

The Ladies of Grace Adieu and other stories by Susanna Clarke.
Illustrated by Charles Vess
Bloomsbury 2006.

Susanna Clarke's first novel was the extraordinary Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell, a massive tome of enormous intricacy that was a most satisfying read. In The Ladies of Grace Adieu, Clarke has gone from the massive to the miniscule, with a series of short stories, 8 in all, which pick up some of the themes of magick and faerie (sic) that were first encountered in her first work.

Jonathan Strange makes a guest appearance in the first story, and the Raven King and John Uskglass also figure in this collection, but a host of new characters are introduced as well, not least the three mysterious ladies of Grace Adieu, the Jewish physician David Montefiore and the Rev. Alessandro Simonelli, but to give more information would be almost impossible without retelling the stories in which they appear.

Anyone who enjoyed Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell will be similarly captivated by Susanna Clarke's latest work, and will wonder at her sparkling creativity and the originality of her mind.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh