

SHORTLISTED FOR THE WOMEN'S
PRIZE FOR FICTION 2021

SUSANNA CLARKE



'Exquisite'
DAVID MITCHELL

'Full of wonders'
SUNDAYTIMES

'Quite extraordinary'
BERNARDINE EVARISTO

'Utterly otherworldly'
GUARDIAN

'Spellbinding'
ERIN MORGENSTERN

'Miraculous'
MADELINE MILLER

PIRANESI

BLOOMSBURY

**CHOSEN AS A BOOK OF THE YEAR BY THE
THE TIMES, GUARDIAN, OBSERVER, DAILY
TELEGRAPH, FINANCIAL TIMES, i PAPER, NEW
STATESMAN, SPECTATOR, TIME MAGAZINE, TIMES
LITERARY SUPPLEMENT, BBC CULTURE, NETGALLEY**

‘To read *Piranesi* is to be the labyrinth and the traveller in the labyrinth, which is poetry and prose ... A novel to revisit – a house you can open again, with statues touched by quiet thoughts and strange tides’

Observer

‘Clarke’s imagination is prodigious, her pacing is masterly and she knows how to employ dry humour in the service of majesty’

New York Times

‘Piranesi, the novel and man both, are luxuriously enigmatic and the labyrinthine House they inhabit is intoxicating. This novel is an enchanting, dark, multi-layered offering that more than lives up to the power of its predecessor’ *Irish Times*

‘Infinitely clever ... none of [Clarke’s] enchantment has worn off – it’s evolved ... to abide in these pages is to find oneself happily detained in awe’ *Washington Post*

‘It’s sixteen years since *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* – now Clarke is back with a new otherworldly fantasy’ *Guardian*, 2020 in books

‘The most gloriously peculiar book I’ve read in years’ *Observer*

‘Beautiful and bewitchingly strange’ *Mail on Sunday*

‘A beguiling study of isolation and exile ... To say more would be to ruin one of the year’s more unusual reading experiences’ *i paper*, Books of the Year 2020

‘Purely joyful reading’ Naomi Alderman, *Spectator*, Books of the Year

‘Haunting, tantalising, enigmatic, profound ... A precisely and beautifully imagined fictional world ... This magnificent novel leaves us wondering if we are perhaps still living in Plato’s cave, mistaking shadows for the real thing, failing to see the immeasurable beauty and infinite kindness within our reach’ *Financial Times*, Books of the Year

‘I was beguiled ... Assured and captivating. Like the real Piranesi, these visions will surely endure’ *Guardian*, Best Books of 2020

‘For fantasy readers often eager to get lost in mystical worlds and escape the complications of real life, Piranesi’s predicament deeply resonates’ *Time*, Books of the Year

‘My absolute favourite book of the year by miles ... it took root in me’
Jenny Colgan, *Spectator*, Books of the Year

‘[*Piranesi*] flooded me, as the tides flood the halls, with a scouring grief, leaving gleaming gifts in its wake ... rich, wondrous, full of aching joy and sweet sorrow’ *New York Times Book Review*

‘*Piranesi* will wreck you: the novel establishes Susanna Clarke as one of our greatest living writers’ *New York Magazine*

‘A fantasy of exceptional beauty ... I can think of few recent books that keep the reader so passionately hungry to know what happens next and to understand the hints and guesses that appear in greater and greater profusion ... This is a novel of exceptional beauty, something which surpasses even the lovely, gratifyingly ironic prose familiar from Clarke’s first book. There is at the heart of her writing: a rare capacity for the immediate’ Rowan Williams, *New Statesman*
Books of the Year

‘Reminds us of fiction’s power to take us to another world and expand our understanding of this one’ *Guardian*, Autumn highlights

‘The most curious confection ... Blending elements of mythology and fantasy, with nods along the way to CS Lewis and Tolkien ... A genuinely moving climax that throws open the doors of the halls in more ways than one’ *i paper*

