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## Intrusion, Immersive or Irregular: Classifying the Fantasy of *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* with the Intertextual Influence of *Sir Orfeo*

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### Introduction

Often when we think of fantasy we think of far off places or some magical world completely removed from our own. We think of C.S. Lewis's Narnia or J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle Earth. Even J. K. Rowling's wizards and witches are distinctly divided from and inaccessible to non-magical people. But what happens when this Other Place comes into contact with our world? Susanna Clarke explores this type of contact in her novel *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*. Relating the adventures of two magicians in early nineteenth century England, the novel describes what happens when the magic of the Faerie realm interacts with our world or, more specifically, with England. The ultimate effect is one where each place does not exist independently of one another but rather are ontologically connected. Unpacking the particulars of this existential coexistence and identifying the exact nature of Clarke's fantasy is no easy task. For this it is helpful to turn to Farrah Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, a book dedicated to the classification of five different types that a fantasy work might fall into: portal-quest, immersive, intrusion, liminal and irregular. Despite the thorough detail that Mendlesohn achieves in outlining and explaining each category, Clarke's novel remains exceedingly difficult to place. In addition to Mendlesohn's book then, we must also turn to the outside influence of other primary texts, like the Middle English poem *Sir Orfeo*, to classify the intricate fantasy that is *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*.

*Sir Orfeo* belongs to a particular Middle English genre known as Medieval Romance. Although separated by a span of several hundred years, both Medieval Romance and modern-day Fantasy are similar as genres, making the comparison between *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* and *Sir Orfeo* appropriate. Aside from the similarities as genres, the two texts share a considerable amount of likeness concerning their themes and content. The main source of their affinity is Faerie. The *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* defines Faerie simply as: "the land of the Fairies, or fairyland" (Clute and Grant). Both the novel and the poem describe the intimate encounters between this place and England. Consequently, *Sir Orfeo* serves as an excellent source to compare and contrast the nature of Clarke's Faerie, and by extension the fantastical nature of the novel itself. Thus, we can arrive at what type of fantasy Clarke's novel is by making extensive use of Mendlesohn's categorization system, as well as accounting for the influence historical texts such as *Sir Orfeo* can have on modern fantasy like *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*.

### Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell Summary

Published in 2004, *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* tells an epic story of two magicians in nineteenth century England navigating the throes of British politics, the Napoleonic wars, and the perils of Faerie magic. The first portion of the novel is dedicated to introducing Mr. Gilbert

Norrell, a reclusive elderly man dedicated to the study and practice of English magic. Within Clarke's England the notion of magic is prevalent, but the practice of magic is not and has not been for roughly two hundred years. Many people study magic, but almost no one performs it and so, sadly, the merit of magic in England has been reduced in societal stature: "Magic (in the practical sense) was much fallen off. It had low connexions.... A gentleman might study the history of magic (nothing could be nobler) but he could not do any" (4). Norrell's main ambition as a practical magician is to change this degraded societal view of magic and restore the respectability of it. He finds himself leaving the comforts of his country residence for the bustling city of London in order to make his mark: "Get me 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" (44). While Norrell is a fierce defender of the integrity of magic, he also has rigid beliefs concerning the ways that magic should be used and a strict policy against any magic that involves Faeries. In his plight to win over England and restore the appreciation of practiced magic, Norrell finds himself going against his own regulations to save a young woman, Lady Pole, from death. Severely ill and set to marry her fiancé, Lady Pole passes away causing much grief and communal upheaval. Norrell, having begun to display his amazing magic to the rest of England, is approached and begged to bring her back to life. Against his good conscience, Norrell agrees and enlists the aid of a Faerie, who Clarke refers to as "the gentleman with thistledown hair," to restore Lady Pole. What Norrell doesn't know, though, is the cursed life Lady Pole has following her remarkable revival. She is doomed to live half in England and half in Faerie as every night she is whisked away to the gentleman with the thistledown hair's haunting hall. Lady Pole's liminal existence between England and Faerie and her nightly kidnapping by the Faerie will come to speak to some of the novel's larger themes such as ontological matters and affiliations with the poem *Sir Orfeo*, respectively.

Clarke dedicates the next section of the novel to Jonathan Strange. A younger and more charming man than Norrell, Strange has struggled to find his calling in life. After stumbling upon some magic, Strange is initially doubtful at the prospect, but soon finds himself zealously dedicated to his new profession as a practical magician. As the novel continues, Strange and Norrell come to meet each other in London and soon, Strange becomes Norrell's official apprentice. The arrangement between Strange and Norrell initially goes well until the two develop an extreme difference of opinion on Faerie magic. Norrell is of the position that Faerie, Faerie people, and Faerie magic are all dangerous and insistently warns Strange against them. Strange, having an impulsive and curious personality, soon disregards Norrell's cautioning and finds himself daring to interact ever increasingly with the Faerie realm. His beloved wife, Arabella Strange, soon finds herself suffering at Strange's lack of caution as she, much like Lady Pole, becomes subject to the clutches of the gentleman with the thistledown hair. Strange's intense interest in Faerie, along with Arabella's intimate experience with a Faerie person, will later help to discuss some of the qualities the Faerie realm in the novel has as compared to the Faerie realm in *Sir Orfeo*.

The third and final part of Clarke's novel is entitled "John Uskglass." Also known as the Raven King, Uskglass is an ominous and mysterious character. Portrayed as a historical legend throughout the novel, Uskglass is believed by most (with the exception of Norrell) to be the

greatest English magician there ever was. Interestingly, while he is referenced often by the characters and footnotes of the novel, the Raven King never actually makes an appearance, save for one brief moment towards the end where Clarke strongly insinuates, but never actually confirms, that it is him. However, despite his lack of physical presence within the novel, the Raven King nevertheless enhances a discussion on Faerie. Born in England (and therefore human) but raised in Faerie, the Raven King embodies the liminal aspects between England and Faerie that are woven all throughout the novel. As ruler of areas both in England and in Faerie (as well as Hell), the Raven King also speaks to the intertextuality existent between Clarke's novel and other historical English texts, as will be discussed later. This third part of the novel, therefore, is aptly named as it witnesses an increasing presence and influence of Faerie within England. Between Norrell's efforts to restore English magic to its former glory, Strange's ceaseless pursuit of Faerie, and some prophetic force of fate, the boundaries of England begin to become indistinct from those of Faerie: "England seemed to be wearing thin" (746). Thus, the final portion of the novel extensively explores the ontological obscurity of England and Faerie.

### Sir Orfeo Summary

*Sir Orfeo*, a fourteenth-century medieval romance, is helpful in discussing *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* by comparing the themes of Faerie in both texts. The poem relates the tale of a king, Sir Orfeo, who loses his beloved queen, Dame Heurodis, and journeys into Faerie to rescue her. While based on the Greek myth about Orpheus and Eurydice, the poem utilizes traditional Middle English romance tropes such as the Faerie realm. The romance begins by describing the many English lays that have been written and how many of them refer to Faerie (10). The lay then quickly introduces Sir Orfeo himself and describes his prestigious lineage, his many redeeming qualities and his fluency as a harpist. Dame Heurodis is next introduced and her great beauty is described. One day in May, Heurodis finds herself falling asleep underneath a fruit tree while watched over by her maids. As the morning turns to afternoon, the maids are startled as Heurodis wakes up in a full panic and begins to viciously scratch her own face and tear at her clothes. Once Heurodis is brought back to Orfeo's castle and he sees her, there is despairing belief that she has gone mad. She then tells Orfeo that they can no longer be together, to which he desperately protests and demands a reason. At this, Heurodis relates her experience while under the tree; as she lay there, two knights approached and instructed her to follow them to their lord who wished to speak with her. At her refusal, the knights went away and then quickly returned with their king and hundreds of other knights and ladies who proceeded to steal her away to their land. After showing off his kingdom to her, this king then warns her that she must

Looke tomorwe that thou be  
Right here under this impe-tree,  
And thanne thou shalt with us go,  
And live with us everemo" (165-168).

The next day, despite Orfeo's efforts and an army to protect her, Heurodis is again taken away as she disappears from their midst. Despairing at the loss of his wife, Orfeo condemns himself

to exile leaving the kingdom in the hands of his steward and going to live a remote life in the forest. Orfeo spends ten long years in the forest until one day he sees a party of women riding by with his wife amongst them. Ecstatic, Orfeo follows the party through the woods until they eventually come to a large rock which the party also goes through. Once on the other side, Orfeo finds himself in a “fair countrey” (351), and the home of the king who kidnapped his wife. Orfeo eventually strikes a bargain with the king and wins back his wife by playing his harp beautifully and impressively. The lay ends on a romantic note as Orfeo returns to his kingdom, wife by his side, and takes up his role as king once again.

### **Rhetorics of Fantasy Summary**

Understanding the basic outline of both the novel and the poem, it is now useful to turn to Farrah Mendlesohn and her book *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, to help analyze and draw out some of the finer aspects of each work as well as create a discussion about the realm of Faerie. In *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Mendlesohn categorizes the fantasy genre into five separate groups: Portal-Quest Fantasy, Immersive Fantasy, Intrusion Fantasy, Liminal Fantasy and lastly, Irregular Fantasy. I will be discussing each one at length, with Irregular towards the end of the essay. To begin with, each of Mendlesohn’s fantasy categories comprise of particular defining features and characteristics; however, many of these features are not limited to one specific category. Thus, when identifying a particular fantasy text, it is effective to categorize it not based on a list of features but rather on overall compatibility. The boundaries of Mendlesohn’s categories are not rigid, but rather fuzzy, and so fantasy’s categorization is not always definitively defined. For example, Mendlesohn discusses *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* in a total of three of the five categories, suggesting that some fantasies are resistant to categorization and fall within several categories.

