM

Liberalism, just as any long-standing political philosophy, presents several challenges to those attempting to accurately define it. It is not a singular, monolithic theory, but instead it exists along a spectrum with multiple branches and theories which frequently contradict each other.² Once those contradictions are removed, only a vague notion of what is “liberal” remains.³ Another challenge when it comes to defining and describing liberalism is a geographical one, as the term is used in diverse ways depending on where one finds themselves. Goodlad points out that the term “liberal” in the United States is mainly applied to left-leaning politics, whilst in the United Kingdom it is more about its economic policies, which would be more accurately described as “neo-liberal” in the United States.⁴ This chapter is not an attempt to create an all-encompassing definition of liberalism; instead, it aims to examine and describe the fundamental principles of liberalism to be used to analyse Susanna Clarke’s *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* later on.

2.1 Liberalism in general

Liberalism, which emerged as a political philosophy in the seventeenth century, places great importance on individual freedom, equality, and the protection of basic human rights. However, the manifestation of these values can vary widely depending on where along the liberal spectrum any given individual finds themselves. According to Shaun P. Young, the key tenets of liberalism common to the work of all liberal theorists are “individual liberty and equality; individual rights; the importance of private property; the idea of limited constitutional government; and the related values of autonomy, consent, pluralism and toleration.”⁵ He states that all these values are present, to varying degrees, in various forms of liberalism. However, not everyone agrees. Duncan Bell notes that “[u]nless the stipulated commitments are conceptualised at a very high level of generality [...] they will invariably fail to encompass the deep divisions between professed variants of liberalism, yet when pitched at that level they provide little guidance for pursuing the

² See Lauren M. E. Goodlad, “Liberalism and Literature,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture*, ed. Juliet John (Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.

³ See Shane D. Courtland, Gerald Gaus, and David Schmitz, “Liberalism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford University, February 22, 2022), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/liberalism/>.

⁴ See Goodlad, “Liberalism and Literature,” 2.

⁵ Shaun P. Young, *Beyond Rawls: An Analysis of the Concept of Political Liberalism* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2002), accessed February 7th, 2023, <https://archive.org/details/beyondrawlsanaly0000youn/>, 45.

detailed reconstruction necessary for satisfactory description or explanation.”⁶ For the sake of simplicity, as defining liberalism as a political theory is not the main interest of this thesis, the key tenets as identified and defined by Shaun Young will be discussed here.

The most distinctive feature of liberalism is its emphasis on the individual and their rights, as opposed to the society or community as a whole. While the protection of an individual’s liberty is paramount, the key issue is how to ensure this it. Over time, the definition of these inalienable rights and the methods for ensuring their protection have changed considerably. As previously mentioned, it also depends on the specific subset of liberalism in question. Beginning with simply the right to self-preservation, the fundamental rights have since continued to expand to include not only self-preservation, but also self-fulfilment.⁷ These developments include rights and freedoms that we now regard as commonplace, such as “freedom from the arbitrary violation of one’s person, liberty and possessions; freedom of conscience; freedom of religion; freedom of association; freedom of speech; freedom of movement; and other similar liberties and protections.”⁸

A problem which arises is to what extent should the government be involved in the creation and protection of these rights and liberties. While there is no singular answer, most liberals agree that it is not enough to simply rely on the reason and morals of people to ensure nobody’s rights are violated, as the right to self-preservation may be interpreted quite differently by different individuals which could lead to misuse and eventually chaos and violence. Instead, a certain level of government oversight is deemed necessary, though it still needs to be done with the consent of those involved as it entails restricting their freedom in order to ensure everyone’s basic rights are protected. All these restrictions must be justified, and the government’s function should be limited.⁹ Thomas Paine even called government “a necessary evil.”¹⁰ Limiting of government’s power is ensured by enforcing the separation of powers and by enabling citizens to remove and replace a government that is not abiding by the laws of their country. In the present day,

⁶ Duncan Bell, “What Is Liberalism?,” *Political Theory* 42, no. 6 (June 26, 2014): 682-715, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591714535103>, 687.

⁷ See Young, *Beyond Rawls*, 27-29.

⁸ *Ibid*, 29.

⁹ *Ibid*, 29-31.

¹⁰ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), Accessed February 10th, 2023, <https://archive.org/details/commonsense0000pain/>, 5.

the permissible amount of responsibility and authority a government wields has increased, as the rights it is supposed to protect have expanded from simple self-preservation to also include things necessary for self-fulfilment.¹¹

Liberty has been a core value of liberalism since its very beginning, though its understanding has changed considerably. The older conception of liberty was that “an individual is sovereign in public affairs, but a subject in private affairs. Conversely, under the modern conception of liberty, a citizen is sovereign in the private realm, but, in many respects, a subject in the public realm.”¹² Currently, a distinction is made between negative and positive liberty. Negative liberty is defined as “the absence of coercion by other agents”¹³ by the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, or to put it more simply, “freedom from external influence,”¹⁴ while positive liberty is defined as freedom to self-direct and act autonomously, to pursue one’s own goals.¹⁵ Liberty is closely tied with the notion of private property, which is discussed next.

The right to hold private property has been a key feature of liberalism, which considers it inseparable from the idea of liberty. Property includes not only physical possessions but also one’s own life and freedoms.¹⁶ Young goes as far as to claim that “without such security for one’s person and possessions, individual liberty is, in essence, worthless.”¹⁷ For classical liberalism, this means a free market economy is the best way of achieving this, as personal and economic liberty are inextricably linked together. This was famously argued by Adam Smith in his *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Another argument in favour of private property is that it ensures that power cannot be centralised in the hands of few people who acquire vast amounts of property and resources in order to gain power and make people dependent on them, which could easily influence their decisions. However, more modern branches of liberalism have argued that while the right to private property is important, it can also create barriers for those unable to obtain it.¹⁸

Several more features of liberalism will be briefly discussed, namely equality, consent, pluralism, and toleration. Equality is a fundamental concept of liberalism. All

¹¹ See Young, *Beyond Rawls*, 31-33.

¹² *Ibid*, 34.

¹³ Courtland, Gaus, and Schmidtz, “Liberalism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

¹⁴ Goodlad, “Liberalism and Literature,” 4.

¹⁵ See Courtland, Gaus, and Schmidtz, “Liberalism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

¹⁶ See Young, *Beyond Rawls*, 37.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 37.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 37-39.

branches of liberalism take all men to be equal, in at least a few key ways. Though the concept and understanding of equality has changed dramatically throughout history, the core belief remains unchanged. Everyone should have an equal right to freedom, liberty and other values.¹⁹ Equality, however, does not end with the right to be free, to vote, and to hold private property, it is simply the foundation upon which true equality is built. Further requirements include access to educational and economic opportunities which allow each person to pursue their goals.²⁰

Many of the aforementioned values, including equality, are highly dependent on individuals' consent. To give an example, for the system of law to work and ensure every person's liberty is maintained and cannot be violated, the individual must consent to the inherent limiting of their liberty by those same laws. It is consent that gives legitimacy and power to elected governments. This focus on consent comes as a result of the following core feature, pluralism.²¹

Young claims that liberalism formed in response to the violence surrounding religious pluralism. It stands in opposition to monism, which is the belief that there is one correct end suitable for everyone, everywhere across time and space. It comes naturally from the fact of individuals' liberty and freedoms, which give rise to many competing and conflicting values and ideals. Without pluralism, only one of these would be acceptable in mainstream society. However, with pluralism in the mix, individuals can choose where they place their beliefs and values on a wide-ranging spectrum of options and peacefully co-exist. In fact, a unity or the prevalence of a singular value or ideal is seen as impossible.²²

The last point of interest is the concept of toleration. Just like pluralism, the roots of tolerance as a part of liberalism are linked with early calls for religious tolerance. This is again connected with the previously discussed values, especially pluralism and liberty. The existence of many differing viewpoints thanks to the prevalence of pluralism necessitates tolerance from others in order that everyone has the opportunity to make use of their liberties. Tolerance applies not only to religious beliefs but to one's system of morals and conception of philosophy and ethical behaviour.²³ Young goes on to state that

¹⁹ See Young, *Beyond Rawls*, 39-40.

²⁰ See Goodlad, "Liberalism and Literature," 5.

²¹ See Young, *Beyond Rawls*, 40-42.

²² Ibid, 42-43.

²³ Ibid, 44-45.

in the modern times, “[t]he defense of toleration continues to be a primary concern for a number of liberal theorists, and, in various forms, a fundamental component of all liberal conceptions of justice.”²⁴

In summary, liberalism is a political philosophy that values individual freedom, equality, and human rights. It holds that the government should protect these values and ensure that everyone has equal access to those items considered necessary to achieve their goals and self-realisation. The many branches of liberalism differ in how they believe this should be achieved, what the role of government should be, and how exactly all these values are defined and understood.

2.2 Liberalism in culture and literature

Liberalism as a political philosophy does not exist in a vacuum, it interacts with and influences other aspects of life. Therefore, its influence on culture and literature must not be neglected. The aim of this chapter is to examine the way in which liberal influences present themselves in literature and in culture, especially when it comes to its treatment of minorities. Here, culture is taken as a “comprehensive way of life.”²⁵ The key elements of liberalism which have influenced literature and culture the most are its emphasis on individualism, equality, liberty, and partly democracy as well.

The first issue, and the one most frequently discussed in literature, is the relationship between liberalism and the rights of minority groups. In his book *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*, Kymlicka points out that liberalism’s focus on the individual and their equality and rights may appear inconsistent with liberal ideas of justice, and, indeed, with many measures which have been introduced in order to protect minority groups. In fact, many proponents of liberalism claim that membership to a minority or a cultural community is not relevant to the rights of the individual and they see the protection of certain groups as contrary to their idea of liberal values.²⁶ However, this is in contrast with the writings of early liberals such as Mill and Dewey, who emphasized “the importance of cultural membership for individual autonomy.”²⁷ Kymlicka points out that this line of thinking was prevalent until the Second World War, after which the

²⁴ See Young, *Beyond Rawls*, 45.

²⁵ Avishai Margalit and Moshe Halbertal, “Liberalism and the Right to Culture,” *Social Research* 71, no. 3 (2004): pp. 529-548, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40971713>, 529.

²⁶ See Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 135-142, 206-207.

²⁷ Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*, 207.

mainstream liberal thought changed to what he terms ‘colour-blind’, where the race and culture of an individual should not be taken into account in order that they may be treated equally.²⁸

Kymlicka disagrees with this point of view, as he finds that contrary to the common belief that minority rights are not compatible with the core values of liberalism, people, as part of their right to freedom, also have the right to belong to a culture. Thus it is in the best interest of the state, via the government, to ensure that this right is protected.²⁹ Not everyone agrees with Kymlicka’s analysis of the issue. Margalit and Halbertal explored the idea of the right to culture in their essay, where they discuss what the right to culture really means and the issues that are present when a group whose values and norms do not align with the liberal ideas of individuals’ rights asks for the government’s protection of their culture. Another issue is that the state should remain neutral, it should not interfere unless it is absolutely necessary. However, in order to ensure that individuals’ rights to their culture, especially a minority one, are protected, it often has to overstep that boundary. They claim that this is a necessary step, otherwise a minority culture may eventually disappear. In order that the culture cannot only maintain its way of life but also flourish, it needs the right to obtain the support of various state institutions.³⁰

Furthermore, it has been pointed out that the harm done to members of minorities is usually not overt in the way liberal theorists typically define it and understand it. The harm principle is frequently invoked in the sense of the state having the duty to protect individuals from harm done to them by others, even if that means the state has to take a position that would not be considered neutral. However, the oppression of a minority is, typically, not so easily identifiable as it does not have a single source and is done slowly over time. Kernohan calls this “accumulative harm”.³¹ Based on this, he expands the definition of the harm principle to state that “[t]he state may adopt policies that otherwise would violate neutrality only if individual activity either is, by itself, causing harm to others or is part of an accumulative activity which brings about harm to others.”³²

²⁸ See Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*, 207-214.

²⁹ Ibid, 207-209.

³⁰ See Margalit and Halbertal, “Liberalism and the Right to Culture,” 529-536.

³¹ See Andrew Kernohan, *Liberalism, Equality, and Cultural Oppression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 71-76.

³² Kernohan, *Liberalism, Equality, and Cultural Oppression*, 76.

Additionally, it is pointed out that the ideals of equality and tolerance often stand in opposition. The principle of equality asks us to treat all members of a society as equals, to not favour specific individuals or groups over others on any grounds. Conversely, the principle of tolerance supposes acceptance and tolerance of varying points of view and opinions on how one lives their life and achieves their goals. How can we merge these opposing ideals in a society where members of minority groups who cannot “pass” as members of the majority are systematically disadvantaged? Where is the limit of tolerance and where does equality come into play? Kernohan argues that “[b]y failing to contest cultural oppression, [...] contemporary liberalism has overemphasized tolerance at the expense of equality.”³³ Tolerance should not apply to beliefs or practices where one person is seen as lesser than another, on any grounds.

An issue which follows from accumulative harm is that this form of discrimination becomes ingrained in society, frequently to the extent that it is simply accepted as the norm. They may consider forms of discrimination, both covert and overt alike, to be acceptable, or they fail to notice them altogether as they have been conditioned into believing themselves to have lesser worth than others.³⁴ A present day example of this problem, though it is slowly being addressed, is discrimination against people of colour, women, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. While liberalism is built upon the principles of tolerance and equality, people from these and other minority communities still face systematic discrimination, which is in direct opposition to the ideals of liberalism.

Here, the state has several options as to how to proceed in regard to cultural oppression and discrimination. The first is to do nothing at all and remain neutral, expecting the issue to sort itself out, which is the approach Kymlicka prefers. The other extreme of the spectrum is a strategy of censorship, whereby the state takes aggressive action to ensure that the oppressive environment cannot flourish. The third strategy, and the one most preferable, is that of advocacy. The state does have to overstep the bounds of neutrality; however this should be done in a non-coercive manner to ensure a minimal violation of individuals’ liberties.³⁵

³³ Kernohan, *Liberalism, Equality, and Cultural Oppression*, 1.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 7.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 91-96.

Literature is inherently a part of culture, and thus it is also influenced by political philosophies and their real-world realisations and effects. Goodlad states that liberalism as a political philosophy has “dominated the British academy from the mid-Victorian decades through the First World War, providing intellectual impetus for the transition from individualist to collectivist conceptions of the social world.”³⁶ While the time period she identified is later than the time when *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* takes place, because it was written at the turn of the twentieth and twenty first centuries, the developments of this period can still provide relevant insights. In a 1949 preface to a collection of his essays discussing liberalism’s influence on literature, Lionel Trilling notes that “the literature of the modern period, of the last century and a half, has been characteristically political.”³⁷ He goes on to discuss the prevalence of liberalism as a political theory at the time, and explains its place in literary criticism by saying that literature is not only engaging with politics and with liberalism directly, it is also “the human activity that takes the fullest and most precise account of variousness, possibility, complexity, and difficulty.”³⁸

³⁶ Goodlad, “Liberalism and Literature,” 2.

³⁷ Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), https://archive.org/details/liberalimaginati0000tril_q0s5/, p. x.

³⁸ Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination*, p. xiii.

3. CONSERVATISM

Just like liberalism, conservatism presents several challenges to those attempting to accurately define it. It is not just a political philosophy and calling someone ‘conservative’ immediately calls to mind specific associations, not all of which are in line with conservatism as a political philosophy. There are various branches of conservatism which can significantly differ in what they consider to be the core values of their philosophy.³⁹ This chapter is not an attempt to create an all-encompassing definition of conservatism; instead, it aims to examine and describe its fundamental principles to be used to analyse Susanna Clarke’s *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* later on.

3.1 Conservatism in general

The roots of conservatism appear to reach much further back than the roots of liberalism, with some claiming that Aristotle and Confucius can be seen as its precursors. However, it truly emerged as a political philosophy in reaction to the 1789 French Revolution, which was highly criticised in the United Kingdom. Conservatism was also in contrast with the ideals of Enlightenment, which in its goals to improve the human condition and reform traditional institutions appealed to reason rather than to tradition and authority.⁴⁰ However, unlike with liberalism, not as much attention has been paid to conservatism as a political philosophy until fairly recently, as it was not considered to be one by many political theorists and writers.

As a political philosophy, conservatism “is defined by the desire to conserve, reflected in a resistance to, or at least a suspicion of, change.”⁴¹ It stands in opposition to liberalism, as it is against its appeal to reason, and it does not believe that every single person is morally good. Instead, it focuses on the concrete realisations and challenges, and references how they have been dealt with in the past, by existing institutions.⁴² According to Andrew Heywood, the key tenets of conservatism which form a connection between all the various branches of it are tradition, human imperfection, the organic nature of society, hierarchy and authority, and private property.⁴³ All these values are

³⁹ See Andy Hamilton, “Conservatism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford University, October 29, 2019), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/conservatism/>.

⁴⁰ See Hamilton, “Conservatism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

⁴¹ Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction* (London: Red Globe Press, 2021), 49.

⁴² See Hamilton, “Conservatism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

⁴³ See Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 52.

present, to varying degrees, in various forms of conservatism. For the sake of simplicity, as defining political theory is not the main interest of this thesis, the key tenets as identified and defined by Heywood will be discussed here. Other writers have identified further tenets they deem to be essential, such as the uncertainty of progress, the limited reach of human reason, the importance of even prejudices, and the fallibility of majority rule and its potential for tyranny.⁴⁴

Arguably the most visible and important aspect of conservatism is its belief in and respect for tradition. Tradition can be understood as anything which has been passed down from the previous generations, from customs and practices to values, institutions, and entire social and political systems. Frequently, this includes religious beliefs as well, as appellations to “God’s plans” for mankind still appear in the speech of many conservatives today. Since conservatism is opposed to change, staying with tradition is the natural solution. After all, things, beliefs, and even institutions that are traditional have stood the test of time, they have been proven to work and to be beneficial, and therefore they should be preserved for the benefit of future generations. Not only have they been proven to work, they are also stable and provide individuals and society with a sense of belonging and identity. That which is familiar to us is also easier to accept and much more difficult to question.⁴⁵ However, appealing to tradition is not just turning to the past for answers, it is, in its own way, a response to the challenges present in the modern world.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, this does mean that conservatism is often resistant to change which it believes to be taking place too quickly and which appears to threaten the traditional conception of life.

Another point in which conservatism differs from liberalism is its belief in human imperfection. While liberalism believes in the natural moral good of individuals, conservatism claims that people are imperfect and limited, both psychologically and morally, which is why instead of relying on consensus and tolerance, the most effective way of preventing violence, crime, and other anti-social behaviours is by creating a strong government and an unforgiving criminal justice system. This should deter people from straying from the right path. The role of law is “not to uphold liberty, but to preserve

⁴⁴ See Zig Layton-Henry, ed., *Conservative Politics in Western Europe* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982), 3-4.

⁴⁵ See Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 52-54.

⁴⁶ See Hamilton, “Conservatism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

order.”⁴⁷ Conservatism professes to offer stability, security and predictability in this uncertain world by providing people with order, as the many choices liberalism presents can lead to uncertainty and anxiety. All these ideals are based on tradition, history, and experience and above all a pragmatic, practical approach to the world, avoiding theoretical ideals which appeal to reason alone.⁴⁸

While liberalism focuses on the individual as a unique person with their rights and freedoms, conservatism focuses on the fact that the individual cannot be separated from society, and freedom is not the right to be left alone (the negative conception of freedom as understood by liberalism), instead it is the “willing acceptance of social obligations and ties by individuals who recognize their value.”⁴⁹ Conservatism frequently understands society as having an organic nature, meaning that it slowly evolved over time and its elements are interconnected and any institutions that were created grew organically to fulfil that society’s needs. The claim here is that as institutions develop over time, they serve a purpose, and by simply surviving they demonstrate their value and their right to retain their position in society. As a result, any attempts at reforming or even abolishing them which do not come from within could be quite harmful to the society as a whole and are looked at with distrust and disdain by proponents of conservatism.⁵⁰ A further point of interest here is that the society, which can be a family, a local community, or a society as a whole, should be the one to assess their problems and needs and act accordingly rather than have rules imposed on them by the state.⁵¹

This focus on society and its function is connected with another key aspect of conservatism, which is its emphasis on the role of hierarchy and authority, which is seen as a direct consequence of an organic society. The belief is that a hierarchy of authority emerges naturally, and those in position of authority are rewarded accordingly for taking on a more challenging role. As a result, conservatives often uphold and support the established class system of a given society. This benefits society as a whole, as it creates stability and ensures that those who need it are taken care of.⁵² This is in direct conflict

⁴⁷ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 54.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 54.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 55.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 55-58.

⁵¹ See Hamilton, “Conservatism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

⁵² Ibid.

with liberalism's emphasis on equality, as it always results in unequal distribution of power, status, and property, which is the last of the key tenets which is discussed next.⁵³

Property is a divisive topic between liberal and conservative theorists. While liberalism believes that property should be earned based on an individual's hard work and merit, for conservatives it is seen as a way of accumulating wealth and with that a certain power and protection in an uncertain world. It is seen as more than material; it is an extension of an individual. Just like with authority, the right to own property entails the obligation to maintain it in a way that enables it to benefit future generations.⁵⁴ However, as property and space is finite, this can become an issue where the focus becomes accumulating property for profit and for power at such a large scale that it causes issues such as those present in the housing market today, with wildly inflated property prices which bar many people from being able to rent, let alone purchase, housing at a reasonable rate. To what extent the government should step in and influence the market certainly depends on where on the political spectrum one finds themselves.

Conservatism frequently criticises liberalism's focus on the individual, whereby a society is simply a collection of individuals pursuing their own goals with little regard for others held together by laws and norms which are very abstract and rational without being grounded in reality or in tradition. Individuals choose their identity instead of acquiring it naturally through their community. The issue that comes up repeatedly in conservative critiques of liberalism is a distaste for the abstract origins of many laws and rights. Conversely, liberal critics often see conservatism as enabling and organising selfishness, since in a society which is full of flaws and injustices, conservatives tend to resist change, they are seen as hindering progress and intentionally ignoring issues which could be solved. Though these views do contrast with one another, they share certain common ideas and ideals.

In summary, conservatism is a political philosophy which values tradition, loyalty, authority, hierarchy, and the role of society over the individual. It holds that the government should step in only when necessary, mainly to ensure that morality is upheld, as it understands humans as being morally imperfect and therefore in need of guidance and punishment when certain boundaries are crossed. It contrasts with liberalism and its focus on the individual, freedom, and equality.

⁵³ See Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 58-60.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 60-61.

3.2 Conservatism in culture and literature

Just as liberalism, conservatism is not simply a political theory, it interacts with and influences other aspects of life. Therefore, its influence on culture and literature must not be neglected. The aim of this chapter is to examine the way in which conservative influences present themselves in literature and in culture. The key elements of conservatism which have the most influence are its emphasis on tradition and traditional values, order, and resistance to change.

Cultural conservatism is understood as “a general belief in the importance of preserving traditional values”⁵⁵ and it “typically has a strong religious component.”⁵⁶ It sees our identities as being mediated through and given meaning by our culture and institutions. It also attempts to explain how inequalities arise and acquire legitimacy through the culture and practices of its people. It understands the self as being individual, however it is the culture around an individual, its practices and institutions, which organise it into a whole and give it legitimacy. A culture and its practices also serve as a source of authority. Hostility to signs of individualism is a result of these beliefs.⁵⁷ Rayner states that “[a]ccording to cultural conservatives much of the familiar ‘decline of the West’ literature is little more than a smokescreen covering the massive destruction of cultural objects that has been deliberately engineered by ‘progressive’ politicians.”⁵⁸ Liberal emphasis on the individual and their free choice is seen as being against traditional values and cultural objects, be that the language or institutions.

When it comes to cultural conservatism, Rayner claims that the state, or the government, has three main tasks. Firstly, the government is the only institution which can ensure that a culture and its inheritance survives, which is why it is frequently in opposition to cosmopolitanism or to international organisations such as the European Union. Secondly, it must ensure that individuals are aware of their obligations to those institutions and organisations larger than any single person. This is often done through rituals and ceremonies which can be shrouded in myth in order to inspire awe and loyalty.

⁵⁵ John Zumbrennen and Amy Gangl, “Conflict, Fusion, or Coexistence? The Complexity of Contemporary American Conservatism,” *Political Behavior* 30, no. 2 (2008): pp. 199–221, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40213313>, 205.

⁵⁶ Zumbrennen and Gangl, “Conflict, Fusion, or Coexistence? The Complexity of Contemporary American Conservatism,” 205.

⁵⁷ See Jeremy Rayner, “Philosophy into Dogma: The Revival of Cultural Conservatism,” *British Journal of Political Science* 16, no. 4 (1986): 455–73, doi:10.1017/S000712340000452X, 457–460.

⁵⁸ Rayner, “Philosophy into Dogma: The Revival of Cultural Conservatism,” 463.

And finally, the government is entrusted with ensuring that the common culture is taken care of and that it is “healthy”, meaning it is not corrupting its citizens.⁵⁹

When it comes to literature, conservatism prefers that which aligns with its values of tradition, family, hierarchy and authority and it is against books which it sees as attacking or undermining these values. A key issue visible especially in the United States is book banning in schools, or more generally banning what is considered inappropriate for school-aged children and young adults. Overwhelmingly, the legislation which supports these bans as well as suggestions of specific things which are to be banned comes from Republicans, i.e., from conservative-leaning people and legislators.⁶⁰ According to a study done by the PEN America organisation, challenges to the appropriateness of books and the censorship of books available in schools has increased drastically beginning with the 2021-2022 school year. These bans disproportionately affected books with LGBTQ+ themes and characters (41% of banned books), books with characters of colour (40% of banned books) and books addressing themes of race and racism (20% of banned books). While the majority of books deemed to be inappropriate are fiction, 24% of them are non-fiction, including autobiographies, memoirs, and educational books. Interestingly, it is highlighted that the majority of Americans all across the political spectrum oppose book bans.⁶¹

Though this is not a one-sided issue, as Bill Bailey claims there is a systematic discrimination against conservative writers and thinkers when it comes to their inclusion in library collections, their publication and in fact even their reviews, or rather lack thereof. The claim is that conservative literature is overlooked and dismissed without thorough consideration, and Bailey goes on to list books, journals, and writers that are seen as “indispensable” and should be available in any library which offers books from all sides of the political spectrum and of widely differing viewpoints.⁶²

⁵⁹ See Rayner, “Philosophy into Dogma: The Revival of Cultural Conservatism,” 463.

⁶⁰ See Adam Gabbat, “A Streak of Extremism!: US Book Bans May Increase in 2023,” *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, December 24, 2022), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/dec/24/us-book-bans-streak-of-extremism>.

⁶¹ See Jonathan Friedman, “Banned in the USA: The Growing Movement to Ban Books,” PEN America, September 19, 2022, <https://pen.org/report/banned-usa-growing-movement-to-censor-books-in-schools/>.

⁶² See Bill Bailey, “The Literature of Conservatism,” *Collection Building* 7, no. 1 (1985): pp. 11-13, <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb023174>, 11-13.

4. THE ISSUE OF GENRE

The question of genre in literature is multifaceted and intricate and it has long been debated by many scholars. This issue has been further complicated owing to the influence of modernism and postmodernism, which have challenged traditional genre categories and introduced new ones. As such, the classification of literature using the traditional genre categories has become increasingly challenging and Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* is no different. The novel's unique characteristics enable diverse interpretations of its genre and allow the use of various critical approaches in determining its genre or combination of genres.

The aim of this chapter is to explore potential genre theories which can be applied to *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, namely speculative fiction and fantasy, and alternate history. The analysis will begin with an overview of fantasy as a subset of speculative fiction with a particular focus on its defining elements as identified by scholars such as Rosemary Jackson, Brian Attebery, and Farah Mendlesohn. Building on this, alternate history will be explored as another potential genre classification that may be applicable to *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*.

4.1 Speculative Fiction and Fantasy

Fantasy is a notoriously difficult genre to define, as the variety of works which can be considered as belonging to this genre is incredibly diverse, resulting in very generic definitions which do not explain much at all. The superordinate term of speculative fiction is fraught with the same issues. Nonetheless, a discussion of what speculative fiction and fantasy are and what they entail is necessary in order that we may properly explore the genre of *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*.

4.1.1 Speculative fiction

Firstly, speculative fiction will be discussed. There are three common interpretations of the term which evolved over time, and depending on which theorist one looks at, a different understanding of the term may be present and utilised. The three interpretations of speculative fiction are as "a subgenre of science fiction that deals with human rather than technological problems, a genre distinct from and opposite to science fiction in its exclusive focus on possible futures, and a super category for all genres that deliberately

depart from imitating “consensus reality” of everyday experience.”⁶³ The latter definition of speculative fiction as a superordinate term includes science fiction, fantasy, horror, as well as their derivative and related genres. The emphasis here is on the fact that the boundaries of what is classified as speculative fiction are fuzzy, and rather than creating a narrow definition, this term covers a wide range of works which resemble the prototypical representatives to a certain extent.⁶⁴ This is the definition which will be used here, though in various theoretical works the previous two interpretations and uses of the term appear as well. Defining speculative fiction as a fuzzy set means that there can be a multitude of features and defining characteristics, only some of which are present in different works. This way the category can encompass diverse works which may not have anything in common between the two of them, but they are still considered speculative fiction. There is not a single set of characteristics a work must have to belong to this category, instead as long as it has some, it can claim to belong.⁶⁵

In general, speculative fiction is classified as grouping together diverse non-mimetic works of fiction and is thus put into opposition with the realistic narratives of mimetic fiction. In the past, all the genres which are now seen as subsets of speculative fiction were treated as separate fields of study, mostly independent of one another. Oziewicz points out that the term “the fantastic” has been used frequently and extensively to fulfil the same role and occupy the same space as this interpretation of speculative fiction. However, the fantastic has certain connotations which make the use of the term speculative fiction preferable.⁶⁶ Another advantage which comes with this term is that it is divorced from the Western-centric, predominantly white and male focus of science fiction studies and is instead open to works from around the world in languages other than English.⁶⁷ This inclusive nature of speculative fiction can be best summarised by saying that “speculative fiction today refers to a global phenomenon of non-mimetic traditions around the world, whose contemporary ethnic examples often articulate multicultural

⁶³ Marek Oziewicz, “Speculative Fiction,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, March 29, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.78>.

⁶⁴ See Oziewicz, “Speculative Fiction.”

⁶⁵ See R. B. Gill, “The Uses of Genre and the Classification of Speculative Fiction,” *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 46, no. 2 (June 2013): pp. 71-85, <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/44030329>, 75-76, 82-83.

⁶⁶ See Oziewicz, “Speculative Fiction.”

⁶⁷ See Gerald R. Lucas, “Speculative Fiction,” *The Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Fiction*, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444337822.wbetcfv2s013>, 4-5.

reality better than the historically white and predominantly Anglophone non-mimetic genres.”⁶⁸

4.1.2 Fantasy

As previously mentioned, fantasy is notoriously difficult to define as a genre, leading to various interpretations and explanations of it depending on the chosen methodology and critical framework. While his theoretical approach will not be discussed here, Tvetzan Todorov's *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* was a seminal work which brought critical attention to the fantastic which was typically dismissed as unworthy of serious critical engagement. His discussion of the structural features of this genre and the division of the uncanny, the fantastic, and the marvellous informed and influenced other writers and critics in their analyses. Here, the main focus will be on fantasy as defined and discussed by Rosemary Jackson, Brian Attebery, Farah Mendlesohn and others. At the end of this chapter, the concept of a political reading of fantasy and the topic of historical fantasy will be introduced and discussed.

