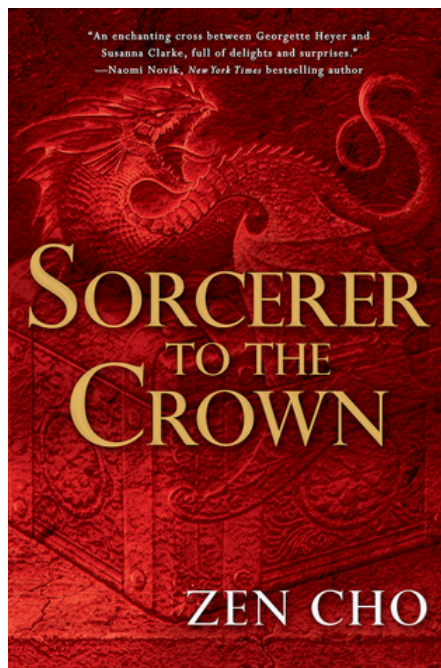




Sorcerer to the Crown

Zen Cho

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Sorcerer to the Crown

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Sorcerer to the Crown Zen Cho

Magic and mayhem collide with the British elite in this whimsical and sparkling debut.

At his wit's end, Zacharias Wythe, freed slave, eminently proficient magician, and Sorcerer Royal of the Unnatural Philosophers—one of the most respected organizations throughout all of Britain—ventures to the border of Fairyland to discover why England's magical stocks are drying up.

But when his adventure brings him in contact with a most unusual comrade, a woman with immense power and an unfathomable gift, he sets on a path which will alter the nature of sorcery in all of Britain—and the world at large...

Sorcerer to the Crown Details

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From Reader Review Sorcerer to the Crown for online ebook

Althea Ann says

Not at all what I expected! And it was great!

From the cover art, the title, and the length of the book I was expecting a weighty, Asia-tinged fantasy epic. Nope!

It may be long - but I zipped through it in a day. And - it's hilarious.

As the comments below indicate, yes, comparisons with Susanna Clarke's 'Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell' are unavoidable. The settings are very similar: an old-timey London inhabited by a society of stuffy and aristocratic magicians. There are also incursions of Fairyland, and in addition, both prominently feature a former slave who dramatically rises in society. However, this is a much less serious work. Although not unsophisticated, it's less fussy - and much more romantic. I'd say: imagine if Susanna Clarke's writing met Gail Carriger's. I have to say though, I enjoyed this better than either - it hit my sweet spot.

Our two main characters:

Prunella is an orphaned assistant at a girls' school. Abandoned by her British father; her Indian mother known only by the tint she imparted to her daughter's skin, she is dependent on the headmistress for her living. She has a deal of magical talent - unfortunately, in this England, girls are not considered to have a constitution suitable for the use of magic, and schools such as this one, for gentlewitches, are devoted solely to preventing the young women from using their skills. (Of course, people tend to look the other way when servants use magic to accomplish their menial tasks.)

Zacharias is the titular Sorcerer to the Crown. Unfortunately, his occupation of the post of head sorcerer in Britain is a matter of some controversy. A black man and a former slave, he is not quite the aristocrat his fellow magicians want as their leader. Plots to depose him are already being fomented.

Although Zacharias' position is already unstable, politics and disasters wait for no one. The magic of England seems to be draining away, and no one is sure why. In addition, a Sultan and a 'foreign witch' from Janda Baik (a small Malaysian island) are at each others' throats and both threaten to drag England into a conflict overseas.

But when the Sorcerer is imposed upon to give a speech at a girls' school, he meets Prunella - and from there, events proceed in a merrily headlong, roller-coaster type fashion.

Thoroughly delightful.

Many thanks to Ace and Net Galley for the opportunity to read this excellent book. As always, my opinions are solely my own.

Ashley says

This sneaky little book is a sneaking sneakster. It sneaks right up on you, and you love it before you realize what's happening.

I actually read this book way before I meant to. I realized on my drive to Phoenix a couple of weeks ago that I was quickly going to run out of *Pride and Prejudice* audiobook, and I didn't have a replacement on deck. Good old public library and OneClickDigital had this puppy featured, and I wanted to read it anyway, so why not?

It was a bit hard to get into at first. I kept having to rewind the audiobook and listen to parts over again. But once I got a couple chapters in, the book either picked up or I was sufficiently comfortable with the characters and the world that it wasn't a problem anymore. And then I had a new problem, which was: *This is a really good book, and I don't want to stop listening to it.*

Sorcerer to the Crown takes place in an alternate Regency England, one in which magic is real, and flows into the mortal world from Faerie. Only, for generations now, England's magic has been drying up. There is less of it to go around, and less people popping up who can practice it. This isn't helped by the English dum-dums refusing to educate anyone but a gentleman in the art of proper magic. If you're lower class or female, forget it. And if you're female, there are schools of magic where not only do they *not* teach you how to practice magic, but the entire focus of the school is for young girls to learn to *suppress* their magic.

Yeah. This is one of THOSE books. And I loved every second of it.

Our two main characters are Zacharias, a black man adopted out of slavery by England's Sorcerer Royal at the age of six when his talent with magic made itself known, and Prunella, a half-Indian half-white orphan. As the story opens, Zacharias is dealing with the fallout of the death of his adopted father, Sir Stephen. Mysterious circumstances resulted in Zacharias emerging from Sir Stephen's study the night he died, now in possession of the staff of the Sorcerer Royal. Already not accepted due to his skin color, the murky situation leads to rampant rumors and many of England's most powerful sorcerers questioning whether he deserves to be the Sorcerer Royal. Prunella is currently living in one of the aforementioned schools of magic for young ladies, and striving to hide just how excessively magical she really is, when a visit from Zacharias upends her whole life.

The most surprising, and most pleasant, thing about this book is how subversively funny it is. If you're not paying attention, the jokes could pass you by, but if you are, there's some really funny stuff hidden in Cho's prose. Her characters are also wonderfully alive. Prunella is one of my favorite characters I've read in the last couple of years. She just don't give a shit.

The atmosphere of this book was delicious, and the story satisfying. It was surprising and funny and moving. Not sure what else I could ask for.

I don't know where Cho is taking the sequels this book is apparently getting, but one nice thing about *Sorcerer to the Crown* is that it is self-contained. No cliffhangers, just a nice beginning, middle and end.

I need to buy my own copy and re-read it, so I can catch everything I'm sure I missed.

[4.5 stars]

Justine says

I thought this was really entertaining. It was like *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, but with a strong female character and all the boring parts taken out.

Bookdragon Sean says

I picked up *Sorcerer to the Crown* because I heard it was strikingly reminiscent of one of my favourite fantasy books, the wonderful *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* by Suasana Clarke.

Such a thing is this book's greatest asset and also its downfall. Perhaps my rating of this would have been slightly higher had I read first. Though when reading all I saw was how the book had drawn from a much better book. Cho's setting and world building are adequate, but again I was imagining them in relation to *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*. Both books deal with English magic during the time of the Napoleonic wars and the regency period. Magic is seen as improper in the stuffy society of the early nineteenth century; it is frowned upon and drastically misunderstood.

Is it too similar?

In Clarke's novel Stephen is the black house-servant of Sir Walter Pole. He has descended from slaves, and though not part of the system, he is very much a second class citizen. Zacharias Wythe, from Cho's novel, is a black sorcerer in a society that deems him inferior. I feel like Cho has essentially read *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* and asked herself a question: what would happen if Stephen was also a magician? And this is the book that answers the situation. An African sorcerer is at the head of the English magic society in an all too familiar world.