### **Liminal and Portal-Quest Fantasy**

Liminality is the fourth category in *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, however, because of its limited applicability in categorizing *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*, it will be discussed first. Despite liminality’s strong presence within *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*, liminal fantasy, as a category itself, fails to encompass the novel as a fantasy type. This is not to say that Clarke’s novel does not contain key elements of liminal fantasy, just that it does not hold up to Mendlesohn’s overall requirements. Mendlesohn asserts that one of the key aspects of liminal fantasy is when a text presents an instance of potential fantastic that leads to temptation. She then describes how, “the liminal moment that maintains the anxiety around this material temptation assists the creation of the tone and mode that we associate with the fantastic: its presence is represented as unnerving, and it is this sense of unnerving that is at the heart of the category I have termed liminal” (xxiii). Within Clarke’s novel, however, the fantastic is not portrayed as merely a tempting possibility, it is overtly present and active throughout. Thus, while liminality in itself is an important aspect of the novel (particularly when considering Faerie

and England in relation to one another for example), *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* does not meet the criteria to be considered a liminal fantasy.

The first of Mendlesohn's categories, portal-quest fantasy, also fails to capture the essence of Clarke's novel, however, it does engage more actively with the novel than liminal fantasy does. This fantasy category encompasses two types of fantasies that often are indistinct from one another, portal being one and quest the other. While *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* certainly contains and exhibits elements of this type of fantasy, the novel is definitively not a portal-quest fantasy. We know this as Mendlesohn describes the main criteria of this category as: "In both, and crucially, the fantastic is *on the other side* and does not leak" (1). Here the "both" is referring to portal and quest. As well, "on the other side" is referring to a portal of any type. Thus, for a fantasy text to be considered a portal-quest, the fantastic of the secondary world must not exist or enter into the character's primary world. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* serves as an example of this restriction since no magic from Narnia ever comes back into England with the Pevensie children (1). When considering *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* in relation to this standard then, England acts as the primary world and Faerie as the secondary. The novel has numerous moments where magic occurs and is used both in England and in Faerie. This makes it evident that Clarke's novel does not adhere to this crucial criterion. Mendlesohn further stresses the importance of this feature in portal-quest fantasy when saying, "Although individuals may cross both ways, the fantastic does not" (2). While certainly multiple characters in Clarke's novel do cross over to Faerie and return again to England, so too does the fantastic of the Faerie realm. Such instances of Faerie's presence within England are more frequent towards the end of the novel when the Raven King's presence is stronger within England: "Seventeen fairy roads have opened up in Yorkshire.... Inhabitants are reporting that they can see strange destinations at the end of them – places no one has ever seen before" (750-751). Faerie is no longer respecting the boundaries of England but is rather encroaching in on the country, so that a road between Yorkshire and some obscure place in Faerie no longer acts as a portal but more as a liminal transitioning. Faerie is not "on the other side," it is within and around England.

### **Immersive and Intrusion Fantasy**

The remaining two major categories of Mendlesohn's fantasies are immersive and intrusion, and it is here that the boundaries of the fantastic nature of *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* are not so easily defined. As such, while clarifying the definition of each category is necessary, it does not provide enough of a foundation to resolve the placement of Clarke's novel between the two. As immersive and intrusion fantasies are comprised of inclusivity and exclusivity respectively, there is a binary discourse between them and as such they will be discussed in relation to one another rather than separately.

Within her extensive chapter on immersive fantasy Mendelson does not mention Clarke's novel nor use it as an example, suggesting that she does not consider it immersive fantasy. However, upon closer analysis it becomes clear that *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* does fulfill the key features of an immersive fantasy. Mendlesohn underlines the key features of

immersive fantasy when saying: “Most important is that ... the point of view of the characters of an immersive fantasy *must* take for granted the fantastic elements with which they are surrounded; they must exist as integrated with the magical (or fantastic) even if they themselves are not magical” (xxi). At first glance it would seem that this definition does not describe the people of Strange and Norrell’s England. Many English citizens within the novel are awestruck or almost disbelieving when Norrell first begins to showcase his magic abilities. After Norrell performs a simple (to him at least) piece of magic and animates an old cathedral by giving the stones and statues voices, Mr. Segundus (a theoretical magician) insists that a letter be written to *The Times* newspaper to publicize these “extraordinary feats” (37). However, despite the lack of unification between these characters and the magic, an important distinction must be made; the source of the character’s surprise or awe in regard to the magic witnessed is not the fact that the magic exists, it is that the magic is being practiced.

In contrast to her immersive fantasy chapter, Mendlesohn mentions *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* numerous times in her intrusion fantasy chapter suggesting that, according to her, the novel is, if not perfectly, best categorized as an intrusion fantasy novel. While Clarke’s work certainly contains some aspects of this category, just as it does with portal-quest and liminal, *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* is definitively not an intrusion fantasy. To begin with, Mendlesohn explains that, “[t]he trajectory of the intrusion fantasy is straightforward: the world is ruptured by the intrusion, which disrupts normality which has to be negotiated with or defeated, sent back from whence it came, or controlled” (115). On the surface it could appear that this definition indeed encapsulates the fantastic elements of the novel. However, when considering aspects such as the rich magical history of England, the long-lasting interlacing between England and Faerie, as well as the ever “thinness” of England, it becomes clear that the novel is an immersive fantasy. By examining some of the finer aspects of the novel and assessing them based on Mendlesohn’s categorization, which this essay will do over the next few pages, it becomes clear how the book, on an overall scale, is best classified as an immersive fantasy and not an intrusion fantasy.

## Intertextuality

Before launching into the novel’s textual evidence demonstrating that the novel is an immersive fantasy, it is important to note that other primary texts, such as *Sir Orfeo*, can also support this classification through their intertextuality. M. H Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham define intertextuality as being

used to signify the multiple ways in which any one literary text is in fact made up of other texts, by means of its open or covert citations and *allusions*, its repetitions and transformations of the formal and substantive features of earlier texts, or simply its unavoidable participation in the common stock of linguistic conventions and procedures that are “always-already” in place and constitute the discourses into which they are born (401).

As such, through intertextuality, *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* is inevitably subject to the influence of many other literary works and some of the main features of the novel may be a

result of the culmination of all these past texts. Thus, a Middle English text such as *Sir Orfeo*, which shares many similar components and motifs with Clarke's novel, is appropriate to draw on when dissecting the novel's immersive versus intrusive motifs. James and Peggy Knapp reinforce this notion in *Medieval Romance: The Aesthetic of Possibility* when saying: "the English Orfeo looks forward as well as back, in details waiting to become the seeds of new tellings" (51). These "seeds" have certainly grown within Clarke's novel as the realm of Faerie clearly shares ties with its historical counterpart. Overall, in addition to all of the arguments that will be pulled from the novel itself, I will also be pulling from *Sir Orfeo* as it is a suitable means of finding evidence in support of *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell's* categorization.

With the importance of intertextuality in mind, it is necessary to clarify why *Sir Orfeo*, one of many Middle English texts dealing with the realm of Faerie<sup>1</sup>, is particularly appropriate to discuss alongside *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*. The two works share many similarities including Faerie kidnapping, instances of madness or altered consciousness, and extended physical descriptions of Faerie. Within the poem, it is quickly related how Lady Heurodis "was away ytwight, / With fairye forth ynome" (193-4), and for the following ten years is, presumably, under the restriction of the Faeries. Clarke echoes this encounter with Arabella Strange's kidnapping. Wife to Jonathan Strange, Arabella begins to exude an air of distance, as if she is retreating from the world. Shortly after being spotted wandering the cold and snowy moors jacketless, Arabella is found dead in her home. Little to the knowledge of her husband, or anyone else, she has actually been stolen away by the gentleman with the thistledown hair and imprisoned in his Faerie hall. Both Dame Heurodis and Arabella Strange are stolen away to eerie surroundings and a haunted existence as they wait for their respective husbands to retrieve them. The fairy halls that the ladies are imprisoned within in each text are also a point of similarity. Clarke describes the gentleman with the thistle-down hair's hall when Stephen Black (servant to Lady Pole and fellow captive of the faerie) enters it: "an immense stone house with a thousand windows. A feeble light shone out of some of these openings. A high wall surrounded the house. Stephen passed through... and found himself in a wide and dreary courtyard where skulls, broken bones, and rusting weapons were scattered about as if they had lain there for centuries" (172). The hall reflects the malicious and self-serving habits of its owner. The Fairy King's hall, however, is actually described as being beautiful and richly decorated,

Within ther were wide wones,  
And alle were fulle of precious stones.  
The worste pilar on to biholde  
Al it was of burnist golde (365-368).

Despite its profuse adornment, James and Peggy Knapp comment on how the "appearance only masks the horrors of the hall" (61). And indeed, once Orfeo wanders its halls, he is subject to its gruesome sights which reveal its true horrific nature. The vivid display of people enduring an endless and hopeless torture within both Faerie halls is a further parallel between the works.

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<sup>1</sup> Some other Middle English texts that involve Faerie include *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, and Marie de France's *Lanval*.