The Encyclopedia of Fantasy by John Clute and John Grant defines a fantasy text as "self coherent narrative. When set in this world, it tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it; when set in an otherworld, that otherworld will be impossible, though stories set there may be possible in its terms,"⁶⁹ emphasising that there is always a story at the core of every fantasy work.⁷⁰ This is the starting point of this discussion of what exactly is fantasy.

In her book *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, Rosemary Jackson goes against the common perception of fantasy as transcending reality and creating completely unrelated alternative worlds where the stories take place. Her claim is that "[l]ike any other text, a literary fantasy is produced within, and determined by, its social context. Though it might struggle against the limits of this context, often being articulated upon that very struggle, it cannot be understood in isolation from it."⁷¹ This means that fantasy cannot be interpreted as simply a tale with no relation to its context, instead, just as with any other piece of writing, the historical, political, social, and economic context must be

⁶⁸ Oziewicz, "Speculative Fiction."

⁶⁹ John Clute and John Grant, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (London: Orbit, 1999), 338.

⁷⁰ See Clute and Grant, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 5.

⁷¹ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 2009), 2.

taken into account.⁷² The term which repeatedly appears in various works discussing fantasy and the fantastic is the idea of fantasy as a literary mode. Jackson holds this point of view as well, stating that "[i]t could be suggested that fantasy is a literary mode from which a number of related genres emerge"⁷³ and she does the same with the fantastic, defining it as a literary mode and placing it between the categories of the marvellous and the mimetic.⁷⁴

Briefly, the terms marvellous, mimetic, and fantastic will be defined, to enable their further use. The marvellous is exemplified by the works of Tolkien, where the narrator is typically impersonal and authoritative, relaying information with little to no questioning of the events. It most typically employs formulaic beginnings and endings. This is most typically represented by fairy stories, romance, magic, and supernaturalism. The mimetic claims to imitate reality, which is most typical of nineteenth century realistic novels. It utilises a third-person narrator and typically opens in a way which suggests that the world of the story and our world is the same. Finally, the fantastic which according to Jackson combines elements of both the mimetic and the marvellous. Just as the mimetic, it claims that the story it is telling is real utilising the same strategies realistic fiction does. However, it then introduces an unreal element, breaking the veneer of realism.⁷⁵ The narrator in this mode "is no clearer than the protagonist about what is going on, nor about interpretation; the status of what is being seen and recorded as 'real' is constantly in question. This instability of narrative is at the centre of the fantastic as a mode."⁷⁶ Fantasy is then one of the forms that the fantastic can take.

Brian Attebery follows in this line of thinking. He describes fantasy as a "fuzzy set", similarly to the way speculative fiction was described. In this way of understanding it, the genre does not have firm boundaries, instead it is defined by prototypical examples which form the centre of it, and the further away from the centre one gets the less typical the works are. The boundary between what does and does not belong in this genre category is described as fuzzy as there is no specific cut-off point, instead a work located on the edge may be seen as belonging by one and as not belonging by another. Similarly to Jackson, he too sees the fantastic as being a literary mode whilst fantasy is one genre

⁷² See Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 2-4.

⁷³ Ibid, 4.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 15-19.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 19-21.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 20.

within this mode. There is also a brief mention of fantasy as a formula, which is what comes to mind for many upon hearing the term fantasy. It covers the stereotypical formula of storytelling of many swords-and-sorcery novels, to give an example. Fantasy as a formula is relatively easy to describe as its structure and key elements and plot points remain essentially the same.⁷⁷ He concurs with Jackson that while mimesis and fantasy are contrasting modes, they "are not opposites. They can and do coexist [...], fantasy depends on mimesis for its effectiveness."⁷⁸

Attebery goes on to identify the three main elements of the works readers typically recognise as modern fantasy: the content of the story is impossible; the characteristic structure is comic, meaning the main problem posited by the narrative is resolved; and the final is the effect it has on the reader. Tolkien termed this effect on the reader "eucatastrophe" and Attebery calls it "wonder."⁷⁹ To summarise what the genre of fantasy is, he states that it is "a form that makes use of both the fantastic mode, to produce the impossibilities, and the mimetic, to reproduce the familiar. [...] Fantasy does impose many restrictions on the powers of the imagination, but in return it offers the possibility of generating not merely a meaning but an awareness of and a pattern for meaningfulness."⁸⁰ The key restriction here is that fantasy relies on the use of mimesis, as without it there would be very little to no understanding of the story. In this way, mimesis serves as a grounding element against which the fantastic features stand out. By contrasting them against what is real and recognisable, the fantastic becomes effective.

While Farah Mendlesohn essentially agrees with the aforementioned definition of fantasy as a fuzzy set comprising of a range of definitions, she takes a slightly different approach to the analysis of fantasy, focusing on the language and rhetoric used by fantasy in order to create tools for critical analysis of this genre.⁸¹ Based on her research she characterizes four categories of the fantastic, which will be briefly presented here. The four categories are the portal-quest, the immersive, the intrusive, and the liminal and they are "determined by the means by which the fantastic enters the narrated world."⁸² In the portal-quest fantasy, the character leaves their home via a portal into an unknown place

⁷⁷ See Brian Attebery, "Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula," in *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Sandner (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), pp. 293-309, 295-305.

⁷⁸ Attebery, "Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula," 296.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 307-308.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 309.

⁸¹ See Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, ebook version (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), Introduction.

⁸² Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Introduction.

and the reader is in the position of companion-audience, they depend on the character to explain unfamiliar sights. The unknown and the fantastic is contained behind those portals and it does not intrude upon the safe, familiar world the character comes from. An example of a portal-quest fantasy is C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950).⁸³ The immersive fantasy is one where the world of the narrative is a completely separate world, and this is achieved by assuming the reader is a part of the world and that they share in the knowledge of the world. It constructs an "irony of mimesis in which ornamental speech and persuasive speech become inseparable." An example of an immersive fantasy is Tolkien's *The Silmarillion* (1977).⁸⁴ The intrusion fantasy is one where the normality of the world is disrupted by an intrusion and this has to be dealt with in some way, whether that is acceptance, control, or defeat. *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* is an example of an intrusion fantasy identified by Mendelsohn. Finally, the liminal fantasy is that which "estranges the reader from the fantastic as seen as described by the protagonist"⁸⁵ and the dialogue between the reader and the author is crucial in the creation of the liminal fantastic. An example given by Mendelsohn is Hope Mirrlees's *Lud-in-the-Mist* (1926). These four categories can be used to classify most works of fantasy, though sometimes these categories may overlap or a particular work may appear to belong to more than one or those which shift from one mode to another.

While fantasy may appear as an escapist genre with little relevance to current affairs or politics, just as any other text, it exists in a society and it will inevitably reflect the politics of that world.⁸⁶ Bould and Vint go as far as to say that "[a]ll fantasy is political."⁸⁷ Though the ways in which fantasy can express this and work to influence the world are not as direct as those in other forms, they can still prove quite effective, especially when looking at narratives which focus on giving power to a different group than the real-world majority. Issues such as gender and racial politics come into play here. Fantasy allows the writer to create a world which differs from our own in who holds power or one where they can focus on stories which were overshadowed by dominant narratives of the time,

⁸³ See Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Chapter 1.

⁸⁴ Ibid, Chapter 2.

⁸⁵ Ibid, Chapter 4.

⁸⁶ See Brian Attebery, *Fantasy: How It Works*, ebook version (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2022), Chapter 8.

⁸⁷ Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint, "Political Readings," in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, ed. Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 102.

giving a voice to minorities and other who are typically silenced.⁸⁸ Here we can return to what was already said about speculative fiction, it gives opportunities to writers who are not typically white, male, and English-speaking.

Jackson established this connection between fantasy and its subversiveness in that its imitation of the world via mimesis is disrupted by the presence of unreal elements, subverting our expectations and offering a different version of reality. In this way, it comments on the established politics of its time.⁸⁹ However, Bould and Vint point out the limitations of Jackson's theory in that its narrow definition of the fantastic excludes much of what is considered genre fantasy. Of Mendlesohn's categories, they claim the immersive to be the most suitable for political interpretation and the portal-quest fantasy to be likely to uphold or at least not challenge the social order.⁹⁰

Lastly, the subgenre of historical fantasy must be acknowledged, though the concept of alternative histories as a genre, where this type of narrative may be placed as well, will be discussed fully in the following section. There are various opinions on the relationship between fantasy and history. Jana French claims that the tension present in historical fantasy is a result of the presence of two opposing modes,⁹¹ however in Clute's *Encyclopedia* we find the opinion that fantasy is inextricably linked with history.⁹² Based on these opposing views, historical fantasy can be placed as a middle point between the purely historical and purely fantastic, resulting in a genre which questions both. Schanoes discusses two common ways in which historical fantasy is presented. The first is by using a frame scholar, combining a historical tale surrounded by a frame narrative placed in the present where a scholar is typically seeking to understand the past. Frequently, the line between what is historical and what is fantastic gets blurred, which in itself is a commentary on the uncertain nature of history. As an example of this type of narrative, she gives Mary Gentle's *A Secret History: The Book of Ash #1* (1999).⁹³ The second common way of presenting a historical fantasy is by using the scholar as a character, where the scholar is much more active and they are part of the story, or even the driving force behind the story. These types of narratives "examine the role of the scholar in a

⁸⁸ See Attebery, *Fantasy: How It Works*, Chapter 8.

⁸⁹ See Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 19-21.

⁹⁰ See Bould and Vint, "Political Readings," 105-107.

⁹¹ See Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James, *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 236.

⁹² See Clute and Grant, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 468.

⁹³ See Veronica Schanoes, "Historical Fantasy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, ed. Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 237-240.

world of magic and the axis of knowledge that exists between the practical and the academic."⁹⁴ *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* is an example of this type of narrative. To summarise, it can be stated that historical fantasy is "a subgenre that opens up alternative ways of understanding how history has worked, both in the sense of providing a 'secret' history [...] and in the sense that they call into question the distinction between history and fantasy that underlies the legitimacy of historical discourse."⁹⁵

4.2 Alternate History

Though the concept of historical fantasy as a subgenre was briefly discussed in the previous section, this subchapter will focus on alternate history as another genre which must be taken into consideration when discussing the genre identity of *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, as this novel has been classified as a historical fantasy or an alternate history multiple times. The goal of this section is to describe what the genre of alternate history entails and what its defining characteristics are. The connection and interactions between alternate history and fantasy will be considered as well.

Before the genre of alternate history can be defined, it must be noted that there is a wide array of terms which is used to indicate essentially the same concept, including but not limited to allohistory, alternative history, uchronia, and 'what-if' story. The most widely used term appears to be alternate history, which is what Kathleen Singles uses and this is the term that is used here as well.

Gevers defines alternate history as branching off "from our own past history as a result of an altered historical outcome; it involves the element of counterfactuality, its Alternate World recognisably akin to ours, occupying an equivalent position in space and time, but ironically dissimilar from it by virtue of anachronistic discrepancies."⁹⁶ Counterfactuality is the use of elements which are contrary to known and agreed upon facts. These discrepancies are not small details, however, they should typically be major deviations from the accepted version of history in order that the writer can explore the impact of such deviations. While his discussion of the genre is mostly focused on its presentation in science fiction, he does note that fantasy makes use of alternate history in

⁹⁴ Schanoes, "Historical Fantasy," 240-241.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 246.

⁹⁶ Nicholas D. Gevers, "Mirrors of the Past: Versions of History in Science Fiction and Fantasy," 1997, 19.

a similar way and thus his exploration of it can be used.⁹⁷ Though elements of counterfactuality are present in narratives of alternate history, Singles argues that while alternate history and counterfactual history are closely related, they are not the same. Alternate history is most typically a fictional genre, whereas counterfactual history falls under the purview of historians, who use historical evidence and sources to answer their what-if questions in an attempt to show what our world would look like if a historical event either did not take place or took place with a different result.⁹⁸ As far as the function of alternate history goes, Rosenfeld claims that it exists to "express our changing views about the present"⁹⁹ and that the different varieties reflect this. In his opinion, fantasy scenarios are typically employed to criticise the present. While this claim seems quite broad given the scope of the fantasy genre, it is not without merit. It is certainly in line with Jackson's idea of fantasy as a genre of subversion, and with other claims of the link between fantasy and political themes. In spite of this, an allowance for a subset of fantasy which does not explicitly or implicitly criticise the current state of affairs should be made.

From his discussion of counterfactual fiction, Lubomír Doležel draws six general conclusions about the structure of this genre's fictional worlds. While he does call it counterfactual fiction, his definition and examples of it are closer to what has so far been discussed as alternate history rather than to counterfactual history. These six conclusions are (1) the fictional world deviates from the historical world as we know it, (2) the social order of the fictional world substantially differs from history, (3) the fictional world contains items which were not present in the historical world and items which were present may be missing, (4) the "movers" of the fictional world are leaders, be that political, military, or religious, (5) the basic paradox of counterfactual fiction is that while the social, military, and political order may seem random, the lives of its characters are dictated by it, it is inescapable, (6) lastly, writers change not only the history of the world, they also change the traits and life events of the historical figures used in their writing.¹⁰⁰

Doležel also briefly mentions that there is a connection between science fiction and alternate history, using Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), though

⁹⁷ See Gevers, "Mirrors of the Past: Versions of History in Science Fiction and Fantasy," 21-22.

⁹⁸ See Kathleen Singles, *Alternate History: Playing with Contingency and Necessity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 1-4.

⁹⁹ Gavriel Rosenfeld, "Why Do We Ask 'What If?'" Reflections on the Function of Alternate History," *History and Theory* 41, no. 4 (December 2002): pp. 90-103, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2303.00222>, 103.

¹⁰⁰ See Lubomír Doležel, *Identita literárního díla* (Brno-Praha: Ústav pro Českou Literaturu AV ČR, 2004), 46-48.

he makes the distinction that science fiction shows a future which substantially differs from the present, while counterfactual historical fiction goes back to the past where a major change takes place and this is reflected in the present.¹⁰¹ Indeed, here we can see an overlap where these two genres may blend and different critics may classify a novel such as Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* as both science fiction and alternate history, depending on the criteria they are working with. This discussion of a relationship between science fiction and alternate history can be extended to certain works of fantasy as well.

To summarise, the genre of alternate history presents a version of history where a major deviation from history as we know it took place at some point in the past and in the presented narrative, we are seeing the impact and the consequences of those changes.

¹⁰¹ See Doležel, *Identita literárního díla*, 41-42.

5. DEFINING THE GENRE OF *JONATHAN STRANGE & MR NORRELL*

Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell has over time been classified as belonging to many different genres and subgenres, from fantasy and historical fiction to gothic fiction and alternate history, or alternatively a blend of several of these genres. Clarke's style of writing has been likened to several nineteenth century writers, including Jane Austen¹⁰² and Charles Dickens, and called by some a pastiche or imitation of the style of these writers, which may be taken into account as well.¹⁰³

However, not everyone agrees with this assessment. Quite unlike the novels of the nineteenth century, *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* contains nearly two hundred footnotes throughout its entirety which direct the reader to (fictional) sources for claims given in the text or expand on ideas in the main text by providing background details or explaining anecdotes and historical details and relevance and even theories related to what is discussed. At several points throughout the novel, the footnotes take over the page and become the main focus of the text for a while. In this chapter, the elements and definitions of fantasy by Jackson, Mendlesohn and Attebery will be discussed as to their relevance to *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, followed by a discussion of whether the genre of alternate history would be a more appropriate label.