Cho attempts to write in dated prose; she attempts to infuse modern prose with that of Austen. Clarke did the same with an absolute brilliant level of execution. She even produced a typical three-volume novel to add to this effect. Cho's attempt is sloppy with distinctively modern words and phrasing being set against older expressions. The result is uneven writing that dances between being accessible to younger readers and being a pastiche. All in all, it just was not written with the same level of skill and attention to detail that Clarke displayed.

Clarke is just SO much better!

Sorcerer to the Crown certainly isn't a terrible book, but for me it will always exist in the shadow of a much greater book: one that I wanted to stop reading this one for. The parallels are far too strong. Perhaps all this is merely coincidental and the writers just had similar ideas for the setting of a novel, though even so Clarke handles her book with more skill. Her characters are charming and very complex individuals. I love the way she based her two magicians on Wordsworth and Coleridge with magic replacing the arguments they had over poetry.

If you have read *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* then you will possibly hate this for its bland attempt at similar ideas. However, if you have not read it, you may find some enjoyment here.

Elizabeth says

Let's just get it out there - OMG!

This book is beautiful inside and out. The cover design is luxurious loveliness and the contents within - they're even better.

Sorcerer to the Crown takes us back to the early 19th century for a tale of fantastical courtly intrigue the Royal Society of Magicians (well, Thaumaturges, but whatever). Despite it's traditional fantasy setting of ye olde Europe this book falls far from trad fantasy tree. It's diverse, clever, doesn't get bogged down in ridiculously complex plots, and still has time to be damned wonderful.

Fall in love it with for teaching you new words whilst making you laugh, for angry mermaids getting scolded by aunty, and heroines who can be ruthlessly capable and perfectly proper all at the same time.

Molly says

Rating, 3 stars. (more ranting than review)

It started promising, with little **Zacharias Wythe** showing the Royal Society of Unnatural Philosophers, that he is a worthy apprentice to **Sir Stephen Wythe**, despite the color of his skin. Years have passed and following the death of Sir Stephen, Zacharias takes his place of **Sorcerer Royal**, something that because of his origins doesn't sit well with the majority of the thaumaturges (magicians/sorcerers).

Zacharias was born a slave. Sir Stephen saw something special in the little boy. He had liberated him (separating his fate from that of his birth parents), given him his name and the position in society that goes with it (no matter the society liked it or not) and honed him to become a powerful sorcerer.

Prunella Gentleman on the other hand was raised by *Mrs. Daubney*, and hes spent her youth helping her manage the **School for Gentlewitches**. She never new her mother, who due to Prunella's complexion must have been of darker skin, and her father, Mr. Hilary Gentleman had left her alone in the world when she was but a little child (presumably drowning himself). Mrs Daubney, Gentleman's lodger didn't know what to do with the little girl that had even then begun to show troubling signs of being magical. Because Ladies cannot be magical. They are too fragile and empty-headed to handle magical powers. It is not something befitting a young lady. It is alright for some village woman to be a witch and sell some potions and herbs. But real magic is for men, more precisely gentlemen (and with the right colour of skin). Learning how to handle a girl afflicted by magic, Mrs. Daubney changes her fortunes opening a school for young ladies suffering the same magical problems as Prunella's.

"Being a school for gentlewitches, it did not, of course, instruct its students in practical thaumaturgy. Mrs. Daubney knew just what parents desired her to inculcate in their inconveniently magical daughters: pretty manners, a moderate measure of education and, above all, a habit of restraint."

This book had all the elements it needed to make me fall in love with the story ... and then ... unfortunately it didn't. It had the interesting racial element that was underplayed. It had the possibility to shake the ground with the politics or war. The story unfolds on Britain during the Napoleonic wars. It had all the makes of great conflicts. Britain with France. The thaumaturges versus the British government. The thaumaturges versus the Fairy Court (even that was almost unused). And there was a botched attempt of romance don't look at me like that ... **I don't count that as romance** ... zero chemistry.