‘The author of *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* returns with a noticeably more compact tale, but one that is just as peculiar and beguiling, transporting us to a labyrinthine house filled with statues and albatrosses, and to the eponymous protagonist’ *Financial Times*

‘Fifteen years on from *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, Clarke’s second novel finally sees the light’ Andrew Holgate, *Sunday Times*, What to watch out for next year 2020

‘A dazzling fable about loneliness, imagination and memory’ *Spectator*

‘The stuff of half-remembered dreams ... The chief joy of *Piranesi* is that it is a space with limitless room for the reader to roam through ... Clarke’s novel captures the limbic fizz that comes with being alone in a place with secrets – the breathless childhood glee of unsupervised and unsanctioned exploration’
Times Literary Supplement, Books of the Year

‘Sixteen long years have passed since the publication of the magnificent *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*. Susanna Clarke returns at last in September with *Piranesi* ... The eerie tale of a man who lives in a flooded house’ *Daily Express*

‘Utterly brain-mangling ... A creepy, expertly managed crime story’ *Metro*

‘A book that’s deliciously weird but meticulously constructed to achieve maximum suspense. Susanna Clarke doesn’t just write about magic; she channels it on to the page’ *Sunday Express*

‘Sixteen years after *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*, Susannah Clarke returns at last with the otherworldly tale of a man who lives in a flooded house’ *Daily Mirror*

‘A magical house with labyrinthine halls and tides that thunder up staircases’ *The Times*, Autumn highlights

‘The long-awaited new book from the author of *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*’ *Observer*

‘A short and beautiful novel that reads like a poem ... in its cumulative effect of expressing an emotion and state of being that is inexpressible. It’s a strange and lovely read’ *Buzzfeed*

‘Enthralling and transcendent ... Clarke’s writing is clear, sharp – she can cleave your heart in a few short words ... The mystery of *Piranesi* unwinds at a tantalizing yet lightning-like pace – it’s hard not to rush ahead, even when each sentence, each revelation makes you want to linger’ *NPR*

‘Plunges deep into those forbidden fortresses from which the un-mad and mortal among us are forever barred ... Clarke has un-picked her personality and returned to this world, our Earth, so that the rest of us might know her exquisite burden’ *Wired*

‘As gloriously imaginative as its predecessor ... A novel that could have been written by nobody else ... Her prose is crisp, direct and unfussy ... It’s a book about the tension between those who want to possess a world and those who delight in it, describe it, honour it.

It’s an extraordinary book, well worth the wait’ *SFX Magazine*

‘Susannah Clarke’s monumental masterwork *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* was one of the finest works of speculative fiction of the twenty-first century and now, with *Piranesi*, she once more mines a darkly fantastical vision with a tale of a very singular house and its mysterious inhabitants. Saturated in gothic atmosphere and supernatural lore, *Piranesi* is simply unmissable’ *Waterstones.com*

‘Here is Clarke’s talent in full flower; *Piranesi* is the most purely enjoyable novel I’ve read in a long while’ *Literary Review*

‘Delightful, discombobulating ... *Piranesi* is detective of his own existence ... Gripping’ *Psychologies*

‘A wonder’ *Slate.com*

‘Susanna Clarke has fashioned her own myth anew and enlarged the world again’ *New Republic*

‘A blend of reverie, art, mystery and the uncanny ... A beautiful, unsettling, hypnotic and, yes, singular experience’ *Irish Independent*

‘A novel that feels like a surreal meditation on life in quarantine’
New Yorker

‘The long-awaited followup to *Jonathan Strange* is even more magically immersive ... Here is a protagonist with no guile, no greed, no envy, no cruelty, and yet still intriguing’ *Los Angeles Times*

‘Why don’t you trip on the new Susanna Clarke book if you want to get your mind bent but don’t much care for drugs?’

New York Magazine

‘A high-quality page-turner – even the most leisurely reader will probably finish it off in a day – but its chief pleasure is immersion in its strange and uncannily attractive setting ... A standout feat’

Wall Street Journal

‘Could *Piranesi* match the hype? I’m delighted to say it has, with Clarke’s singular wit and imagination still intact in a far more compressed yet still captivating tale you’ll want to delve into again right after you read its sublime last sentence’ *Boston Globe*

‘[Piranesi’s] love of the house and the meaning he finds in his humble life within it give this unusual novel a radiant, gentle, melancholy heart’ *Slate*, Best Books of 2020

‘Susanna Clarke’s astonishing *Piranesi* proves she’s one of the greatest novelists writing today’ *Vox*

‘Piranesi hit my mind and soul like a thunderbolt. It is a work of deep power’ *EW.com*

‘Spellbinding, strange, and unforgettably original’ *Esquire*

‘An inventive and spellbinding read’ *Attitude*

‘Everything about this novel is a mystery. Fantastical, very strange and not to be missed!’ Alice O’Keeffe, Editor’s Choice, *The Bookseller*

‘An astounding, charming and challenging work. It is also – as I learned during a late-night reading – impossible to put down. It contains the foreshadowing of a well-drawn crime novel, the mystery and intrigue of Shirley Jackson’s *Hill House*, and the philosophical fantasy of Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*. The world, the House and Piranesi himself will completely consume you’ *Sunday Business Post*

‘Okay, now everyone listen. No, I mean it, shut up for a second. We need to talk about Piranesi. I don’t... I really do not know how to talk about this book beyond a very high-pitched scream and an emphatic grabbing of your knee’ *Tor.com*

‘Her prowess as a stylist is undiminished ... Piranesi’s naively observant voice also nods to the narrators of those Enlightenment parables of flawed Reason lost amid marvels and monsters – think Defoe’s *Crusoe*, Swift’s *Gulliver*, Voltaire’s *Candide*’ *Arts Desk*

‘A warm book about losing and finding oneself; about what humanity could have lost in the process of becoming rational’
BBC.com

‘Exquisitely formed, delicately judged ... This is a novel that witnesses the limits, the transgressions, and the humanity of science. It questions what can be questioned, and reckons with the very great price of curiosity ... *Piranesi* is its own beautiful thing ... perfect in its solitude. Patient and dreadful, with a denouement so compassionately done’ Lunate

‘A magical mystery brilliantly voiced. Out of this world’ *Saga*
‘Half dream sequence, half detective story, this wonderfully playful exploration of myth and reality keeps us guessing’ *The Tablet*

‘I wish I could read this again for the first time. Its atmosphere of beautiful, sad loneliness is the perfect lockdown companion. There are so many things to note about the book, but here is just one: Piranesi looks with loving attention at the world in which he finds himself, caring for everything that he encounters, and receiving everything as a loving gift. Other forces, however, see it very differently. The book is deeply satisfying, with a depth of sadness – or is it joy?’ *Church Times*, Books of the Year 2020

‘*Piranesi* is one of those endlessly giving novels that reveal more details the more you read it, and the ending, above all, is an imperative to begin again’ *Strange Horizons*

‘Worth the wait. It is a haunting mystery with a winsome hero that creates a very compelling read’ *sfcrownsnest.info*

‘Unforgettable – surely one of the most original works of fiction this season. ... It’s a hypnotic tale that you can devour in a day (and probably will; it’s that hard to put down)’ AARP

‘Destined to become a work of classic fantasy’ Ron Charles, CBS
Sunday Morning Book Report

‘Immersive, strange and beautiful ... Stunning’ *Kindred Spirit*

‘The book is freighted with mystery, striking imagery and philosophical speculation. Clarke’s sharply honed prose is a delight’
Morning Star

‘Almost impossible to put down ... lavishly descriptive, charming, heartbreaking and imbued with a magic that will be familiar to Clarke’s devoted readers, *Piranesi* will satisfy lovers of *Jonathan Strange* and win her many new fans’ Bookpage, starred review

‘Readers who accompany [Piranesi] as he learns to understand himself will see magic returning to our world. Weird and haunting and excellent’ *Kirkus Reviews*, Starred Review

‘Clarke wraps a twisty mystery inside a metaphysical fantasy in her extraordinary new novel ... Sure to be recognized as one of the year’s most inventive’ *Publishers Weekly*, Starred Review

‘As questions multiply and suspense mounts in this spellbinding, occult puzzle of a fable, one begins to wonder if perhaps the reverence, kindness, and gratitude practiced by Clarke’s enchanting and resilient hero aren’t all the wisdom one truly needs’ *Booklist*, Starred Review

‘Clarke creates an immersive world that readers can almost believe exist’ *Library Journal*, Starred Review

‘Susanna Clarke’s first novel since 2004’s *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* was more than worth the sixteen-year wait. Full of the magic and mayhem you might expect, *Piranesi* introduces a labyrinth to savour’ NetGalley UK’s Top Ten Books of 2020

SUSANNA CLARKE's debut novel, *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize and shortlisted for the Whitbread First Novel Award and the *Guardian* First Book Award. It won the British Book Awards Newcomer of the Year, the Hugo Award and the World Fantasy Award in 2005. Susanna Clarke is also the author of the short story collection *The Ladies of Grace Adieu*. *Piranesi* was a *Sunday Times* and *New York Times* bestseller, and was awarded Audies Audiobook of the Year, shortlisted for the British Book Awards Audiobook of the Year, the Costa Novel Award, the Women's Prize for Fiction, the RSL Encore Awards, the Hugo Award, the Nebula Awards, the British Science Fiction Association's Best Novel, the Bloggers Book Award; was a finalist for the Goodreads Fantasy Book of the Year, the Ray Bradbury Prize for Science Fiction and the Locus Awards; and was longlisted for the 2021 Booktube Prize. Susanna Clarke lives in Derbyshire.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell
The Ladies of Grace Adieu and Other Stories

PIRANESI
SUSANNA
CLARKE

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For Colin

‘I am the great scholar, the magician, the adept, who is *doing* the experiment. Of course I need subjects to do it *on*.’

The Magician’s Nephew, C. S. Lewis

‘People call me a philosopher or a scientist or an anthropologist. I am none of those things. I am an anamnesiologist. I study what has been forgotten. I divine what has disappeared utterly. I work with absences, with silences, with curious gaps between things. I am really more of a magician than anything else.’

Laurence Arne-Sayles, interview in

The Secret Garden, May 1976

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PART 1

PIRANESI

When the Moon rose in the Third Northern Hall I went to the Ninth Vestibule

ENTRY FOR THE FIRST DAY OF THE FIFTH MONTH IN THE YEAR THE
ALBATROSS CAME TO THE SOUTH-WESTERN HALLS

When the Moon rose in the Third Northern Hall I went to the Ninth Vestibule to witness the joining of three Tides. This is something that happens only once every eight years.

The Ninth Vestibule is remarkable for the three great Staircases it contains. Its Walls are lined with marble Statues, hundreds upon hundreds of them, Tier upon Tier, rising into the distant heights.

I climbed up the Western Wall until I reached the Statue of a Woman carrying a Beehive, fifteen metres above the Pavement. The Woman is two or three times my own height and the Beehive is covered with marble Bees the size of my thumb. One Bee – this always gives me a slight sensation of queasiness – crawls over her left Eye. I squeezed Myself into the Woman's Niche and waited until I heard the Tides roaring in the Lower Halls and felt the Walls vibrating with the force of what was about to happen.

First came the Tide from the Far Eastern Halls. This Tide ascended the Easternmost Staircase without violence. It had no colour to speak of and its Waters were no more than ankle deep. It spread a grey mirror across the Pavement, the surface of which was marbled with streaks of milky Foam.