First, Jackson's definition will be discussed. Within the spectrum of the marvellous, the mimetic, and the fantastic, *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* can be identified as belonging to the fantastic mode. This is due to the combination of the highly mimetic setting and historical elements with the presence of magic and other such fantastical elements in the world.

Jackson sees fantasy as a subversive genre, related to the time and social context it was produced in and oftentimes it stands in opposition to the dominant ideology. While on the surface *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* appears to uphold the status quo as the two titular main characters are both white, reasonably wealthy, men who are at leisure to pursue their interests with comparatively few obstacles, making full use of the system of society built to benefit them, there is more to the story than that. Strange, and even more

¹⁰² See Douglas Charles Kane, "A Modern Fairy-Story: *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* Seen Through the Prism of Tolkien's Classic Essay," *Mythlore* 37, no. 1 (133), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26809328>, 142.

¹⁰³ See Sylwia Borowska-Szerszun, "The Interplay of the Domestic and the Uncanny in Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*," *Crossroads: A Journal of English Studies*, no. 2(9) (2015), <https://doi.org/10.15290/cr.2015.09.2.01>, 4.

so Norrell are posed as the ones responsible for bringing magic back to England. Indeed, Norrell explicitly states this repeatedly throughout the novel, for example when explaining why he has decided to relocate to London, saying “I have come to London in order to further the cause of modern magic. I intend, sir, to bring back magic to Britain.”¹⁰⁴ In the end, however, the magic of Strange and Norrell is merely a drop in the ocean, and the floodgates are truly opened by the actions of a fairy simply called “the gentleman with thistle-down hair”, a black servant named Stephen Black, and to a lesser extent two women, Lady Pole and Arabella Strange as well as other magical practitioners of lower-class origins and without serious associations with Strange and Norrell.

In her discussion of the of the language and rhetoric used by fantasy works, Mendlesohn classifies *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* as an intrusion fantasy. Here, all of her categories of fantasy will be examined to confirm whether her classification is accurate. Firstly, the category of portal-quest fantasy can be easily ruled out. While there are portals between England and other realms, most frequently in the form of mirrors, they do not serve as a barrier in the way Mendlesohn describes. Characters and elements of magic from both sides can pass through and interact. The liminal fantasy category can be eliminated as well, as the fantastic elements do not exist at the edges and just beyond our grasp as they should in a proper liminal fantasy. The next two categories are not so easy to dismiss. First, Mendlesohn classifies it as an intrusion fantasy because "all the magic in *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* is intrusion/disruption. Magic is always portrayed as being brought into the controlled and mannered world of society."¹⁰⁵ She also sees the abundant footnotes as an intrusion, disrupting the flow of the text frequently to explain things related to magic or its history. However, she does admit that it is "first and foremost an immersive fantasy." In spite of this conflict, she ultimately argues that the main strategy employed to construct the fantastic is one of intrusion.

Does magic truly intrude and cause disruptions in the world of *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*? There are certainly elements which are undeniably intrusive, such as the gentleman with thistle-down hair whose presence almost always causes chaos and creates unforeseen issues, such as the interweaving of Britain and Faerie at certain moments. However, magic in and of itself is not truly intrusive in this world. The people of Clarke's Britain know of magic, it is mentioned by Mr Murray, a bookseller, that everyone learns

¹⁰⁴ Susanna Clarke, *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 65-66.

¹⁰⁵ Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Chapter 3.

"a little of the history and theory of magic in [their] schoolrooms,"¹⁰⁶ and the eventuality of the Raven King's return and his taking over his former kingdom in northern England is even part of the constitution.¹⁰⁷ What is shocking to the people of Britain is not the existence of magic, it is the practise of magic. They are accustomed to the idea that magic was done regularly in the past, but by their time it had been relegated to a purely theoretical pursuit. The only truly intrusive magic is that of the gentleman with thistle-down hair, and in the end partly the return of The King's Roads, which are roads leading to Faerie and other realms. Their reappearance is a disruption, though it is acknowledged that they were commonplace in England in the past. For this reason, here we consider *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* to belong in the immersive category of fantasy.

It also fulfils the expectations placed upon fantasy as defined by Clute and Grant. It is a self coherent narrative set in our world, however the events of that narrative cannot have possibly taken place in this world, which is in line with their definition.¹⁰⁸ When considered within Attebery's framework, *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* is clearly not fantasy as a formula, otherwise this discussion would not have been necessary. It does not contain the stereotypical elements one associates with a typical high fantasy or sword-and-sorcery novel. It does, however, comply with the three main criteria he identified as being typical of modern fantasy. The content of the story is indeed impossible, the problem posed by the narrative – the return of magic to England – is resolved. Attebery's 'wonder' which he likens to Tolkien's eucatastrophe, which is defined as a "sudden, miraculous 'turn' from sorrow to joy that on the brink of tragedy rescues the story from disaster"¹⁰⁹ is also present. While things are steadily looking more and more grim for Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell as the narrative progresses, especially in the latter third, in the end things get resolved in quite an unexpected way, which is in line with what eucatastrophe was defined as.

To summarise, *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* meets the expectations placed on the genre of fantasy in these various definitions and theories, thus fantasy is a strong contender for its genre identity. However, before any conclusion can be made, the genre

¹⁰⁶ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 143.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 686.

¹⁰⁸ See Clute and Grant, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 338.

¹⁰⁹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *Tolkien On Fairy-Stories*, ed. Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2014), 14.

of alternate history and other less frequently mentioned genres must be taken into account and discussed as well.

Alternate history is the second frequent genre label which this novel receives and its applicability will be analysed here. Gevers's definition sees “an altered historical outcome”¹¹⁰ of a past event as the key element of this genre, which is not entirely applicable here as there is no single large event with an outcome contrary to our reality. In fact, Clarke has ensured that the historical elements of the novel are represented accurately, and that when magic comes into play it only changes the method but not the result of any given action. To give an example of this, a footnote mentions that Strange’s magical intervention of creating an ever-changing landscape was likely the deciding factor of a battle, as it ensured that one part of the French army could not get to the battlefield in time.¹¹¹ This is very close to what happened in reality, as general D'Erlon was receiving conflicting instructions and the corps he commanded kept marching between two different battlefields, ultimately not joining the battle on either one.¹¹² This then is not in the true spirit of alternate history, as there is not a true deviation from recorded history. The same can be said about the rest of the novel, where most historical elements are accurately represented and the interweaving of historical fact and fiction is done quite skilfully. The reader will find real historical figures such as Lord Wellington, and Lord Liverpool who served as a Prime Minister, alongside fictional characters such as Sir Walter Pole, who does not appear to be a real historical figure, though his role is again in line with what it would have been at the time. In this way, then, *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* resembles more a work of historical fiction rather than an alternate history. However, the element of deviation from our timeline is only one of the elements which make alternate history what it is.

Another thing which should be taken into account is Doležel’s six features of a fictional world of alternate history. In *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, two of these are easily identified, as the fictional world deviates from our world in that magic is real, and the lives of the characters are dictated by the social and political order presented in the novel. Two more of these features are more complicated, as it is more up to interpretation.

¹¹⁰ Gevers, “Mirrors of the Past: Versions of History in Science Fiction and Fantasy,” 19.

¹¹¹ See Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 567.

¹¹² See Mullié Charles, *Biographie des célébrités militaires des armées de terre et de mer de 1789 à 1850*, vol. 1 (Paris: Poignavant et compie, 1851), <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k36796t/f450,447>.

The presence of items in the fictional world which are not present in the real world is questionable, unless we stretch the definition of item to include magic itself. Next is the question of the “movers” of the world. On the surface it appears that indeed various traditional leaders can be considered the “movers,” however, towards the end the reader is less sure who is behind the return of magic, and the issue becomes less clear with characters such as Stephen Black and the gentleman with thistle-down hair coming into play. One element that is certainly not present is a different social order as *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* maintains the social order of early nineteenth century England. Lastly, the feature of changing the traits and life events of historical figures remains. This one is quite difficult to answer, as it requires study of the life and actions of historical figures present in the narrative, of which there are many, making this beyond the scope of this thesis. However, a cursory inquiry suggests that Clarke has attempted to maintain historical accuracy even when it comes to these figures. Thus, while the genre of alternate history may not be a perfect fit, Clarke did use certain elements of it in creating this novel.

As mentioned before, the subgenre of historical fantasy as defined by Schanoes may be useful in combining these elements into a singular genre identity, as it is somewhere in between a work of history and a work of fantasy. As previously argued, elements of both fantasy and alternate history are present in this novel, therefore I suggest classifying it as a mixture of both genres, or, alternatively, classifying it as a work of historical fantasy.

6. THE MANIFESTATION OF LIBERALISM AND CONSERVATISM IN *JONATHAN STRANGE & MR NORRELL*

The aim of this chapter is to examine the influence of the political ideologies of liberalism and conservatism on the narrative of *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*. Rather than focusing on each political philosophy separately, the analysis here is organised thematically as both liberalism and conservatism are frequently at work at the same time, sometimes creating conflict and sometimes working together. Different characters may have vastly different viewpoints on and opinions of a certain issue, thus a thematic organisation is more beneficial here. Firstly, the discussion will focus on how different characters or groups of characters understand magic, which reveals quite a lot about how they think about the world around them. Next, the role of minority characters, chiefly women and people of colour, will be examined, followed by an analysis of the role of class and social status. Finally, from these discussions the influences of liberalism and conservatism on constructing this narrative will be extrapolated.

6.1 The perception of English magic

In this section, the focus is on how different characters perceive English magic and what their expectations of it are. As is repeatedly mentioned, practical magic has not been in use in Britain of the time for over two hundred years, and thus most people are forming their opinions of it anew, based on incomplete information, stereotypes, and prejudices. As a result, the reactions to Norrell's claims and ideas vary widely, enabling the analysis of a whole spectrum of reactions from the highly conservative to the extremely open and liberal. For the purpose of this chapter, the ideas of magic of the following characters or groups of characters will be analysed: Mr. Norrell, Jonathan Strange, the gentleman with thistle-down hair, Sir Walter Pole and more broadly the government, Lord Wellington and more broadly the military, and finally the general public.

6.1.1 Gilbert Norrell

Gilbert Norrell, mostly referred to as Mr Norrell throughout the novel, is the first practical magician of the Revival of English Magic. His magical abilities are the result of years of dedicated study of books of magic which he has been collecting for a long time. Mr

Norrell is the first practical magician the reader is introduced to and thus he serves as a source of information and a voice of authority on the topic of magic. Birns claims that he “represents the modern magician, the magician who is assimilable in polite, urbane society.”¹¹³

Mr Norrell's approach to magic is very calculated and researched. From the very beginning, his goal is to not only bring magic back, but to make it into a respectable profession. The word "respectable" appears repeatedly and is somewhat contrasted with "mystical," which Norrell uses to denigrate what he deems to be not suitable for modern English magic.¹¹⁴ This need to ensure that magic is seen as a respectable profession is visible from the very beginning. When he is moving to London, he asks Childermass, his servant, to get him "a house that says to those that visit it that magic is a respectable profession – no less than Law and a great deal more so than Medicine."¹¹⁵ With this one request he reveals several things. Firstly, he places magic into the hierarchy of the "learned professions," those occupations considered suitable for gentlemen of middle-class or upper-class backgrounds to occupy their time in a meaningful way. Incidentally, these professions typically require one to engage with research and to a certain extent become a scholar. These professions traditionally include the church, law, and medicine and they stand in opposition to trades, which were typically only taken up by people of lower class backgrounds as a means of making ends meet.¹¹⁶ Secondly, he creates a hierarchy of these professions with church at the very top, followed by law and then medicine, and places magic amongst them, on the same level as law. It is his "hope for English magic that it should be regarded as a quiet, respectable sort of profession"¹¹⁷ which is at the core of everything he does in pursuit of reviving magic in England.

He is not the only one who sees magic as belonging among these professions, later on Mr Segundus also states that magic "is the noblest profession in the world – well, the second noblest perhaps, after the Church,"¹¹⁸ placing magic a little bit higher in the hierarchy than Mr Norrell. In this way, Norrell identifies with the conservative ideal of the role of hierarchy and authority in the functioning of society. He does not seek to

¹¹³ Nicholas Birns, "Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell, the Magic of Sociality, and Radical Fantasy," *Humanities* 9, no. 125 (October 21, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.3390/h9040125>, 3.

¹¹⁴ See Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 15, 158.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 51.

¹¹⁶ See Kenneth Hudson, "The Learned Professions," in *The Jargon of the Professions* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1978), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-03199-3_2, 22.

¹¹⁷ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 356.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 587.

change the status quo, instead he is attempting to integrate magic within the existing system, ensuring it remains a pursuit for gentlemen and thus limiting access and retaining control.

When it comes to magic, for him the written word is the highest authority and rigorous study of books of magic is the only proper way to become a practical magician. Or, as Byrne puts it, “[w]hat characterises Mr Norrell’s magical practice is his unfailing deference to the authority of the printed word.”¹¹⁹ He does not like the idea of Strange's approach which is more akin to experimentation than research, which is expressed when he creates a highly structured plan for Strange's magical education.¹²⁰ Later, he chastises Strange for setting out on fairy roads, not because it is dangerous, but because he believes it will “bring magic into disrepute.”¹²¹

From Norrell's conservative approach to hierarchy and authority, it follows that he should not want to break from tradition and in fact he should like to revive the way things used to be done. This is true, but only to a certain extent. First, the way in which Norrell stays with tradition shall be examined. Almost as soon as he appears in the novel, he starts his attempts to revive old magical law, the first instance of this happens when he requests the members of the Learned Society of York Magicians disband if he were to perform magic, as he sends a solicitor with a contract written according to old magical law codes.¹²² This use of magical law is not the only instance, he repeatedly talks about how there should be a way to regulate magicians and he sees himself as the only one capable of creating such regulations and norms. In fact, the first concrete suggestion he makes to the government, other than offering his magical services, is that "magic ought to be regulated by the Government and magicians ought to be licensed (though naturally he had no idea of any one being licensed but himself). He proposed that a proper regulatory Board of Magic be established."¹²³ While this proposal is rejected by the Government, he is not entirely unsuccessful. Within the City of London, a Committee for Magical Acts is set up which decrees that "only Mr Norrell was permitted to do magic within the City boundaries."¹²⁴ Later on, when he and Strange are betrayed and

¹¹⁹ Deirdre Byrne, “The Book and the Spell in Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*,” *English Academy Review* 26, no. 2 (October 15, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.1080/10131750903336007>, 6.

¹²⁰ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 297.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 518.

¹²² *Ibid*, 27.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 225.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 226.

impersonated by Drawlight, one of his two advisors who had been with him since he came to London, he suggests the revival of Les Cinqs Dragownes, a medieval court presiding over crimes of a magical nature because he believes that is the only way to regulate magic and safeguard it from those whom he deems “wicked.”¹²⁵ Again, in this way he is appealing to the role and power of traditional authority and setting up, or rather reviving a parallel version entirely concerned with magic.

This desire to be the only magician and to be in charge of this magic revival is also manifested in his reactions to suggestions and attempts to set up a school to educate future magicians. First, it is a suggestion by Lord Hawkesbury, a prominent member of the government, to create a school or a Royal Society as a way to educate more magicians to aid in the war efforts, and due to his enthusiasm for this idea, he gains approval and a promise of funding from the King and various other prominent figures. With some difficulty, he is able to convince Lord Hawkesbury that there is no time nor are there any suitable students for this scheme.¹²⁶ The second time this happens is when Mr Segundus gets the opportunity to build a school for magicians from the ground up under the patronage of a wealthy lady. Unfortunately, as soon as Norrell learns of this scheme, he forces Mr Segundus to shut it down voluntarily, lest he be forced to make use of his connections in the government.¹²⁷ This speaks to Norrell's desire for complete control over who has access to a magical education, even if it is just a theoretical one, as is proposed with this second school. This is suggestive of his conservative belief that human imperfection is too dangerous when it comes to magic and should something go wrong the consequences would be dire. He believes himself to be the only one who can manage this in a safe manner.