By some blurbs and reviews this was described as a mix of Georgette Heyer's regency novels and Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*. I didn't read any of Heyer's books, though I think I know what regency books are like. Maybe there's something in that claim. For the comparisons with *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*.....*phleeese*, no way. I mean I get the similarities. but for someone to say if I love *Heyer* and *Strange*, I would love this book.

I did like parts of this book, but I loved all those 1000+ pages of *Strange* (footnotes and all), there's no way

comparing these two.

In the end I think my problem was that Prunella has turned out to be (after a few promising chapters) too hungry for power and position for my taste.

"Prunella had no more interest in magical lore than a fish has in the philosophical properties of water."

Ok, she doesn't have any interest in magic even if she is gifted with more power than many men ... I can get that. But she wishes to be powerful through a high profile marriage?! She wants to wed someone wealthy (not just moderate wealthy), excessively in love with her... and who would let me do whatever she wished. Greedy much?!

I get girl-power. I love a kick-ass heroine that knows what she wants in life....but Prunella was too much for me. She reminded me of Alison Goodman's Eona, she was pretty hard to digest in book two Eona: The Last Dragoneye, but somehow I could get why she acted so power-hungry.... but with Prunella, not so much. So I ended grumbling to myself till the end of the book. And the ending was that supposed to make me swoon?!!

Maybe it's me again. Usually if something rubs me hard the wrong way, I can't enjoy the rest of the book (And oh, don't make me start on that poor familiar what was that?! Surely they could have found another solution to Leofric).

In the end Prunella annoyed me, Zacharias bored me and maybe I ended enjoying more smaller players like *Damerell*, *Hsiang Han* and *Mak Genggang*.

Not bad, not great... an OK book.

Jessica ❀ ➡ Silverbow ➡ ❀ Rabid Reads-no-more says

Reviewed by: Rabid Reads

I tried to read SORCERER TO THE CROWN by Zen Cho THREE separate times, and had pretty much given it up for lost when I decided to give it one . . . more . . . chance.

Many, many thanks to friend and fellow Ace Roc Star **Anne at The Book Nympho** , whose review influenced this decision. *tips hat*

The beginning is slow, no getting around it. Even if I hadn't been reading mostly high-octane, action-packed urban fantasy in the weeks prior to my first attempts, I think I still would have found it slow.

I was initially reminded of a Jane Austen novel.

You: But you LOVE Jane Austen!

Me: Yes, I know.

You: ???

Me: I love Jane Austen, *despite* the florid prose, not *because* of it.

BUT. Given time, this book grew on me for the same reasons EMMA and PRIDE AND PREJUDICE did: clever hilarity and exasperating yet wonderful characters whom I grew to absolutely adore.

And BONUS, there is the kind of whimsicality that can only be present in a FANTASY novel.

Zacharias Wythe is not a white, land-owning man in something like 19th century England. He was adopted and emancipated by Sir Stephen Wythe, Sorcerer to the Crown, and his presence in society is met with both acceptance and ridicule by the peerage, and:

Though he had never doubted his guardian's attachment, being Sir Stephen's protégé had at times felt like being a touring attraction—a dancing bear on its lead.

And how easy it is to blame one whose existence you already disdain for problems almost certainly not of his doing.

Like the steady decline of magic in England? Who better to hold accountable than the new Sorcerer to the Crown? Especially when it so neatly provides a solution to the problem that *is* the new Sorcerer to the Crown?

But regardless of continuous and varied mistreatment at the hands of other thaumaturges, Zacharias is determined to discover the source of England's lack of magic as his station demands, and during this search he also discovers the plight of gentlewitches.

Well-bred ladies do *not* practice magic, you see. If a young lady is discovered to have any magical ability at all, she is shipped to a boarding school where her use of magic will be stamped out.

It is in one such school that Zacharias stops as a favor to a friend, only to find that the method of suppression is an altered version of a KILLING CURSE, modified to be cast by a lady on HERSELF, draining her magic temporarily, along with her energy and essential spark.

Zacharias is predictably horrified (b/c not a stuffy, pompous wanker like his sorcerer brethren).