In addition to these connections are the instances of madness associated with those who have come into contact with Faerie. Once Heurodis has awoken from her nap, she immediately shows frantic signs of distress and there is an impression of her going mad:

The two maidenen hire biside  
 Ne durste with hire no leng abide,  
 But runne to the palais right  
 And tolde bothe squier and knight  
 That hir queene awede wolde (83-87).

Lady Pole parallels Heurodis's madness in Clarke's novel. A young woman whose unchecked illness leads to her death is brought back to life by Mr. Norrell and his use of Faerie magic. She is never quite the same and for many years after is supposed by everyone to be mad, as she raves randomly about nonconsequential matters. Aside from her servant Stephen Black, who also suffers from "madness," no one realizes that Lady Pole is not insane but is rather under extreme mental duress, as she is stolen away every single night and subjected to the tortures of the gentleman with the thistle-down hair's hall. Both Lady Pole and Dame Heurodis are so distraught with their encounter with Faerie that, once returned to England, they are assumed to be insane by everyone. Additionally, towards the end of the novel, once Strange learns that his wife, Arabella, is not dead but trapped in the man with the thistledown hair's hall, he comes to the conclusion that the only way he can access the hall to save Arabella is to drive himself insane. Even Mr. Norrell, reluctant to discuss Faerie in any form, concedes that, "Some of our most important writers have remarked upon the strong resemblance between madmen and faeries" (393). This link between madness and Faerie advocates for the intertextuality between the two texts and the possible direct influence of *Sir Orfeo* on *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*. Between the kidnapping, the halls of horror, and the moments of seeming madness, it is easy to draw a connection between the Faerie realm of Middle English and the Faerie realm of Clarke's fantasy.

### ***Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell as Immersive***

Turning to the novel itself now, we can see that *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* effectively and persistently reminds the reader of England's magical past and deep connections with Faerie, which in turn indicates the immersive nature of it. Primarily achieved through footnotes, Clarke often describes historical events in great detail concerning instances within England where Faerie has made itself known and magic has been practiced. In one particular passage, Clarke describes the history of the Shadow House, a famous magical landmark. Supposedly built in the late sixteenth century, for almost two hundred years it has been known as "one of the most magical places in England" (226). She goes on to recount the multiple magicians who have lived there over the years and some of the peculiar "activities" to have occurred there, such as a young female visitor who, upon looking into a mirror, saw the reflection of herself age from toddler to elderly woman until she effectively watched her whole life's ageing cycle, finishing with the reflection of a corpse. While this passage serves to provide the reader with an understanding of the presence of magical places and events within England's history, Clarke's



dedication to providing an extensive historical background is almost inexhaustible. She goes on to augment the Shadow House's history with a footnote speaking to its ruin and the last lady, Miss Absalom, to live within it. Miss Absalom explains how it is proper for the house to fall into ruin so that it might be returned to the Raven King even though, at this time, the Raven King has long been absent from England:

It is said in that day, in that hour [of ruin], our houses become the possessions of the Raven King. Though we bewail the end of English magic and say it is long gone from us and inquire of each other how it was possible that we came to lose something so precious, let us not forget that...one day we will no more be able to escape the Raven King than, in this present Age, we can bring him back (227).

Here, Clarke is effectively adding to the rich magical history of England she has created throughout the novel, while simultaneously explaining that magic and Faerie, represented by the Raven King, are also a part of England's future. This is just one of many instances where Clarke illustrates how integrated magic and Faerie are with England<sup>2</sup>. Magic is interwoven throughout England's past, and passages and footnotes such as this impress upon the reader that magic is no stranger to England.

Aside from the long presence of magic within England, there are other aspects of the novel which indicate it belongs to the immersive category, such as her emphasis on theoretical versus practical magicians. The distinction between the two types speaks to the fluctuation of magic's presence in England. As described in the previous paragraph, while England has long held a connection with magic and Faerie, over the last couple hundred years this connection has faded. The existence of theoretical magicians is a direct result of this.

A theoretical magician is someone who studies the history and theory of magic, but who does not actually perform or use magic; that is left to the practical magicians. During Norrell's time, he and Jonathan Strange are the only practical magicians known in England. There are, however, plenty of theoretical magicians who dedicate their lives to the theory of magic as seriously as doctors or lawyers do to their respective fields. While the actual usage of magic has faded not only out of practice but also from the field of respectful professions, the study of magic is not childish or absurd, but rather considered to be an esteemed academic discourse. Despite that English society is no longer as acquainted with the actual presence of magic as it formerly was, there is no doubt as to magic's existence or sincerity. It is commonly believed, understood, and studied that magic is a very real part of England's history and England itself. Strange reinforces this notion when speaking to Miss Greysteel, a friend of his: "English magic was shaped by England – just as England herself was shaped by magic. The two go together. You cannot separate them." To which she replies, "You mean, that English minds and history and so forth were shaped by magic" (659). This brief exchange between Strange and Miss Greysteel summarizes the overall disposition the novel takes; magic is an integral part of England and its history. In this regard, then, *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* meets Mendlesohn's qualifications regarding characters of immersive fantasy in that they "must take

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<sup>2</sup> Some other examples of this include the story of Master Nottingham's daughter pp. 258-262, a magical theory by a magician named Meraud p. 178, and a passage on shape-changing magic in England p. 574.

for granted the fantastic elements with which they are surrounded” (xxi). All of the characters within England, especially theoretical magicians, live with the common knowledge of magic’s presence in England’s history; thus, they are taking for granted the fantastic element of magic.

The ontological matter of England’s thinning correlates with England’s history of magic and the multitude of theoretical magicians present even during England’s least magical periods. The exact physical nature between England and Faerie, the boundaries and borders that simultaneously separate and connect them are indistinct, blurry, and ever changing. The matter of where Faerie exists has always been associated with an inexactness. Strange echoes this notion when he returns from a jaunt on the Faerie roads and describes their location merely as “Elsewhere” (586). In another instance, when Strange longingly expresses his desire to explore this “elsewhere” he ambiguously describes it as “wherever men of my sort used to go, long ago. Wandering on paths that other men have not seen. Behind the sky. On the other side of the rain” (406). Strange’s vague comments suggest that Faerie is not far off, rather, just out of reach. Later in the novel, when England sees a strong resurgence of magic, Norrell’s servant, Childermass, begins to see the world as if through two separate lenses at once: “Behind the stone-and-oak passages of Starecross Hall, a vision of another house leapt up. Childermass saw high corridors that stretched away into unthinkable distances. It was as if two transparencies had been put into a magic magic lantern at the same time, so that one picture overlaid the other” (785). Childermass is seeing both Faerie and England at once as if they exist in the same space, or, he exists in the liminal space between them. It is as though the realm of Faerie has been superimposed on the country of England. All these instances indicate that Faerie is not a secondary world that exists independent of England but rather a place that exists in conjunction with England. England, therefore, is a place of thinning. This idea of thinning is often imprecisely used in discussions on fantasy or fantasy worlds<sup>3</sup>. In this particular instance, though, I am using “thinning” to describe the lapse or reduction in the physical substantiality and solidity of a place. The independent and tangible distinction belonging to England’s ontological borders is thinned, blurred, and ill-defined when in contact with Faerie and the country is and always has been susceptible to the physical overlapping of Faerie as a result. Thus, when Mendlesohn states that “[t]he immersive fantasy is a fantasy of thinning” (60), *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* meets this criterion, further advocating for the categorization of the novel as immersive fantasy.

As mentioned earlier, categorizing a novel as complex and intricate as *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* as a particular type of fantasy proves to be no easy task; even Mendlesohn herself struggles with its classification. While she discusses the novel to a certain degree in the intrusion portion of her book, she also discusses the novel to some length as irregular fantasy, her final and most ambiguous category, which once again underscores the difficulty of the novel’s classification. Between these two chapters, Mendlesohn exhibits contradictory thoughts on how and where the novel best be placed. For example, she claims that all magic within the novel is intrusive. Later, in glaring contradiction, she says: “the truth of [Clarke’s] world is that

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<sup>3</sup> Mendlesohn, Clute and Grant have discussed thinning in each of their respective works. However, none of them actually explains or defines the actual meaning of thinning.

magic is not an intrusion” (168). While the finer points concerning magic and Faerie within Clarke’s novel are difficult to negotiate, as reflected in the contradictory nature of Mendlesohn’s assertions, the historical emphasis on magic, the existence of theoretical magicians, and England’s thinning all dictate that *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* is an immersive fantasy.

### Intrusion Within Each Text

While all these aspects of the novel indicate its inclusion as an immersive fantasy, and by extension its ill-fit as intrusion fantasy, *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* still exhibits some aspects of the intrusion category. Mendlesohn even goes so far as to claim that “All the magic in *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* is intrusion/disruption” (165). While I intend to refute this particular claim later on, there are certain aspects of the novel I concede reflect qualities of intrusion fantasy. Mendlesohn argues that, often in intrusion fantasy, “the fantastic is the bringer of chaos” (xxi). Many of the magical moments within the novel act not as chaotic but as an attempt at peace or out of defense, such as Strange’s efforts in the war against France or Norrell’s erecting defensive borders around England’s coast. However, there is one element of the novel that consistently heralds chaos: the gentleman with the thistle-down hair. Although never directly stated, the man with the thistledown hair is clearly a fairy (and interestingly nameless). Acutely recognized by Aunt Greysteel as “very mischievous creatures” (622), the gentleman with the thistle-down hair constantly brings misery and confusion to all he interacts with. From kidnapping Lady Pole and Stephen Black, who must spend endless haunting and sleepless nights in his hall in Faerie, to plotting the murder of the King of England, he is motivated by nothing but his own self-interests. Mendlesohn asserts that one of the conditions of an intrusion novel is that the intrusion itself must be defeated so that the world can return to its former normalcy (xxii). When, towards the end of the novel, Stephen Black conquers the gentleman with the thistle-down hair, some of the growing oddities within England are tamed or diffused. In this sense then, the gentleman with the thistle-down hair embodies the criteria of an intrusion novel.