Not only does he want to heavily regulate and restrict magic, he also quite clearly wants to prevent those he disagrees with from having a say and he wants to be the one to decide which things are proper for modern English magic and which are not. The periodical *The Friends of English Magic* serves as his mouthpiece, only presenting the opinions and information he deems suitable for this new age of magic. The narrator of the novel quite sarcastically remarks that “[t]here is not much to interest the serious student of magic in the early issues”¹²⁸ and goes on to list the kind of magicians the early articles

¹²⁵ See Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 516-522.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 223-225.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 580-593.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 147.

are attacking, easily summarised as any magicians other than Mr Norrell himself. While he is not the author of these articles, it is made abundantly clear that they are all approved by him and he is the one making the final decisions as to what is and is not suitable for publication and circulation. In this way, the periodical “becomes a textual vehicle for a far more malicious agenda: Mr Norrell’s wish to dominate the practice of magic in England while keeping all magical knowledge to himself.”¹²⁹

It is in his opinions of what modern magic should be where he breaks away from tradition. While the differences are never explicitly stated, the narrator and at times Mr Norrell keep making a distinction between English magic and modern magic. What makes English magic so unique? The implication is that English magic is reliant on fairies, as it was in the past. There are several passages where the practise of magic is equated with having fairy servants or making deals with fairies, travelling on Faerie roads into other lands, and learning by doing, by being an apprentice to an established magician. Norrell repeatedly declares his distaste for fairies, including having an article on the topic published in his periodical. To Strange, he expresses his opinion that “[t]heir utility has been greatly exaggerated, the danger much underestimated,”¹³⁰ and even makes the claim that most respectable magic is achievable without the involvement of fairies. However, he is forced to admit that this view of magic is entirely unprecedented and that “there are some sorts of magic which are entirely impossible without fairies.”¹³¹ In this way, he is quite dramatically diverging from tradition of fairy involvement in English magic.

From this, his idea of modern magic can be extrapolated as one which does not rely on the aid of fairies, instead it is one of rigorous study of various books of magic in order to use magic as a tool. This is apparent in what Norrell proposes he should do – aid in the war effort, and after the war his work of protecting the British coasts from storms in order to protect the property along the coastline from destruction, and ensuring a river does not flood its surrounding areas. These are all highly practical uses which are useful, however they do not excite public interest or remain in their minds for long. This is why it is suggested Norrell should create illusions which would remind people that the magic is there and protecting them. Norrell does not quite understand their purpose, but he acquiesces and promises to keep the public perception of his magic in mind. He does not

¹²⁹ Byrne, “The Book and the Spell in Susanna Clarke’s *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*,” 8.

¹³⁰ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 298.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 300.

understand the need to appeal to the public if his magic is functional, but he is willing to learn and take notes.¹³²

Despite these protestations, he employs the services of a fairy in order to revive Miss Wintertowne (later known by her married name as Lady Pole), and it is this act of magic which truly brings him to the attention of the public and of the government. Even before he performs this magic, he declares that "[t]here is scarcely any form of magic more dangerous [...] to the magician and dangerous to the subject."¹³³ Nevertheless, he sees the potential value of this act in furthering his agenda and decides to perform it, summoning a fairy which is called the gentlemen with thistle-down hair throughout the novel to aid him. He makes a deal with the fairy, bargaining away half her life in exchange for the fairy bringing her back to life. In spite of his awareness of the tricks fairies like to play on people and his best efforts to avoid them, it soon comes to light that he was outwitted by the fairy. Since he does not confide in anybody that the help of a fairy was necessary, it is only him that knows this, and he goes on with his campaign against fairies. This is not the only time Norrell goes against what he is saying publicly, but it is this event which sets off an avalanche of other events and which places Norrell on the map as someone to be taken seriously.

Connected with his desire to remove or at least significantly decrease the importance of fairies is his dislike of the Raven King. He shocks many with the opinion that the Raven King's "magic was of a particularly pernicious sort and nothing would please [Norrell] more than that he should be forgot as completely as he deserves."¹³⁴ Later, he reaffirms this point of view when asked about the complete lack of mentions of the Raven King in any of the articles published under his supervision by stating that it is "one of [his] ambitions to make that man as completely forgotten as he deserves"¹³⁵ or to at least separate himself from his legacy. In an impassioned speech to Strange, he expresses his frustrations with the idea that without the Raven King, there would be no magic nor magicians in England:

That is the common opinion, certainly. But even it were true – which I am very far from allowing – he has long since forfeited any entitlement to our esteem. For what were his first actions upon coming into England? To make war upon England's lawful King and rob him of half his kingdom!

¹³² Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 884-885.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 99.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 71.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 288.

And shall you and I, Mr Strange, let it be known that we have chosen such a man as our model? That we account him the first among us? Will that make our profession respected? Will that persuade the King's ministers to put their trust in us? I do not think so! No, Mr Strange, if we cannot make his name forgotten, then it is our duty – yours and mine – to broadcast our hatred of him! To let it be known everywhere our great abhorrence of his corrupt nature and evil deeds!¹³⁶

This point of view can be seen as a clear break from tradition, similarly to his ideas about the place of fairies within modern magic.

The last point of interest here, which has already been somewhat touched upon, is Norrell's censorship of ideas, books, and writers which he deems unsuitable or incompatible with his concept of modern magic. This starts gradually and innocuously enough that it could simply be taken as scholarly disputes, with Norrell claiming that this or that author and their ideas are not useful or relevant. It is also apparent in Norrell purchasing all books of magic which are for sale, no matter their cost. It could be seen as a desire for more knowledge, nevertheless it also works to prevent anybody else from having access to those books. Old habits die hard, and even when he takes Strange as his pupil, he is hesitant when it comes to lending out his books and he even sends certain books he deems to be too dangerous back to his house in Yorkshire to ensure they stay inaccessible.¹³⁷

However, this effort to prevent people from accessing the "wrong" books culminates in quite a dramatic way, with Norrell essentially banning Strange's book, *The History and Practice of English Magic*, as he does not agree with the ideas expressed within it. This is similar to the current efforts to ban books deemed inappropriate especially within schools in the United States. Of course, Norrell does not simply declare that Strange's book is banned, he does not have the authority to do that. Instead, he ensures that any copies sold could not be read by the buyers, using magical means. Firstly, the books start disappearing from people's homes, much to their dismay, then Norrell sends his servants to buy up the stock of the book, and finally all the copies of the book turn blank. Norrell does not deny his involvement in this, in fact his servant claims that "Mr Norrell is eager to declare himself responsible. He has a whole list of reasons and will be glad to tell them to any one who will listen."¹³⁸ In addition, he offers to compensate the

¹³⁶ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 288.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 307-308

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 720.

booksellers for their losses, but this is still quite a forceful and direct way of ensuring that there is no opposition to his ideas of magic.¹³⁹ This is in line with the conservative belief that humans are imperfect and should not have an endless sea of options to choose from, which may result in them straying from the "right" path. Instead, a limited number of options, all of which have been chosen and approved by someone in a position of authority who is knowledgeable about the issue, is the better choice.

In summary, Mr Norrell can be found quite clearly on the conservative end of the spectrum. His only idea which can be termed liberal is the distancing of modern magic from the influence of fairies and of the Raven King, though whether this is done in the name of progress or because he wants to have complete control of the narrative remains unclear. His desire to make magic into a respectable gentlemanly profession and to revive or set up committees and other authorities to regulate it, together with him trying to ensure magic is as inaccessible as possible for the regular person points clearly towards the tradition of conservatism. Finally, the exclusion of women and essentially restriction of free speech when it comes to magic makes it clear that Norrell is ultimately very conservative in his thinking.

6.1.2 Jonathan Strange

Jonathan Strange is England's second practical magician of this era. Unlike Mr Norrell, he stumbles into the practice of magic almost by accident. Eventually he becomes Norrell's pupil, joins the war effort on the battlefield alongside Lord Wellington and becomes a useful addition to the army. Ultimately, the ideological differences between him and Norrell prove to be too great, and they split. During their time apart, after the loss of his wife, Strange studies the relation of magic and insanity and toys with insanity in himself. Despite their differences, in the end they are forced to work together once again as it turns out their ideas of magic do not stand in opposition, they complement one another.

When compared with Norrell's approach to magic, Strange is much more open to discovery via experimentation as he has no books of magic to learn from. He is obliged to rely on what he has read and learned from books about magic, many of which Norrell would deem inappropriate or simply wrong in their assertions. Due to this lack of access,

¹³⁹ See Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 715-726.

Strange's ideas of magic are much more aligned with the general public, in that it relies on the use of fairies. Indeed, when he is speaking with Mr Norrell, he quite openly criticises an article which intends to disprove this, unaware that the article aligns with Norrell's values and was approved by him.¹⁴⁰ This is immediately criticised by Lascelles, who says that Strange "has not troubled to inform himself of the modern ideas on the subject – by which I mean, of course, Mr Norrell's ideas."¹⁴¹ In this way, then, Strange is more conservative than Norrell, as his ideas are closely aligned with the past magical traditions. At the same time, he is going against the current state of affairs as established by Norrell, which would make his ideas more liberal.

The way Strange performs magic is quite experimental and intuitive compared to Norrell's bookish, learned, and carefully crafted spells. Strange himself describes it by saying: "I have only the haziest notion of what I did. I dare say it is just the same with you, sir, one has a sensation like music playing at the back of one's head – one simply knows what the next note will be,"¹⁴² which astonishes Norrell, but he is excited by the new ideas and interpretations his pupil brings to the table. He does still limit Strange's access to certain books and tries to steer him into holding the same opinions and beliefs to ensure there is no opposition to his ideas. Despite his best efforts, Strange eventually grows weary of these limitations and becomes frustrated with Norrell, exclaiming that "[a] magician cannot increase the stock of magic by reading other men's books. It is quite obvious to me that sooner or later Norrell and I must look beyond our books!"¹⁴³

This opinion arises chiefly from Strange's time serving alongside Lord Wellington in the war against Napoleon, where he does not have the luxury of a well-stocked library to reference. Instead, he "was obliged to invent most of the magic he did, working from general principles and half-remembered stories from old books."¹⁴⁴ His involvement is not directly on the battlefield killing enemy soldiers, instead his main employment is in building and disappearing roads and bridges, spying on enemy armies, and generally gathering information. In fact, when he is asked if a magician can kill a man by magic, he says: "I suppose a magician might, [...] but a gentleman never could."¹⁴⁵ As Borowska-Szerszun puts it, "Jonathan Strange is not expected to blast fire or wipe out the

¹⁴⁰ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 286.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 290.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 295.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 507-508.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 426.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 389.

enemy with powerful spells - the actual killing is left to ordinary, lower class, and preferably foreign *guerilla* soldiers. His involvement benefits his social standing, whereas being a magician is just a subcategory of being a well-respected gentleman."¹⁴⁶ Despite these protestations, when his life is in danger he does nearly kill an enemy soldier by magic and the only thing that stops him is another soldier from his side killing the enemy first.¹⁴⁷

Strange officially breaks away from Norrell after writing a scathing review of a book by Lord Portishead, which was officially approved by both Norrell and Strange himself. To truly distance himself from his former teacher and his opinions, he decides to write a book titled *The History and Practice of English Magic*, where he intends to lay out the truth of magical history as he sees it. He finishes the first volume, and the reader gets to the prologue where he firmly establishes the pivotal role fairies and the Raven King have had in the creation of English magic.¹⁴⁸ Unfortunately, the book is destroyed and taken off the market by Norrell and thus this prologue is the only section of it the reader is able to see.

This ideological split between Norrell and Strange showcases their differing views on the dissemination of information and of magic as a profession. Norrell's rather conservative view was presented in the previous section, but to summarise it, he believes information about magic should be filtered and regulated so that magic itself can be regulated, and only those whom he deems worthy, that is people with a similar belief system to him who are also wealthy men, should be considered as potential pupils. Strange's opinions of this issue are much more liberal. He freely tells Childermass everything he wishes to know, and states "I have told you nothing that is not already in my book. In a month or so, every man, woman and child in this kingdom will be able to read it and form their own opinions upon it."¹⁴⁹ Clearly it is his opinion that it is best to let people choose for themselves and form their own opinions based on information which should be widely available. His ideas do not end there. When he is considering taking pupils himself, he shocks Sir Walter Pole with the proposition that a dancing master should be one of them. Sir Walter asks: "But is that really the sort of person whom we

¹⁴⁶ Borowska-Szerszun, "The Interplay of the Domestic and the Uncanny in Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*," 6.

¹⁴⁷ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 577.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 637-643.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 700.

should be encouraging to take up magic? Surely it is a profession that ought to be reserved for gentlemen."¹⁵⁰ Strange disagrees with him, saying that from all the candidates he has, this is the only one who has managed to learn any practical magic. Not only does he consider taking pupils of a lower class origin acceptable, he also shocks the gentlemen by saying that there is also interest from ladies who wish to become his pupils. This is another point on which he and Norrell disagree, as Strange says "[t]here is no reason why women should not study magic. That is another of Norrell's fallacies."¹⁵¹ Ultimately, he does not take any women as his students due to the need for chaperones and other additional staff to ensure everything is done properly.

Similarly, whilst Norrell is concerned with ensuring magic is respectable and used for the most practical purposes, Strange appears to more fully understand the appeal it holds for the public and the need to have the public on their side, and so it is said that when attending various social gatherings, "Strange would generally oblige the company with a shew of one of the minor sorts of magic."¹⁵² From this, it is quite apparent that Norrell's main goal is making magic a respectable gentlemanly profession, while Strange's goal is to improve the practice of magic itself by any means necessary. His dedication to furthering English magic becomes obvious after the apparent death of his wife Arabella, who is in reality taken by the Gentleman to be his companion in Lost-hope. In his pursuit, he appears to intentionally descend into madness. Through his unorthodox methods, his magical powers increase, and he gains the ability to command nature similarly to the Gentleman, who is alarmed by this development. Upon his reunion with Norrell, Strange explains this by saying "I have been many things since we last met. I have been trees and rivers and hills and stones. I have spoken to stars and earth and wind. One cannot be the conduit through which all English magic flows and still be oneself."¹⁵³ This makes it appear as if he is the reason for magic's return, however, there are also claims that it is all the Raven King's doing and Strange and Norrell are merely the tools used in his spell.¹⁵⁴

Ultimately, Strange's position on the liberalism-conservatism scale is firmly on the liberal end of things. While he does want to adhere to certain magical traditions, such

¹⁵⁰ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 703.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 704.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 328.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 954.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 975.

as the utilisation of fairies, the majority of his ideas are largely liberal. He goes against Norrell's established order of what is respectable magic and what is not, he does not only want to use the magic that has been written about and instead he encourages experimentation to further the cause of magic. Importantly, he is also much more open to people who have a different social status from him studying magic, as exemplified by his taking a pupil who would be considered not a gentleman and also by his arguing that women should be able to study magic just like men.

6.1.3 The gentleman with thistle-down hair

The gentleman with thistle-down hair, henceforth referred to as the Gentleman is an interesting character. He is a fairy and a ruler of a Faerie kingdom called Lost-hope and potentially other kingdoms as well. His first introduction is when he is summoned by Mr Norrell. He summarises why Norrell summoned him, stating: "my genius for magic exceeds that of all the rest of my race. Because I have been the servant and confidential friend of Thomas Godbless, Ralph Stokesey, Martin Pale and of the Raven King. Because I am valorous, chivalrous, generous and as handsome as the day is long!"¹⁵⁵ Clearly, Norrell is at a disadvantage here, the Gentleman knows this and intends to take full advantage of it. From this speech his opinion of magic begins to emerge. It is clear that he sees the role of fairies as important and his experience working alongside some of the greatest magicians is meant to instil confidence and assure Norrell that he has nothing to worry about.

After presenting himself, he demands to know who Norrell is. The first few answers, namely "the greatest magician of the Age"¹⁵⁶ and "the man who is destined to restore magic to England"¹⁵⁷ do not satisfy his curiosity, and thus we get a glimpse into what he deems to be the defining characteristics and qualifications of a true magician. He asks: "But who are you? That is what I wish to know. What magic have you done? Who was your master? What magical lands have you visited? What enemies have you defeated? Who are your allies?"¹⁵⁸ Several things are apparent from this. Firstly, magic is treated as a trade, something to be learned from a master by an apprentice by actually doing magic. This is in stark contrast with Norrell's scholarly and bookish nature.

¹⁵⁵ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 108.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 108.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 108.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 108.

Secondly, we can see that the worth of a magician lies not in the number of books they have read or acquired, instead it is in the actions they have carried out. Simply put, for the Gentleman a magician is a man of action.

Throughout the book it becomes apparent that the magic of the Gentleman differs from that of Norrell and Strange. It is claimed that unlike with humans, magic comes quite naturally to fairies.¹⁵⁹ His magic comes from nature, from the sky, stones, rivers and other elements of the landscape and nature in general. At one point he asks the north wind and the dawn to show him his biggest enemy so that he may be rid of them. Kane concurs, stating that "it is repeatedly emphasized that his magical power is derived from his profound connection with nature."¹⁶⁰ This magic based in the powers of nature is not limited to fairies. The Gentleman quite explicitly states that the magicians of the past had similar powers and the forces of nature were at their command.¹⁶¹ In a way, this almost forces the reader to believe that for the magicians of the past, magic was something quite natural, whereas for those of the current time it takes much more effort and studying for much smaller payoff. Norrell is not ignorant to this, as he admits that they attributed "some of their own extraordinary magic to their ability to talk to trees and rivers and so forth, and to form friendships and alliances with them."¹⁶² However, he does not necessarily believe it, as he goes on to say: "But there is no reason to suppose that they were right. My own magic does not rely upon any such nonsensical ideas."¹⁶³ The reader, however, is led to see things differently. Together with Stephen Black, the reader witness just how tied to nature magic truly is and how powerful it is when one can speak to the world and harness its power.¹⁶⁴ This idea of speaking to different elements of nature and their speaking back is repeated when different characters believe the world is speaking to them, for example when Childermass is looking for a strange source of magic, which turns out to be Lady Pole,¹⁶⁵ or when Stephen Black is taken to be the Raven King and the whole world speaks and listens to him.¹⁶⁶

The Gentleman's magic is quite strongly associated with flute music and presence of the woods, both of which are oftentimes visible to characters who are not being directly

¹⁵⁹ See Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 299, footnote 2.

¹⁶⁰ Kane, "A Modern Fairy-story," 135.

¹⁶¹ See Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 598.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, 658-659.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 659.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 604.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 652-658.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 981-984.

targeted by his magic, but this effect is even stronger for those who are targeted. Lady Pole complains of hearing sad flute music, as do many of the servants in her house. The clearest picture of this is when the Gentleman attempts to lure Jonathan Strange and the King into his magical woods with this flute music. Strange manages to resist with the use of spells and he ensures the King resists as well.¹⁶⁷

Thanks to the Gentleman, the reader is also presented with a clear picture of what magic may have looked like in England when it was at its peak. He is expressing his disappointment with the current state of London to Stephen Black, stating that:

this city has not the hundredth part of its former splendour! I have been gravely disappointed since my return. Once upon a time, to look upon London was to look upon a forest of towers and pinnacles and spires. [...] There were houses ornamented with stone dragons, griffins and lions, symbolizing the wisdom, courage and ferocity of the occupants, while in the gardens of those same houses might be found flesh-and-blood dragons, griffins and lions, locked in strong cages. Their roars, which could be clearly heard in the street, terrified the faint-of-heart. In every church a blessed saint lay, performing miracles hourly at the behest of the populace. Each saint was confined within an ivory casket, which was secreted in a jewel-studded coffin, which in turn was displayed in a magnificent shrine of gold and silver that shone night and day with the light of a thousand wax candles! Every day there was a splendid procession to celebrate one or other of these blessed saints, and London's fame passed from world to world!¹⁶⁸

This shows the extent to which magic was part of the lives of the people at the time and how seemingly normal it was considered. This is in stark contrast with the situation present at the time the novel takes place and it shows the Gentleman's mindset when it comes to magic. To him, it is something natural and, not something to be marvelled at.

At first, the Gentleman's appreciation of Stephen Black and his immediate recognition of Stephen's noble traits may appear as a more egalitarian approach, one where you earn your place instead of it being determined by one's race or origins. Indeed, he elevates Stephen to a high status and even wants him to become a king. However, upon closer inspection, there is a parallel system of hierarchy in play. When speaking to Stephen, his declaration: "[y]our dignity and handsomeness proclaim you to be of noble, perhaps kingly birth!"¹⁶⁹ betrays his true priorities. Instead of race and status, it is based on one's appearance. The fact that one's appearance is for the most part difficult to

¹⁶⁷ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 460.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 217-218.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 187.

significantly alter, similarly to their race, origin, or social status, makes this just as unfair as the British system which too heavily relies on appearance, only differing in the specific criteria which are considered. In this way, the Gentleman's approach, while appearing liberal and egalitarian, is in fact just as conservative as that of Britain.

6.1.4 Sir Walter Pole and the Government

The next character whose opinion of magic is relevant is Sir Walter Pole, and by extension the government as a whole. Many of the characters named as members of the government throughout the story are real, historical figures, but this does not extend to Sir Walter Pole who is fictional.

When Mr Norrell first comes to London and joins London society with the help of Drawlight and Lascelles, he expects that the ministers and other government members will, upon hearing about his magical abilities, come to him and petition him for his help. This reflects the high regard in which he holds magic and he likely expects the same of other people. To his dismay, this does not take place and he is forced to call in favours to get an audience with Sir Walter Pole, who is a minister. At this audience, he hopes to convince Sir Walter of his usefulness and ability to aid in the war with Napoleon. Upon their meeting, based on Norrell's appearance, Sir Walter remarks: "I had been told you were a *practical* magician – I hope you are not offended, sir – it is merely what I was told, and I must say that it is a relief to me to see that you are nothing of the sort. [...] You are a *theoretical* magician, I imagine?"¹⁷⁰ From this brief exchange, it is clear that Sir Walter associates practical magicians with beggars and street sorcerers performing small tricks and telling people's fortunes for money, whereas theoretical magicians are, to him at least, respectable scholars. Norrell does correct him and goes on to explain what he has done and that he wants to be useful. However, Norrell's fatal flaw is that he does not come up with any specific suggestions as to how exactly he could achieve this, nor is he convincing. In the end, Sir Walter dismisses Norrell with the words: "I am sorry to say that it will not do. Magic is not respectable, sir. It is not,' Sir Walter searched for a word, 'serious. The Government cannot meddle with such things."¹⁷¹ This shows Norrell that despite his efforts, he clearly has not achieved his goal of making magic respectable quite yet. In this way, Sir Walter, despite being repeatedly described as a radical or as a liberal

¹⁷⁰ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 85.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 92.

politician, is representing quite a conservative stance. The war has been fought without the use of magic thus far, and there is no need to change that, to turn to something unfamiliar and unproven.

However, after the resurrection of Lady Pole, the gentlemen of the government change their minds quite dramatically on the subject of employing a magician, and they come up with several ideas on how to make use of Mr Norrell. All their ideas are rejected by Mr Norrell for a multitude of reasons, and they are left with no employment for him. Within a month, they do find use for magic, as Norrell summons a fleet of ships made of rain which create a blockade around the French port of Brest as well as many other ports around the French empire, which is quite successful at keeping the French in one place for over a week, though the trick was ultimately discovered.¹⁷² From this point on, the government and the admiralty make use of Norrell's magic in a variety of ways, but it is all achieved from London. Because magic has been proven to work by the resurrection of Lady Pole, they are more open to utilising it in the war, but it takes them a long time to figure out exactly how to make use of it the best way.

Because of the involvement of a magician in the war, many expected it to be over in a couple of months and were sorely disappointed. To give an example, the Foreign Secretary is quoted as saying: "Do not speak to me of magic! It is just like everything else, full of setbacks and disappointments."¹⁷³ From this statement, it can be extrapolated exactly what the Foreign Secretary, and by extension likely many of the members of government, expected, which is for magic to somehow solve all of their problems quickly and without much effort on their part. Unfortunately for them, in this universe magic is simply a tool which must be applied properly for it to work and be useful.

After Napoleon is defeated, there is still work for the magicians. Norrell proposes the protection of Britain's coasts by magic, which is well received by Lord Liverpool, the Prime Minister. Norrell reports that "Lord Liverpool says that every year property to the value of many hundreds of thousands of pounds is destroyed by the sea. Lord Liverpool says that he considers the preservation of property to be the first task of magic in peacetime."¹⁷⁴ This reveals the priorities of not only the Prime Minister, but of the ruling class as a whole. Britain at this time had just come out of a prolonged conflict with

¹⁷² Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 122-135.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 223.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 482.

Napoleon and the French Empire and arguably there were more pressing issues than the destruction of coastal property by predictable storms. Nevertheless, since the property getting damaged or destroyed by these storms belonged to the wealthy who held sway in politics, it was in the Prime Minister's best interest to safeguard their property and garner favour with them, as the lower and working class people did not have the right to vote or really influence the politics in London in any way as this is the time before any major voting rights reforms.¹⁷⁵ While the idea of private property appears in both liberal and conservative ideologies, in this case and at this time it is more within the scope of conservatism, where property is seen as a way to accumulate not only wealth but also power. At this time in history, the right to vote was tied to one's property.

Overall, the stance of the government is tied to what they believe the public perception of magic and of the employment of magicians will be. At first, it is dismissed as not respectable, but once it is proven to work with Lady Pole's resurrection, they deem it safe enough to make use of it. Finally, when Strange and Norrell disappear, publicly they express regrets but privately they are relieved they do not have to deal with any potential consequences of their actions. In this way, their stance is overall conservative, as they are only willing to work with Mr Norrell after seeing specific results, they are not convinced by abstract reasoning.

6.1.5 Lord Wellington and the army

In this section, the ideas of magic of Lord Wellington and by extension the army will be discussed. While the involvement of magic in military matters has to a certain extent already been discussed in the preceding section, the decision-making process there was mostly in the hands of those in London, whereas in this section the magic moves directly to where it is needed, which includes the battlefield.

When the government is attempting to find uses for Mr Norrell's magic, there is a proposal to send him to a battlefield to do magic under the direction of generals and other commanders. One of the people sent to talk to Mr Norrell to see whether this would be possible is Captain Harcourt-Bruce, who is excited by the prospect of magic on the

¹⁷⁵ "The Reform Act 1832," UK Parliament, accessed May 1, 2023, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparliament/houseofcommons/reformacts/overview/reformact1832/>.

battlefield. His idea of a magician is described thus:

His head was full of ancient battles in which the English were outnumbered by the French and doomed to die, when all at once would be heard the sound of strange, unearthly music, and upon a hilltop would appear the Raven King in his tall, black helmet with its mantling of raven-feathers streaming in the wind; and he would gallop down the hillside on his tall, black horse with a hundred human knights and a hundred fairy knights at his back, and he would defeat the French by magic.¹⁷⁶

Clearly, a man such as Mr Norrell was not suitable for this task and thus his involvement on the battlefield was ultimately rejected. However, Captain Harcourt-Bruce's description of what a magician on a battlefield should look like shows what likely is the image in the minds of the majority of the population, which is decidedly different from Mr Norrell.

In the end, it is not Mr Norrell but Jonathan Strange who gets involved in the war and sets out for the battlefields of Portugal. Before he does, there is one incident which once again highlights that magic is simply a tool and without knowledge of the situation it is entirely useless and can cause more harm than good. While he and Norrell are in Portsmouth, a ship gets stuck and Strange's help is requested. Unfortunately, as he is not knowledgeable when it comes to ships, his suggestions are met with horror, as they would result in even more damage than what has already been done to the ship. While he does figure out a way to help, it is not without its drawbacks and the general consensus among the officers is that "the magic he had done had been of a very showy sort and was obviously intended more to draw attention to his own talent and impress the Admiralty than to save the ship."¹⁷⁷ This speaks to two things. First, magic is not a universal solution, as many would wish it to be, which can be applied to every problem regardless of its circumstances. And secondly, the appeal that this sort of magic holds in London among its wealthier citizens does not translate well to a more serious situation such as this one. Despite these issues, the government in London is impressed and decides to send Strange to the battlefields of Portugal to serve under Lord Wellington.

Once Strange arrives in Portugal, Wellington makes it quite clear that he does not approve of his presence, nor does he think the involvement of magic in war has been beneficial so far. He tells Strange: "I must tell you frankly that if I had been able to prevent you coming I would have done so. But now that you are here I shall take the opportunity

¹⁷⁶ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 125-126.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 354.

to explain to you the great nuisance which you and the other gentleman have been to the Army."¹⁷⁸ Despite Strange's protestations that he can be useful, Wellington's requests of more men and faster flying bullets are not achievable by magic and Strange is relegated to writing proposals only for them to be rejected due to their unsuitability or irrelevance to the situation at hand. Clearly this was not the expected reception, but it shows the differences between a government and decision makers far away and those on the ground. Wellington is taking a cautious, conservative approach, sticking with what he knows works. Eventually, he does give in and makes use of Strange's abilities, as was discussed in section 6.1.2. So much so that the narrator remarks that "[I]ike the ministers before him, Lord Wellington was becoming more accustomed to using magic to achieve his ends and he demanded increasingly elaborate spells from his magician."¹⁷⁹

During Strange's time in Portugal, a couple officers also express their ideas of how they believe magic works and how they would utilise it. In their view, magic is something very arcane, bookish, and incredibly complex. As to how they would make use of magic to win the war, one officer says: "When the French appeared on the horizon, I would just [...] do something, you know, and they would all fall down dead."¹⁸⁰ This speaks to the simplified view of what magic can do, likely based on stories of magic from the past, not taking into account what goes into actually doing magic.

In summary, at first Wellington presents quite conservatively, he flat out refuses to make use of Strange's abilities as he simply sees him as a nuisance. He believes the traditional way of waging war has worked well so far and he does not see the need to make use of something which has thus far only been theoretical, since Strange's usefulness on the battlefield is untested. Additionally, his ignorance on the topic of military procedure and thus his irrelevant suggestions only take away time from more important things. However, once Strange integrates himself and his ideas turn more and more useful, Wellington increasingly makes use of his abilities. Just like the government, he remains firmly on the conservative side of the spectrum.

¹⁷⁸ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 375.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 426-427.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 389.

6.1.6 The general public

Finally, what is the general public's idea of magic? Throughout the novel, there is a variety of opinions expressed about magic, and what they imagine magicians and magic are like. The term general public may be slightly misleading here, as the majority of the characters whose opinions are recorded are part of London society and on the wealthier side.

Firstly, what do they imagine to be a magician's typical appearance to be? When meeting Mr Norrell for the first time, Drawlight realizes he has confused Norrell's servant, Childermass, for him, because of his appearance. He corrects this error by saying "I plainly see that whereas *he* [meaning Childermass] has the wild, romantic looks one associates with magicians, *you* [meaning Norrell] have the meditative air of a scholar."¹⁸¹ This idea of a magician having a wild, dark look and ideally resembling the Raven King, which is based on traditional accounts of the Raven King and of magicians from the past, is repeated multiple times throughout the novel.