And it was at Mrs. Daubeney's School for Gentlewitches that things started to pick up.

I began to see hints, not carbon copies, mind you, but *hints* of well-loved characters from various girlhood favorites, most notably in Mrs. Daubeney, who when vexed behaves in a rather Mrs. Bennett-like fashion:

"You ought to have considered me, but no one ever does, and it puts me in an impossible position!"

Then there's the scene of utter pandemonium that somehow manages to combine early ANNE OF GREEN GABLES Anne:

*Henrietta stamped her foot, her grey eyes drowned in green light.
"I will teach you a lesson for that!" she cried. "How dare you call him my precious Mr. Wythe! How dare you say I am in l-love!"*

With those wretched Pringles she doesn't encounter until several books later:

When Prunella entered the classroom, Clarissa Midsomer was trying to bang Emily Villiers's head against a desk. Emily was resisting this, screeching in a manner fit to bring the ceiling down.

(I couldn't find a good picture of the Pringles or of the classroom in chaos after the fireworks were set off, but this one works just as well, I think.)

Fairyland resembled a combination of **Bedknobs and Broomsticks** ' underwater and king of the jungle segments.

Flanked by fish-faced guardsmen, the Fairy King lounged upon his throne . . .

YES. That is fantastic.

Resemblances, purposeful or accidental, aside, were not the only amusements, and I found myself shaking with laughter on more than one occasion, be it the result of a formidable aunt named Georgiana Without Ruth (<-----get it? Ruthless? *snickers*), or his fairy Highness explaining why England's magic is being shunted elsewhere (but don't worry, not to France. They don't like France any better than England does):

"It would be an end to all peace if they returned," he said, with a sigh. "We should give them our first-born child if that would persuade them to stay away. Indeed, we made the offer, but they would not look at poor Cuthbert."

Poor Cuthbert.

BUT. As much as SORCERER TO THE CROWN made me laugh, there is so much more to it than humor. Peppered throughout the story are painful truths:

To her surprise Prunella found that she was still attached to Mrs. Daubeney. She would never trust her again—no! But one could nonetheless be very fond of someone in whom one had no confidence whatsoever.

When Prunella at last listened to the full message contained in the singing orb, I found myself in tears, and there is an Elizabeth and Darcy scene so spectacular as to give its namesake a run for its money.

Maybe you didn't hear me: **there is an Elizabeth and Darcy scene so spectacular as to give its namesake a run for its money.**

Indeed.

SORCERER TO THE CROWN by Zen Cho was fantabulous. Plain and simple. I'm so glad I didn't let a slow start derail my consumption of one of the best books I've read this year, and I hope you'll read it for yourself, b/c it's just that good. Highly recommended.

Mary Robinette Kowal says

I wish I'd written this book.

Alette says

(based on an advance copy obtained from the publisher)

Magic, manners and dragons in Recency England--this alone would be awesome, but Zen Cho adds a veneer of comment on English colonial politics: the two main characters are POCs struggling to find a place in a highly hierarchical English society, and not always succeeding. Oh, and romance, and aunties, and Malaysian vampires; and plenty of hilarious sharp one-liners as sorcerer to the crown Zacharias and impoverished gentlewoman Prudence lock horns to discover who's the most stubborn between them. Like a mix of Jane Austen, PG Wodehouse, and Jonathan Strange and Mister Norell, and all its own thing. Glorious.

I want more like this. Fortunately there are two more books forthcoming ^^

Eon ?Windrunner? says

Zacharias looked around, but everyone had ceased to pay attention to him. For the moment he was reprieved.

He let out a small sigh of relief. As if that tiny breath were the key to his locked memory, his mind opened, and the spell fell into it, fully formed. The words were so clear and obvious, their logic so immaculate, that Zacharias wondered that he had ever lost them.

He spoke the spell under his breath, still a little uncertain after the agonies he had endured. But magic came, ever his friend—magic answered his call. The birds carved upon the box blushed red, green, blue and yellow, and he knew that the spell had caught.