Next came the Tide from the Western Halls. This Tide thundered up the Westernmost Staircase and hit the Eastern Wall with a great Clap, making all the Statues tremble. Its Foam was the white of old fishbones, and its churning depths were pewter. Within seconds its Waters were as high as the Waists of the First Tier of Statues.

Last came the Tide from the Northern Halls. It hurled itself up the middle Staircase, filling the Vestibule with an explosion of glittering, ice-white Foam. I was drenched and blinded. When I could see again Waters were cascading down the Statues. It was then that I realised I had made a mistake in calculating the volumes of the Second and Third Tides. A towering Peak of Water swept up to where I crouched. A great Hand of Water reached out to pluck me from the Wall. I flung my arms around the Legs of the Woman carrying a Beehive and prayed to the House to protect me. The Waters covered me and for a moment I was surrounded by the strange silence that comes when the Sea sweeps over you and drowns its own sounds. I thought that I was going to die; or else that I would be swept away to Unknown Halls, far from the rush and thrum of Familiar Tides. I clung on.

Then, just as suddenly as it began, it was over. The Joined Tides swept on into the surrounding Halls. I heard the thunder and crack as the Tides struck the Walls. The Waters in the Ninth Vestibule sank rapidly down until they barely covered the Plinths of the First Tier of Statues.

I realised that I was holding on to something. I opened my hand and found a marble Finger from some Faraway Statue that the Tides had placed there.

The Beauty of the House is immeasurable; its Kindness infinite.

A description of the World

ENTRY FOR THE SEVENTH DAY OF THE FIFTH MONTH IN THE YEAR
THE ALBATROSS CAME TO THE SOUTH-WESTERN HALLS

I am determined to explore as much of the World as I can in my lifetime. To this end I have travelled as far as the Nine-Hundred-and-Sixtieth Hall to the West, the Eight-Hundred-and-Ninetieth Hall to the North and the Seven-Hundred-and-Sixty-Eighth Hall to the South. I have climbed up to the Upper Halls where Clouds move in slow procession and Statues appear suddenly out of the Mists. I have explored the Drowned Halls where the Dark Waters are carpeted with white water lilies. I have seen the Derelict Halls of the East where Ceilings, Floors – sometimes even Walls! – have collapsed and the dimness is split by shafts of grey Light.

In all these places I have stood in Doorways and looked ahead. I have never seen any indication that the World was coming to an End, but only the regular progression of Halls and Passageways into the Far Distance.

No Hall, no Vestibule, no Staircase, no Passage is without its Statues. In most Halls they cover all the available space, though here and there you will find an Empty Plinth, Niche or Apse, or even a blank space on a Wall otherwise encrusted with Statues. These Absences are as mysterious in their way as the Statues themselves.

I have observed that, while the Statues of a particular Hall are more or less uniform in size, there is considerable variation between Halls. In some places the figures are two or three times the height of a Human Being, in others more or less life-size and in yet others, only reach as high as my shoulder. The Drowned Halls contain Statues that are gigantic – fifteen to twenty metres high – but they are the exception.

I have begun a Catalogue in which I intend to record the Position, Size and Subject of each Statue, and any other points of interest. So far I have completed the First and Second South-Western Halls and am engaged on the Third. The enormity of this task sometimes makes me feel a little dizzy, but as a scientist and an explorer I have a duty to bear witness to the Splendours of the World.

The Windows of the House look out upon Great Courtyards; barren, empty places paved with stone. The Courtyards are generally four-sided, although now and then you will come upon one with six sides, or eight, or even – these are rather strange and gloomy – only three.

Outside the House there are only the Celestial Objects: Sun, Moon and Stars.

The House has three Levels. The Lower Halls are the Domain of the Tides; their Windows – when seen from across a Courtyard – are grey-green with the restless Waters and white with the spatter of Foam. The Lower Halls provide nourishment in the form of fish, crustaceans and sea vegetation.