Following this theme of intrusion, we must return to *Sir Orfeo*. While the Middle English poem is not a modern-day fantasy, applying some of Mendlesohn’s conditions or observations about immersive and intrusive fantasy to *Sir Orfeo* serve to further explore the intertextuality and relationship between the two, since they share strong affinities. In comparison to the novel, specifically concerning the ontological connection between Faerie and England, the poem exhibits more intrusive tendencies and less intertwinement between the two places. For example, unlike *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*, *Sir Orfeo* offers no explanation or suggestion that the characters are familiar with Faerie or that any past instances of positive interaction between England and Faerie have occurred. Indeed, the only acknowledgement that the Faerie King has had other dealings with England are the multitude of persons on torturous exhibit in his hall who seem to have also been kidnapped like Dame Heurodis (in this way the gentleman with the thistle-down hair seems to mirror the Faerie King’s nature). The lack of any historical relationship and the negativity of the interactions lends an invasive quality to Faerie within *Sir Orfeo* and by extension make intrusion a fitting categorization for the poem.

Despite the meddlesome and intrusive nature of the gentleman with the thistle-down hair, *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* does not fall within the intrusion category of Mendlesohn's fantasy types. Indeed, many of the points that advocate for the novel being an immersive fantasy double in detracting from it being intrusion. For instance, while there are many moments where magic and the overlapping of Faerie into England is disruptive it is not, as Mendlesohn states, intrusive. The word itself suggests an unwelcome and foreign quality, neither of which are true with magic and Faerie in reference to England. It is both Strange and Norrell's goal to encourage the return of magic to England and, as Clarke reiterates throughout the novel, Faerie has a long and intimate bond with England. As such, any magic and Faerie-esque aspects affecting England can hardly be considered intrusive. Furthermore, Mendlesohn also states that while "[t]he intrusion fantasy is not necessarily unpleasant, it has at its base the assumption that normality is organized and that when the fantastic retreats the world, while not necessarily unchanged, returns to predictability—at least until the next element of the fantastic intrudes" (xxii). Recalling one of her earlier discussions on portal-quest fantasy, Mendlesohn explains that the fantastic from the other side of the portal must not leak back into the primary world. Based upon this explanation of intrusion fantasy that Mendlesohn gives, it would seem that this type of fantasy could be considered a fantasy where the fantastic *does* leak back through to the primary world. In this sense then, Clarke's novel is certainly not a case of intrusion as Faerie and England share an existence linked by much more than just a portal. Faerie cannot definitively leak back into England when their ontological boundaries are so obscure, and their physical existences are inextricably bound up in each other; England cannot exist without Faerie and Faerie cannot exist without England. Mendlesohn suggests that, as an intrusion novel, England assumes normality in the absence of magic or Faerie. However, based on the long history of interaction between England and Faerie, the latter's presence does not act as intrusive fantasy but rather demonstrates the resurgence portion of a cycle where Faerie's link with England fluctuates in strength over long periods of time. Overall, with considerations of the relationship between Faerie and England, *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* should not be classified as an intrusion fantasy.

### **Irregular Fantasy**

Having discussed the intricacies of immersive and intrusive fantasy, and *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* and *Sir Orfeo* in relation to them, the last and perhaps most complicated of Mendlesohn's fantasy categories is Irregular. In her irregular fantasy chapter Mendlesohn expands upon *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell's* complicated categorization by addressing how the novel acts as both immersive and intrusion fantasy: "In the case of immersive fantasies that contain intrusions, we need to consider whether the location and the story of the fantastic is with the construction of the world, or with the intrusion. We can argue that with a novel such as *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*, it is not the world as we first meet it that we marvel at, but the intrusions that disturb this world" (246). According to this notion then, the source of the fantastic in the novel are the intrusive elements, such as Faerie and magic. However, what Mendlesohn does not consider is that the magic Faerie elements that come into England are not intrusive but

very familiar to England and have been so for a long time. Furthermore, the England that Clarke creates can certainly be marveled at as she spends considerable effort establishing a country rich with magical and supernatural places and past events, which also detracts from her point.

Additionally, if we recall Mendlesohn's portal-quest section, neither the poem nor novel meet the criteria; however, the distinction between worlds that is so prominent within this type of fantasy is far more present within *Sir Orfeo* than *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*. As Orfeo pursues his wife through the forest, he comes to a great stone which he passes through and emerges to find himself in Faerie. This scene presents Faerie as two distinctly separate worlds which depend on the stone-portal for any physical transactions. On the other hand, while also not a portal-quest fantasy, *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* contains stronger connections than mere portals between the two places. Of course, the novel contains many portals as well. They exist in several forms, some more physically definitive than others. One of the most commonly used by Jonathan Strange are mirrors. Before ever actually having entered Faerie, Strange seems drawn to mirrors with an intuitive sense saying: "It is the mirror. Does it not look as if one could just walk into it? It would not be so difficult I think" (406). As the novel progresses, Strange learns to walk into and out of many mirrors which act as portals from England to Faerie and back again. Aside from mirrors, Strange also remarks that, "Birch woods are well known for providing doors into Faerie" (409), another example of a portal. Later, Mr. Norrell speaks of roads which lead to Faerie: "In John Uskglass's time very plain roads were built that lead out of England into Faerie – wide green roads between high green hedges or stone walls." (395). Norrell's description creates the sense that Faerie is very accessible from England, and that portals as connections are easily created, pervading all of England. In contrast, there is only one portal in *Sir Orfeo* and it is difficult, if not impossible, to access without Faeries; Orfeo spent ten years in the forest without knowing of its existence. As such, Faerie in the poem is portrayed as being more distant and inaccessible than Faerie in the novel. By extension then, *Sir Orfeo's* Faerie does not share the same ontological overlapping and blurring of borders as *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell's* does.

## Conclusion

Despite these differences between Faerie in each text, we can see that in many ways *Sir Orfeo* still acts as a source for the blurry nature of Faerie within *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*. This is achieved through intertextuality, whereby *Sir Orfeo* lends a sense of verisimilitude to Clarke's fictional Faerie-punctuated English history. Plenty of England's historical literature, particularly the Medieval Romance genre, describes encounters between English peoples and Faeries, instances where Faerie has brought magic and the fantastic into England. Although, in reality, Faerie will always be contained within the stories of English literature and (sadly) magic does not actually exist, these Faerie-texts have contributed to the strong associations between magic and England. Clarke's novel reflects this. Clarke creates an England where Faerie is not sourced on a page but physically exists as a realm. If we recall that one of the main reasons *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* should be categorized as an immersive novel is the extensive magical history Clarke creates for England, the inspiration for Clarke doing so is not hard to find.

When you look to literature such as *Sir Orfeo*, it's clear that England has a long history of magic. Clarke's fictional England is truly then not that different from the real England as she merely translates the wealth of Faerie stories and texts in English literature and breathes life into them and has them interact with England in a more literal way in *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*.

Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics of Fantasy* is a useful tool to help guide and discuss the categorization of fantasy. The book encourages us to look at aspects of a fantasy that may have gone unnoticed or been overlooked that inform how the text might be classified and has done so for me with *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*. Despite her authority and knowledge on the subject, Mendlesohn relates that Clarke's novel proves resistant to easy classification. However, there are both internal and external factors of the novel that show the it to be a fully immersive fantasy. Within the novel, Clarke goes to great lengths to showcase the historical presence of magic. In her England, magic is not a new phenomenon, it is simply a revival. As well, Clarke makes extensive use of footnotes in her novel which often serve to inform the reader of past historical magical events that occurred in England. In this way then, Clarke has created a primary world where magic is not foreign or otherworldly. Instead, magic is simply an affair that faded out of practice. Outside of the novel, something Mendlesohn does not consider, intertextual influence also advocates for the immersive nature of the novel. Turning to a Middle English poem like *Sir Orfeo*, which shares many similarities with *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*, is useful to explore the effects of this intertextuality. Even though the Faerie realm in the poem and the novel exist in ontologically different ways, the Faerie encounter described in *Sir Orfeo* (and many other Middle English texts) adds elements of magic and fantastic to the English identity. Fantastic English literature shows a long history of Faerie and England sharing an intertwined existence. Clarke responds to this idea by corporealizing it in her novel. She creates an England where the English history of magic and Faerie is not based in literature but in reality. Thus, *Sir Orfeo* contributes to the magical foundation of *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* which in turn showcases how historic Middle English texts can serve to strongly influence new and modern tellings of the fantastic and how they should be categorized. This influence on Clarke's novel by *Sir Orfeo* also speaks to a larger comparative discussion and leads to further questions about the connections, effects, and over all relationship between the beloved fantasy we have today and the rich set of taproot texts found within the medieval romance genre. The strong bond between Faerie and England in the novel, the overlapping and physical indistinction between the later and the former, can be attributed to, at least in part, the intertextuality, to the past texts, such as *Sir Orfeo*, which have created a foundation for such deep connection between these two places.

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