The birds peeled away from the box as they took on substance and being, their wings springing away from their bodies, feathers sprouting upon their flesh. They flew up to the ceiling, squawking. The breeze from their wings brushed Zacharias's face, and he laughed.

One by one the carved bosses sprang to life, and the dead sorcerers and the sour old Green Men and the lions and the lambs and the birds opened their mouths, all of them singing, singing lustily Zacharias's favourite song, drowning out the angry voices of the men below, and filling the room with glorious sound.

You had me at **magic** Miss Cho.

I LOVE magic.

We are presented with an alternate version of historical England (think *Pride & Prejudice* meets Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrel) where the magical society is in a bit of an upheaval for two reasons. Firstly, the current Sorcerer Royal (think Head Magician) has recently passed away, but not before ensuring his successor, who is a black man and therefore despised by most magicians. For it is commonly known, that magic should only be done by white, privileged gentleman. Blood will always tell you know. Secondly, the magic in England is in decline and no-one knows why. Fortunately (read sarcasm), this problem has a convenient scapegoat in the form of a *gasp* black Sorcerer Royal.

And so the new Sorcerer Royal, Zacharias Wythe, sets out to determine the reason for the decline and to return magic to England. It is in this quest that he happens upon a young lady called Prunella.

She is dark-skinned. She is a woman. She has no filter. No sense of propriety. And she has no fear. Oh, and she has more magical talent than just about all of the old, white men in England combined.

“Can you conceive anything more absurd?” said a thaumaturge to a friend, in a carrying whisper. “He might as well seek to persuade us that a pig can fly—or a woman do magic!”

The friend observed that so could pigs fly, if one could be troubled to make them.

“Oh certainly!” replied the first. “And one could teach a woman to do magic, I suppose, but what earthly good would a flying pig or a magical female be to anyone?”

The prevalent prejudice though, ensures that she has just as much of an uphill battle as Zacharias. For it is also known that women are too frail to practice magic, and therefore any young ladies with magical ability are sent to special schools where they are dissuaded from using it and at the same time subjected to horrible spells meant to remove these abilities.

“Mrs. Daubeney knew just what parents desired her to inculcate in their inconveniently magical daughters: pretty manners, a moderate measure of education and, above all, a habit of restraint.”

Fortunately, Prunella is like nothing or no-one they have ever encountered. She will change everything they know...

“Your amoral ingenuity in the pursuit of your interest is perfectly shocking,” said Zacharias severely.

“Yes, isn’t it?” said Prunella, pleased.”

Recommended!

PS: A special mention to Mak Genggang, who clearly knows how revenge works.

“Ma’am,” he said to Mak Genggang, “we had an agreement, as I recall. The thaumaturge who caused your coven such inconvenience has been punished. His familiar has been taken from him.”

“I am pleased to hear it,” said Mak Genggang. “It is no more than he deserves. I should advise you not to stop there, but set fire to his house, too, and sell his children to pirates. That is the only way he will learn to abandon his wicked ways.”

PPS: That hint of romance and the nod at *Pride & Prejudice* at the end of the book was fantastic.

Marie says

This magical, fantastical, witty comedy of manners meets magical fairyland is so fun to read. There is much foreshadowing to provide plenty of excitement and anticipation for the sequel which has not yet been published. For all it's playfulness, there is also an underlining seriousness to this novel. This has to do with the politics of Britain and the treatment of women and people of color. In fairyland, race does not matter, it is not even noticed. Likewise, in fairyland, women are equally adept and capable of practicing magic as men are. This is in stark contrast to England. Politics and society are portrayed as a comedy of manners in Britain where people are tripping over themselves to maintain decorum despite the pervading racism and sexism.