The Upper Halls are, as I have said, the Domain of the Clouds; their Windows are grey-white and misty. Sometimes you will see a whole line of Windows suddenly illuminated

by a flash of lightning. The Upper Halls give Fresh Water, which is shed in the Vestibules in the form of Rain and flows in Streams down Walls and Staircases.

Between these two (largely uninhabitable) Levels are the Middle Halls, which are the Domain of birds and of men. The Beautiful Orderliness of the House is what gives us Life.

This morning I looked out of a Window in the Eighteenth South-Eastern Hall. On the other side of the Courtyard I saw the Other looking out of a Window. The Window was tall and dark; the Other's noble head with its high forehead and neatly trimmed beard was framed in one Corner. He was lost in thought as he so often is. I waved to him. He did not see me. I waved more extravagantly. I jumped up and down with great energy. But the Windows of the House are many and he did not see me.

A list of all the people who have ever lived and what is known of them

ENTRY FOR THE TENTH DAY OF THE FIFTH MONTH IN THE YEAR
THE ALBATROSS CAME TO THE SOUTH-WESTERN HALLS

Since the World began it is certain that there have existed fifteen people. Possibly there have been more; but I am a scientist and must proceed according to the evidence. Of the fifteen people whose existence is verifiable, only Myself and the Other are now living.

I will now name the fifteen people and give, where relevant, their positions.

First Person: Myself

I believe that I am between thirty and thirty-five years of age. I am approximately 1.83 metres tall and of a slender build.

Second Person: The Other

I estimate the Other's age to be between fifty and sixty. He is approximately 1.88 metres tall and, like me, of a slender build. He is strong and fit for his age. His skin is a pale olive colour. His short hair and moustache are dark brown. He has a beard that is greying, almost white; it is neatly trimmed and slightly pointed. The bones of his skull are particularly fine with high, aristocratic cheekbones and a tall, impressive forehead. The overall impression he gives is of a friendly but slightly austere person devoted to the life of the intellect.

He is a scientist like me and the only other living human being, so naturally I value his friendship highly.

The Other believes that there is a Great and Secret Knowledge hidden somewhere in the World that will grant us enormous powers once we have discovered it. What this Knowledge consists of he is not entirely sure, but at various times he has suggested that it might include the following:

1. vanquishing Death and becoming immortal
2. learning by a process of telepathy what other people are thinking
3. transforming ourselves into eagles and flying through the Air
4. transforming ourselves into fish and swimming through the Tides
5. moving objects using only our thoughts

6. snuffing out and reigniting the Sun and Stars
7. dominating lesser intellects and bending them to our will

The Other and I are searching diligently for this Knowledge. We meet twice a week (on Tuesdays and Fridays) to discuss our work. The Other organises his time meticulously and never permits our meetings to last longer than one hour.

If he requires my presence at other times, he calls out 'Piranesi!' until I come.

Piranesi. It is what he calls me.

Which is strange because as far as I remember it is not my name.

Third Person: The Biscuit-Box Man

The Biscuit-Box Man is a skeleton that resides in an Empty Niche in the Third North-Western Hall. The bones have been ordered in a particular way: long ones of a similar size have been collected and tied together with twine made from seaweed. To the right is placed the skull and to the left is a biscuit box containing all the small bones – finger bones, toe bones, vertebrae etc. The biscuit box is red. It has a picture of biscuits and bears the legend, *Huntley Palmers* and *Family Circle*.

When I first discovered the Biscuit-Box Man, the seaweed twine had dried up and fallen apart and he had become rather untidy. I made new twine from fish leather and tied up his bundles of bones again. Now he is in good order once more.

Fourth Person: The Concealed Person

One day three years ago I climbed the Staircase in the Thirteenth Vestibule. Finding that the Clouds had departed