People are curious as to what magic Mr Norrell has been doing, and Drawlight is obliged to invent a story he believes will interest them. His idea of useful and interesting magic is one where Mr Norrell summons a group of fairies to clean washing which had gotten dirty and torn due to a large storm. This story excites much public interest and it follows Mr Norrell for quite some time, so that when he is discussing his ideas of modern magic, this is what people imagine.¹⁸² Even more than hearing about feats of magic, many would like to see him perform some tricks for them. While he laments his lack of usefulness, Drawlight attempts to convince him that "[t]here are ladies and gentlemen all over Town who would be happy to see any little tricks or illusions you might like to shew us one evening after dinner."¹⁸³ They see magic mainly as a form of entertainment, or as a way to free oneself from menial tasks, though this is not as relevant to the majority of Norrell's audience. Mr Norrell is distraught by these misconceptions and requests, complaining: "The *utility* of the magic I have done is entirely lost on them. It is only the most frivolous sorts of magic that excite their interest."¹⁸⁴

Upon overhearing that there may be some discussions going on between Norrell and the Ministers, an unnamed gentleman exclaims his disapproval of it, saying: "What?

¹⁸¹ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 61.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 76.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, 77.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 141.

Are the Ministers got so desperate as that? Are they consulting magicians?"¹⁸⁵ Clearly, in his opinion magic is all well and good for their entertainment, but it has no place in politics.

By publishing the periodicals, *The Friends of English Magic* and *The Modern Magician*, where the articles are written and edited under his supervision, Norrell hopes to educate the public on the issues and ideas of what he deems modern magic. Though it is unclear exactly how successful this endeavour is on a wide scale, in the following example it is apparent that people are aware of his theory, they are just not quite sure what it entails. When Strange declares his intention to pursue the study of magic, he is first dissuaded by his friend because he claims there is no practical application for it. This is met with opposition:

"Oh, but I think you are wrong!" said Mr Redmond. "There is that gentleman in London who confounds the French by sending them illusions! I forget his name. What is it that he calls his theory? Modern magic?"

"But how is that different from the old-fashioned sort?" wondered Mrs Redmond.¹⁸⁶

This example shows that the public may not be as invested in Norrell's theory as he would like them to be.

Of course, as Norrell and later Strange do more and different kinds of magic, the public opinion adjusts accordingly, from adoring them to being angry with Mr Norrell over his destruction of Strange's book, to a fear of Strange when he is enveloped by the pillar of darkness where he suddenly seems to be a threat to the nation.

For the general public, it appears that magic is something akin to entertainment, something to be marvelled at and not really taken seriously. Despite Norrell's attempts at educating the public, it appears most are only superficially familiar with the topic, enough to make contributions to a dinner party conversation.

6.1.7 What is the place of English magic on the political spectrum?

Through the analysis of various characters' attitudes to magic, it has been shown that the opinions they hold are diverse and multifaceted. The titular characters, Strange and Norrell, occupy opposing ends of the political spectrum, and their ideologies clash.

¹⁸⁵ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 78

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 257.

However, they eventually realise that their differences are inconsequential and it is only by joining their forces that they finally achieve the goal they had set for themselves, the revival of magic in England.

The novel does not promote any single attitude towards magic as the only correct one. Rather, it presents a wide variety of perspectives for the reader to consider. Notably, the middle- and higher-class characters tend to adopt a more conservative and cautious approach, which emphasises the need to make use of magic in a safe, controlled, and regulated way. However, the prevalence of this approach does not indicate that it is the correct one.

The incorporation of magic into an otherwise historically accurate world challenges the dominant political ideology of the time. *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* does not conform to the prevailing beliefs of the era. It is worth noting that initially, magic must operate within the established system to become more accepted and thus trustworthy. However, as it becomes more prevalent and accepted, it becomes an equalising force which disregards race, social class and status. Anybody, regardless of their background, can make use of it if the circumstances are right.

6.2 The role of minority characters

In this section, the attention turns more specifically to the role minority characters play in the narrative to examine what their influence is and whether they do truly play supporting roles as it appears from a superficial reading. As previously mentioned, the narrative is ultimately resolved not by the two titular characters, but by a servant, Childermass, a lower-class man, John Segundus, and a black man, Stephen Black. This is also stated by Elizabeth Hoeim, who similarly points out that "the novel's ruthless fairy antagonist is defeated by the allied efforts of women, blacks, and the very poor white magicians put out of business by the professionalization of magic."¹⁸⁷ The focus here will be on characters of colour and on women, with most attention paid to three characters, Stephen Black, Lady Pole, and Arabella Strange.

¹⁸⁷ Elizabeth Hoeim, "The Fantasy of Talking Back: Susanna Clarke's Historical Present in Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell," *Strange Horizons*, October 27, 2008, <http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/articles/the-fantasy-of-talking-back-susanna-clarkes-historical-present-in-jonathan-strange-and-mr-norrell/>.

6.2.1 The treatment of characters of colour

In the entirety of this novel, three characters of colour are mentioned. These are Perroquet, a servant of a French admiral; Stephen Black, a butler and a head servant of Sir Walter Pole; and briefly Joseph Johnson, a black sailor who supports himself by signing and begging on the streets.

Perroquet, the French admiral's servant is described as being "a very small man no bigger than an eight-year-old child, and as dark as a European can be. [...] His skin was the colour of a coffee-bean."¹⁸⁸ Though he has many positive qualities, it is stated that the admiral was "most of all, proud of his colour."¹⁸⁹ This description sets him up to be a throwaway character present for the sake of representation or to show the treatment of people of colour at the time. Though Perroquet appears in the novel only briefly, it is pointed out that he has quite a lot of influence over the admiral, which other high ranking officials dislike. Despite their dislike of him, he is instrumental in figuring out that the fleet of British ships blocking the port of Brest are not real, and after debating exactly what they are with the admiral and another captain, it is again Perroquet who figures out that they are illusions composed of rain.¹⁹⁰ In making this character who appears only once on a handful of pages indispensable in this way, Clarke goes beyond the stereotype she sets up according to historical precedent, and instead showcases the value these characters can have. In this, we can also see the influence of more modern, liberal ideas upon the issue of how people of colour are treated.

A character of colour who plays a much larger role in the narrative is Stephen Black, who is a butler and a trusted servant of Sir Walter Pole. He was brought to Britain as a child of a slave, though he was never a slave himself. He became a servant to Sir Walter Pole and steadily rose through the ranks of his servants. Similarly to Lady Pole, who will be discussed later in this chapter, he becomes enchanted by the Gentleman and is forced to attend his nightly balls at Lost-hope. Furthermore, the Gentleman frequently visits Stephen in England, promising to make him a king and defeat his enemies.¹⁹¹

Firstly, the position of authority Stephen holds is not an unusual one in general, as there often were servants who were given more power and authority over the others thanks to their intelligence or abilities, "[b]ut in Stephen's case it was all the more

¹⁸⁸ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 128-129.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 129.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 129-133.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, 187, 199, 216, 221, 402-403, 599.

extraordinary since Stephen was a negro."¹⁹² However, this highly unusual situation of his position is somewhat diminished when the narrator goes on to say that "[i]t certainly did him no harm that his master was a politician who was pleased to advertise his liberal principles to the world by entrusting the management of his house and business to a black servant."¹⁹³ In just a few sentences, Clarke sets up Stephen as a great servant who earned his position, only to qualify it by saying Sir Walter's political ideas have played a large part in this. Later, the reader learns that it may not all be so political, as Sir Walter is seen treating Stephen as an equal, ensuring he is afforded a good education and is provided for.¹⁹⁴ Just like with Perroquet, Clarke defies the expectations a reader may have of the typical position of a black servant in an early nineteenth century setting with the way Stephen is treated in Sir Walter's house.

When people meet him for the first time, frequently he is the first non-white person they have ever seen. For example, when Lady Pole's servants join the household, they ask a lot of questions about Stephen, including "what [does] he eat and drink"¹⁹⁵ as if he is a completely different species from them, but they do obey his authority. Their interest is not all negative, as it is revealed many believe him to be an African prince, however this is again undercut by the narrator's claim that "it was hardly likely that such independent, proud-spirited Englishmen and women would have submitted to the authority of a *black man*, had they not instinctively felt that respect and reverence which a commoner feels for a king."¹⁹⁶ This implication that there must be something more to Stephen than simply his intelligence and other positive qualities undermines his years of hard work and dedication, but it does explain the sentiment of the time. A more representative example is when he is stranded in the countryside and goes to request help from a local farmer where he is gawked at, ignored, and talked about as if he were not there or could not hear them. The farmer simply cannot believe that Stephen is speaking English and thus he claims not to understand, and among other things, he wondered "whether the black came off when Stephen touched things."¹⁹⁷ This allows the reader a glimpse into what life must have been like for Stephen outside his circle by showing a more typical, though still fairly restrained, reaction from a stranger.

¹⁹² Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 174.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, 174.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 220.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 175.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 175-176.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 673.

Despite being in a position of power, Stephen is painfully aware of the fact that this position and the privileges that come with it do not extend beyond the boundaries of Sir Walter's household. Stephen himself says that "skin can mean a great deal. Mine means that any man may strike me in a public place and never fear the consequences. It means that my friends do not always like to be seen with me in the street. It means that no matter how many books I read, or languages I master, I will never be any thing but a curiosity – like a talking pig or a mathematical horse."¹⁹⁸ Stephen is speaking from experience. Earlier in the novel, there is a scene where he collides with a gentleman in the street, and immediately he wonders whether the friendship of Sir Walter will be enough to save him from the inevitable false accusation of an attempted theft. Before anything can happen, he is saved by the Gentleman who transports him to Lost-hope.¹⁹⁹ Though this is not the only incident, it is the most telling one.

Later, he encounters Joseph Johnson, a black beggar who used to be a sailor, asking for money. While the reader may expect some solidarity between the two black men, the opposite is true. Stephen looks away and ignores him, because "[h]e always took great care not to speak to, or in any way acknowledge, negroes of low station. He feared that if he were seen speaking to such people, it might be supposed that he had some connexion with them."²⁰⁰ This serves as another example of just how unusual Stephen's position is and how careful he feels he must be in order to retain said position.

When discussing slavery with the Gentleman, Stephen says that he is not a slave, and goes on to claim that "[n]o one who stands on British soil can be a slave. The air of England is the air of liberty. It is a great boast of Englishman that this is so."²⁰¹ This claim is quite interesting, as the purchasing and selling of slaves had been made illegal in 1807, however the ownership of slaves was not outlawed until 1833 by the Slavery Abolition Act.²⁰² This would make it seem as if Stephen was simply lucky to have been freed by Sir Walter. However, there is some legal precedent for this, as a 1772 case involving a black man named Somersett, where the court declared that he may not be transported back to the colonies to be sold as a slave as there is no institutionalised version of slavery in Britain, was quickly taken to mean that there could be no slavery in Britain without an

¹⁹⁸ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 677.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 201-203.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 319.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 404.

²⁰² "Parliament and the British Slave Trade: Key Dates," UK Parliament, accessed May 1, 2023, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/tradeindustry/slavetrade/key-dates/>.

explicit law that positively defines it.²⁰³ Nevertheless it is unclear whether this is what Stephen was referring to or if he simply believed that there was no slavery in Britain anymore as a result of the 1807 Act. Either way, right after declaring this, he thinks to himself "and yet [...] they own slaves in other countries,"²⁰⁴ showing the dissonance between these two concepts.

The last point of interest when it comes to Stephen Black are his interactions with the Gentleman, who seems to take a liking to him almost immediately. Though his treatment of Stephen Black may appear more egalitarian at first, as he repeatedly declares his belief that Stephen must be of a royal origin, seemingly unaware of the racial inequality prevalent in England. However, as was previously discussed, he subscribes to a similar hierarchical organisation of society, but in his case it is one based on one's beauty instead of racial and national origin. Stephen is enchanted and regularly stolen away to Lost-hope just like Lady Pole, and his voice and freedom is taken away from him. He is placed under a muffling spell, which prevents him from speaking out. In the end he is his own rescuer, when the whole of England mistakes him for the Raven King and he defeats the Gentleman, freeing himself as well as those who had been stolen away just like himself, including Arabella Strange. Despite his protestations that he is not a king and that he does not want to rule, Stephen Black leaves England behind together with his given name and becomes the new ruler of Lost-hope in accordance with fairy rules of succession, vouching to set right all the wrongs and faults of the previous ruler.²⁰⁵ Birns argues that by "having Black so intimately involved in a plot concerning the restoration of English magic, Clarke is also urging the reader to consider black Britishness as part of the very concept of England itself,"²⁰⁶ which is an issue of rising interest nowadays.

From the way these characters are treated, it is readily apparent that Britain of the early nineteenth century has a long way to go when it comes to racial equality. Though there are those with more liberal viewpoints, such as Sir Walter, they are in the minority, as is proven by just the handful of incidents Stephen Black is involved in. Though his

²⁰³ Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 99-105.

²⁰⁴ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 404.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 989.

²⁰⁶ Birns, "Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell, the Magic of Sociality, and Radical Fantasy," 9.

inclusion, position and the role he plays in the narrative defies what would have been typical at the time, it is still grounded in reality.

6.2.2 The treatment of women

Next, the attention turns to the position of women depicted in the novel. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, married women were essentially the property of their husbands, their position best summarised by Barbara Leigh Smith who stated that '[a] man and a wife are one person in law; the wife loses all her rights as a single woman, and her existence is entirely absorbed in that of her husband.'²⁰⁷ There were legal provisions which could be made to ensure that a lady could have access to separate funds and manage portions of her estate, this was a privilege which could only be afforded by the wealthy.²⁰⁸ To paint a picture of what the expectations were, William Acton describes the perfect woman as being "kind, considerate, self-sacrificing, and sensible, so pure-hearted as to be utterly ignorant of and averse to any sensual indulgence, but so unselfishly attached to the man she loves, as to be willing to give up her own wishes and feelings for his sake."²⁰⁹ This reflects the expectations placed upon women throughout the nineteenth century, and this is the starting point of both the characters which will be analysed. In this section, first how women are treated in general will be discussed, followed by a closer look at the two main female characters, Lady Pole and Arabella Strange, and their influence on the narrative.

As the setting of *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* is a historically accurate one, so are its depictions of how women are treated and what is seen as acceptable in this society. For men hoping to better their social standing, marriage was often seen as a way to achieve this. For Sir Walter, his marriage to Miss Wintertowne (future Lady Pole) is repeatedly presented as a way for him to get out of debt and improve his financial situation, and when she dies, the talk is less about how sad the death of one so young is, and instead the focus is on Sir Walter and his finances. Drawlight declares: "Had she only contrived to remain alive until the end of the week, what a difference it would have made!

²⁰⁷ Barbara Leigh Smith, *A Brief Summary, in Plain Language of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women; Together with a Few Observations Thereon* (London: Holyoake and Co., 1856), 4.

²⁰⁸ See "Report of the Personal Laws Committee (of the Law Amendment Society) on the Laws Relating to the Property of Married Women," reproduced in the *Westminster Review*, New Series, Vol. X (London: John Chapman, 1856), 353-354.

²⁰⁹ William Acton, "The Perfect Ideal of an English Wife," in *Strong-Minded Women: and Other Lost Voices from Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. Janet Horowitz Murray (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), <https://archive.org/details/strongmindedwome00murr/>, 129.

His need of the money is quite desperate – he is all to pieces."²¹⁰ A similar attitude is seen when another man, Arabella's brother, is discussing his potential bride, he describes her as "not generally considered one of the first in beauty"²¹¹ but he goes on to defend her other agreeable qualities. When the question of money comes up, he "triumphantly" replies with a figure of ten thousand pounds, which seems to explain his defence of her character over beauty. This showcases that for many of the middle- and upper-class, marriage was more akin to a business deal than to a romantic affair.

Lady Pole, also known by her unmarried name of Miss Wintertowne, is arguably the reason why English magic came back into the public eye in such a positive light, as it is her resurrection which marks the true beginning of its revival, launching Mr Norrell's career as England's first practical magician of his time. In spite of this, Norrell clearly does not care about what happens to Lady Pole, he is more concerned with Sir Walter's opinion and continued support of his own goals. He even says: "What is the fate of one young woman compared to the success of English magic?"²¹²

With Lady Pole specifically, the reader is afforded a look at what the day to day life of women of her social status is like. She is often depicted as being treated as not really being in the room or as background noise, her presence barely acknowledged, as is the case when Norrell first pays a visit to Sir Walter. After their marriage, this is acknowledged even more explicitly. After a brief conversation between the two of them on the topic of his responsibilities as part of the Government which keep him busy most of the time, the narrator observes that "[s]he seemed so cheerfully resigned to his neglecting her that he could not help opening his mouth to protest – but the justice of what she said prevented him from saying a word."²¹³ This is in stark contrast with her opinions which she expresses after she is freed from the Gentleman's enchantment, where she accuses Strange of neglecting his wife for the sake of his work and research.

Lady Pole does not change from an apparent angel in the house into an angry and opinionated woman overnight, it is a result of years of enchantment and her inability to explain her situation to anyone, thanks to the effects of the muffling spell, which prevent her from talking about Lost-hope altogether. In a way, her enchantment and imprisonment in Lost-hope "symbolically represents the entrapment of women in the role of domestic

²¹⁰ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 95.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 616.

²¹² *Ibid*, 212.

²¹³ *Ibid*, 120.

angels; her inability to express her dread due to the muffling spell corresponds to the lack of a female voice in historical records.”²¹⁴ Her desperation to alert someone to her plight steadily grows, and she attempts to shoot Mr Norrell in hopes that his death may free her from the contract he has made with the Gentleman. Instead, she wounds his servant, Childermass, and is promptly sent off to the countryside to a mad-house. This is another act which further silences her, and at the mad-house this silencing is made visible, when Segundus, the keeper of the house and the man who first wanted to establish a magical school there, asks Stephen Black: "What is the magic that surrounds you and her ladyship? [...] There is a red-and-white rose at your mouth. And another at hers. What does that mean?"²¹⁵ He is the first person to notice this physical manifestation of the silencing spell. Segundus is also the first to realise that Lady Pole is not mad, she is under the effects of a spell. This silencing and presentation of Lady Pole as a madwoman echoes the trope of the madwoman in the attic prevalent in the literature of this period.²¹⁶

After she is freed from the grasp of the Gentleman by Childermass and Segundus who simply "did the magic"²¹⁷ Lady Pole is angry, rightly so, and she springs into action in order to save Stephen Black and Arabella Strange from the Gentleman's enchantment as well. She immediately starts writing letters, not to her husband, but to editors of newspapers, and high-ranking officials, including the Prime Minister, the Prince Regent, and the Archbishop of Canterbury. This is not the normal way things are done, but she argues that she does not "intend to go, in the space of one hour, from the helplessness of enchantment to another sort of helplessness."²¹⁸

In *Lady Pole*, we can see the evolution of a female character from one who accepts her place as subservient to her husband to one who, out of necessity and desperation, stands up for herself and for those less fortunate than her, who will not accept her old position and the expectations that come with it. In this way, she breaks the stereotype of a woman as an angel in the house in favour of becoming more independent and strong-willed.

²¹⁴ Borowska-Szerszun, "The Interplay of the Domestic and the Uncanny in Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*," 9.

²¹⁵ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 669.

²¹⁶ Peter D. Mathews, *English Magic and Imperial Madness: The Anti-Colonial Politics of Susanna Clarke's Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2021), 73-76.

²¹⁷ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 936.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, 979.

Briefly, Arabella Strange will be discussed as well, though her part in the narrative is much smaller than Lady Pole's. Arabella appears to be the only person who befriends Lady Pole in spite of her distant behaviour, and she regularly visits. This is where the Gentleman takes notice of her and eventually, by creating an illusion where she dies, he enchants her and kidnaps her to Lost-hope. There, she and Lady Pole are discovered by Strange, who cannot help them. She is ultimately freed by Stephen Black killing the Gentleman.

Similarly to Lady Pole, Arabella starts as a wife who aims to please her husband in whichever way possible, be that moving with him to London, entertaining his guests, and generally placing his needs and wants before her own. She, too, begins to outgrow this restrictive position, which can be first properly seen in her attempt to defy Norrell's monopoly on books of magic and purchase some books for her husband instead. She spends weeks attempting to borrow enough money for this task. At the auction, it is pointed out that "[s]uch was the general respect for Mr Norrell that not a single gentleman in the room bid against him. But a lady bid against him for every book,"²¹⁹ yet Norrell outbid her for every single one of the books in question. His behaviour towards her is seen as extremely rude, as he ignored her presence entirely.

After her kidnapping and eventual return, there is no immediate reunion with her husband. In fact, they reunite at the very end of the book, only to part again, Arabella "did not offer to go into the Darkness with him and he did not ask her."²²⁰ She makes a choice to stay on her own rather than follow her husband wherever he goes, thus emancipating herself from him and his influence and declaring herself to be her own person.

To summarise, we can see that both women go through a similar development, from being quiet, devoted wives to becoming more outspoken and independent as a result of their voices and their autonomy being taken away from them by the Gentleman. His actions could be taken as a more explicit version of the way patriarchy silences women, especially in a more conservative, traditional societies.

²¹⁹ Clarke, *Strange & Norrell*, 362.

²²⁰ *Ibid*, 1006.

6.3 Overview of liberal and conservative influences

As *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* takes place in an alternate but historically accurate version of early nineteenth century Britain, the expectation is that it would reproduce the social and class system, where power and status is based on one's origins, family, and property. Indeed, a superficial reading would seem to confirm this, as the titular characters are middle-class, reasonably wealthy, white men, which gives them a distinct advantage over others of a lower social standing. This means that they face much fewer obstacles in attempting to achieve their goal of restoring magic to England, such as when Mr Norrell is able to use his position and connections to arrange a meeting with a cabinet minister. This is all supported by the inherently conservative system of society which was present at the time.

The gentleman with thistle-down hair and his kingdom of Lost-hope are set up to appear as an opposing option to this rigid system, as he immediately takes a liking to Stephen Black and declares his intentions of making him king. In Lost-hope, the Faerie kingdom, rulers are selected not based on their family or origin, instead the new ruler is he who defeats the old king. This system may appear more egalitarian, and in a way it is. However, the Gentleman himself subscribes to a similar set of beliefs the English public does, his is simply based on appearance and beauty instead of race and class.

Though the two main characters, Jonathan Strange and Gilbert Norrell, are set up as standing in opposition to one another in their views, Strange being a more liberal opposition to Norrell's staunch conservatism, it is only when they combine their powers and their respective strengths that they ultimately achieve their goal of bringing magic back to England in its full force.

Minority characters present in the novel do not maintain the status quo, Clarke uses them to highlight not only the injustices done to them, but also to challenge some of the notions surrounding them which were present in actual early-nineteenth century literature. Stephen Black, the most visible character of colour in the novel, enjoys a high position in the household of a minister, yet he is readily faced with racism and injustices simply because of the colour of his skin. His involvement in the revival of English magic which culminates with his defeat of the Gentleman subverts reader expectations and highlights the issues with categorising people simply based on their race and origins, which fits within liberal ideology with its emphasis on individuals and their rights. It also highlights the concept of pluralism and toleration.

The second group of minority characters are women, the ones discussed here were Lady Pole and Arabella Strange. This novel breaks down the idea of a home as a safe, domestic space²²¹ and this in turns causes the two women to cast off the ideal of being an angel in the house when they are betrayed and ignored by the men in their lives. The novel highlights the issues of silencing women and through its use of the image of the madwoman in the attic, it shows its flaws and shortcomings in its overbroad application. Instead, both women become more independent and outspoken, deciding to take charge of their own lives and futures instead of being controlled by someone else again. This goes against the ideology of the early nineteenth century and is another example where more liberal ideas of equality and equal opportunities come into play.

On the whole, the novel does not blindly support and hold up the ideals and ideologies of the early nineteenth century. Instead, it engages in a dialogue with them, critically examining certain ideas which may have been taken for granted, and it introduces a more liberal point of view on many issues.

²²¹ Borowska-Szerszun, "The Interplay of the Domestic and the Uncanny in Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*," 8-10.

CONCLUSION

Though speculative fiction and fantasy are often present and regarded as escapist genres which intentionally does not consider or reflect the issues and politics of the real world, it has been shown that this is not necessarily the case with every piece of fiction within these genres. In fact, some go as far as to claim that nearly all fiction within these genres is closely linked with the concerns and politics of the writer's time. *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, the novel in question in this thesis, is no different.

There were two main questions posed as part of this thesis. The first one was what genre does *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* fall under, which was the focus of chapters four and five. The issue of genre identity is a complex one, and the analysis of possible genres here was by no means an exhaustive one. The genres characterised here were speculative fiction and fantasy and alternate history, with a brief introduction of the subgenre of historical fantasy. Elements of both fantasy and alternate history are present within this novel. However, it does not meet all the criteria of alternate history. The conclusion is that the subgenre of historical fantasy may be a suitable compromise, as it combines elements of both fantasy and alternate history.

The second question was whether the historical setting and tone of the novel together with its genre identity warrant the belief that it is inherently conservative in its nature, or whether the influence of modern ideas and ideologies can be observed in the text. This was the focus of chapters two, three, and six. Firstly, the key concepts and characteristics of both liberalism and conservatism were defined in order that they may be used in the analysis of their influence on the text of the novel. This was done firstly by examining the various attitudes to magic present in the novel and determining whether these align with the ideas of liberalism, conservatism, or both. The two titular characters, Strange and Norrell, occupy opposing ends of the political spectrum, being more liberal and conservative respectively, thus their opinions frequently clash. Ultimately, their issues are resolved and they come together and only in doing so are they able to achieve their goals. The other characters discussed in general represent a more conservative approach to the issue, emphasising a careful and controlled adoption of magic. In spite of this, *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* does not promote any single attitude towards magic as the only correct one, instead presenting a range of perspectives to be considered.

Introducing magic into a world that is otherwise portrayed as historically accurate poses a challenge to the dominant political ideology of the time and indeed, *Jonathan*

Strange & Mr Norrell does not adhere to the dominant beliefs of its era. In the beginning, magic needs to operate within the existing system to gain more widespread acceptance and build trust. As it becomes more commonplace and accepted, it can become an equalizing force that disregards differences in race, social class, and status. Anyone, regardless of their background, can utilise magic under the right circumstances.

Next, the role of minority characters in the narrative was examined, focusing on characters of colour and on women. It is clear from the treatment of characters of colour that early nineteenth century Britain had a significant amount of progress to make in terms of achieving racial equality. While some characters, such as Sir Walter, hold more progressive attitudes, they are outnumbered, as demonstrated by the incidents in which Stephen Black is involved. Despite defying the typical portrayal of a character like him in that era and occupying a significant position in the story, his role remains realistic. Both women who were analysed here, Lady Pole and Arabella Strange, undergo a transformation from submissive, loyal wives to more assertive and self-reliant women due to their voices and freedom being taken away by the Gentleman's enchantment. His actions can also be seen as a more explicit manifestation of the patriarchal oppression of women, particularly in more traditional societies.

To briefly summarise these findings, the novel challenges the ideals and political beliefs of the early nineteenth century by engaging in a critical dialogue with them, examining ideas which were commonplace and rarely questioned at the time by introducing a more liberal point of view on many issues. In doing this, it creates a space for discussion of the norms of the time.

RESUMÉ

Tato diplomová práce je zaměřena na problematiku vlivu politické filozofie, především liberalismu a konzervatismu, na fantasy literaturu. To vše je zkoumáno v románu *Jonathan Strange & pan Norrell* (2004) od Susanny Clarke, který zpochybňuje ideály a politické názory počátku devatenáctého století tím, že s nimi vede kritický dialog, zkoumá myšlenky, které byly v té době běžné a zřídka zpochybňované, a představuje liberálnější perspektivu na mnoho témat.

Tato práce se skládá ze šesti kapitol. V první kapitole je krátce představena Susanna Clarke a její díla. Nejvíce pozornosti je věnováno shrnutí důležitých událostí z románu *Jonathan Strange & pan Norrell*, o kterém tato práce pojednává.

Druhá a třetí kapitola poskytují přehled charakteristických znaků a principů liberalismu a konzervatismu, nejprve obecně a poté se zaměřením na jejich aplikaci v oblasti kultury a literatury. Jako základní principy liberalismu jsou identifikovány jednotlivec a jeho práva, ochrana těchto práv svobodně zvolenou vládou, svoboda, soukromý majetek, rovnost, konsent, pluralismus, a tolerance. Jako základní principy konzervatismu jsou identifikovány tradice, lidská nedokonalost, organický charakter společnosti, hierarchie, autorita, a soukromý majetek.

Ve čtvrté kapitole jsou prezentovány teoretické základy pro analýzu žánru tohoto románu. Žánry fantasy a alternativní historie jsou zde definovány a jejich charakteristické znaky identifikovány. V páté kapitole jsou tyto poznatky aplikovány na román *Jonathan Strange & pan Norrell*, který je na základě analýzy kategorizován jako fantasy, s návrhem konkrétnější klasifikace jako historické fantasy, což je subžánr fantasy. Román obsahuje prvky žánru alternativní historie, ale nenaplnuje všechna kritéria pro plné zařazení do této kategorie.

Šestá kapitola je zaměřená na projevy liberalismu a konzervatismu v tomto románu, konkrétně na to, jak jednotlivé postavy vnímají magii, zda je jejich přístup ovlivněn spíše konzervatismem nebo liberalismem. Jejich vliv je také analyzován v přístupu k postavám ze dvou menšin, rasových a genderových. *Jonathan Strange & pan Norrell* zpochybňuje ideály a politické přesvědčení počátku devatenáctého století tím, že zkoumá myšlenky a postoje, které byly v té době běžné a prostřednictvím těchto postav je kritizuje.

Vnesení magie do fikčního světa, který je jinak historicky hodnověrně vykreslený, představuje výzvu pro dominantní politickou ideologii té doby. Román *Jonathan Strange & pan Norrell* se skutečně těchto názorů nedeří. Zpočátku musí magie fungovat v rámci stávajícího sociálního a politického systému, aby získala širší přijetí a důvěru politiků i širší veřejnosti. Jakmile se stane běžnější a přijímanější, může se stát zrovnoprávňující silou, která nebere ohled na rozdíly v rase, pohlaví, společenské třídě a postavení. Každý, bez ohledu na svůj původ, může za správných okolností využívat magii.

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ANNOTATION

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This diploma thesis is focused on the influence of political philosophy, especially liberalism and conservatism, on fantasy literature. This is examined in Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* (2004), a novel which challenged the ideals and political views of the early nineteenth century by engaging in critical dialogue with them, exploring common ideas which were rarely questioned at the time. Additionally, it presents a more liberal perspective on many topics, such as race and gender equality.

ANOTACE

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Tato diplomová práce je zaměřena na problematiku vlivu politické filozofie, především liberalismu a konzervatismu, na fantasy literaturu. To vše je zkoumáno v románu *Jonathan Strange & pan Norrell* (2004) od Susanny Clarke, který zpochybňuje ideály a politické názory počátku devatenáctého století tím, že s nimi vede kritický dialog, zkoumá myšlenky, které byly v té době běžné a zřídka zpochybňované, a představuje liberálnější perspektivu na mnoho témat, jako je otázka rasové a genderové rovnosti.