The story is set in 19th century England. Upon the death of his guardian and mentor, Zacharias Wythe becomes the "sorcerer royal" more out of obligation, than desire. Given that he is a freed slave, a black man, there is much outcry against him. There is an underground movement afoot to unseat him, led by the unscrupulous and dishonest Geoffrey Midsomer. This all comes at a time when there is a drain on the magic in England, there are political entanglements with magicians from foreign lands, and war is ensuing with France.

Zacharias is asked to visit a school for gentle witches where the main objective is to banish or hide their magical abilities. Zacharias immediately notices the magical talents of Prunella Gentleman, who was orphaned and left in the care of Mrs. Daubney at a young age. Prunella has fallen out of favor with Mrs. Daubney, the headmistress of the school and Prunella's guardian since her father's death. She asks Prunella to move to the servant's quarters, but instead Prunella accompanies Zacharias back to London and begins to study thaumaturgy with him. Prunella has recently discovered herself in possession of a singing orb and seven familiar's eggs. As she begins to grow her familiars while looking for a husband, her powers grow, and a love interest develops between Zacharias and Prunella. Prunella is certainly a "Cinderella" character, but one with much bravery, talent and ambition. It is she who becomes the true star, the heroine of the novel, able to take the reins of her position, to succeed as the ultimate "Sorceress Royal."

This is, of course, a very simplified and scaled back version of the novel. There are many subplots within the main plot. The novel is chock full of an interesting array of characters: nosy society ladies, seedy politicians, faeries, vampires, curious familiars, mermaids, dragons, and much more!

This novel is craftily written, full of surprises and larger than life characters. It is at once serious and whimsical. It delights and exceeds expectations. I highly recommend this novel to anyone who enjoys fantasy fiction!!

For discussion questions, please visit: <http://www.book-chatter.com/?p=776>

Sherwood Smith says

Copy provided by NetGalley

There have been a plethora of fantasy-romances-in-the-Regency of late, not surprising considering there's a good chance that a lot of these authors grew up reading Georgette Heyer, and possibly Jane Austen. Except for Susanna Clarke, I don't find Austen's sharp characterization, wit, or style of satire in any of them, however there's a strong feel of Heyer's mix of modernity and her idiosyncratic version of Regency era language in most, and I think that the homage to Heyer is part of the strong appeal as they are entertaining and accessible to readers not steeped in period literature.

In Zen Cho's *Sorcerer to the Crown*, there is a great deal of Heyer's idiom, but without her tendency toward unexamined prejudice and the underlying assumption that Birth Will Always Tell.

What Cho gives us instead is a black Sorcerer Royal, who, despite his intelligence and scrupulous honesty, is constantly dealing with insults, assassination attempts, and other forms of bigotry by supposedly well-born Englishmen. Meanwhile, he is also a man of his own time in believing that females are too frail to handle magic . . . until he meets beautiful, dusky-skinned Prunella Gentleman. Then the sparks begin to fly!

Meanwhile, there are potentates and witches from foreign lands to deal with, and also awareness of French sorcerers ready to pounce (Cho does the most interesting job, I find, in explaining why magic isn't used in the Napoleonic wars), and oh yes, Britain's magic is seriously ebbing.

The book is a great deal of fun, with some laugh-out-loud moments. Some of the motivations might not bear close scrutiny, as is often the way with comedic books, but the many threads, and especially the thoroughly imaginative magic, race along at a spanking pace--while taking some good hard looks at colonialism and the groundless assumptions of the prerogatives of "good birth" when manners, morals, and brains are missing.

Come to think of it, however little the language resembles Jane Austen's, in many ways I think the book's intent might have tickled her fancy, considering her trenchant representation of nobly born and pretentiously superior characters in her novels. Her satire of social frauds hiding behind their pedigrees and Cho's sapient eye on same share a great deal of a similar spirit.

Emma says

Set in a Regency style Britain. An enjoyable and farcical magic infused romp. The author uses the language of the Regency period very well (says I, who gets all her ideas about Regency phrases from Georgette Heyer novels - therefore an expert!). It has similarities in tone to Novak's Temeraire series.

The main characters suffer from the racist attitudes and gender inequality of the times as well as setting the magical world to rights as open to all, not just the privileged. Sorcerers, magicians, witches, vampires, fairies, familiars, dragons, unicorns, mermaids- they're all here. Enjoy!

Alissa says

This is a very delicate story. I truly appreciated the writing style and the hyperbolic characters, the novelty of integrated people of foreign birth as protagonists and all the little idiosyncrasies of this alternative Regency London society.

I agree that the atmosphere, the presence of an association of thaumaturges, fairies and a crisis regarding English magic are reminiscent of Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell (I've not read the book, only watched the TV show). This said, while this story has its serious moments and themes, it's overall on the comedy side and very likely to amuse the reader with Zacharias' equanimity, Prunella's impetuous originality and Mak Genggang's disruptive guile.

The worldbuilding and characterization are very loose, just enough to outline the situation and introduce the characters. Plot-wise there isn't much, the story could be summarized in a brief paragraph but fortunately it swivels around totally absurd situations and crises; the very fact that the entire cast acts as if everything happening is perfectly logical and ordinary is a source of constant mirth.

This book is also an exercise in style; the linear narrative makes use of a rich and delightful prose full of interesting words and phrases, never too complex. Definitely what I liked the most.

Unfortunately, the book goes on and on about women's (females) unsuitability to perform magic and how they must therefore suppress and conceal any magical talent. Only labor class women's craft can partially be overlooked since it may be of use to their betters. Lucky servants.

Maybe it is a way to acquaint the reader with the key concepts needed to understand how the characters will interact, but still. Women learn to endure and dissimulate AND their worth is measured in the marriage market. I get it. Prunella is torn between ingrained beliefs and what may be within her power to achieve (she doesn't waste time in sorting out her priorities, but she has her lapses).

Then there is the protagonist, Zacharias, a man of exquisite manners who, in turn, has learnt to endure and dissimulate because he happens to be dark skinned (as his most liberal colleagues affably describe, "a most gentlemanlike fellow, leaving aside his colour").

Again the story goes on and on about the prejudices he faces, what it meant for a manumitted African boy to be adopted by English blueblood (named Whyte, no less) and the upper-class embarrassment at Zacharias's role of prestige amongst the Unnatural Philosophers societal majority. I get it, he's ostracised.

I found the droning reminders annoying since remembering a few details is not that hard. I'm more drawn to a story which allows me to experience the characters, however little development there may be, rather than one which endeavours to shape my opinions and sympathies.

This trait of the narrative holds true for the plot points and descriptions, too, leaving no room for the reader's imagination. The ending result is akin to over-explaining and I think it's not coincidental that I failed to connect with the whole story. Of course, it doesn't help that there is not much going on, either.

The saving grace is that the prose is beautiful and fits my idea of Britain's "ton" like a glove. You know, flowery speech, mannerly slander, prudish barbed remarks, fashionable witticisms...The Royal Society with its quirks and foibles has a prominent role in the novel, and I liked it very much, along with the lampoon secondary characters, the textbook English humour, the feeling of surrealism in the whole ordeal (the cork ploy was priceless) and Mak Genggang's opinion on all of this.

The general direction of the plot is clear since the outset and the clues about the upcoming revelations plain enough. Thankfully this predictability was not irksome because the book never aims at depth and it is consistent with the light spirit of the story. A pity though, the author could have capitalized better on the choice of protagonists not sporting the "proper" skin hue and of a setting where gender and census come amorally first behind a façade of liberal righteousness.

As a consequence I found myself dividing my attention on evenings: read some more or watch an episode of Vikings? This never happens with books I truly like. I've also developed a slight case of the jitters at the word "female/s": it occurs 75 times, mainly with regard to those of the human species.

It's not that the novel lacks structure or interesting moments but its storytelling and slow-moving thin plot didn't work well for me. It's occasionally fine when the characters are truly memorable or the worldbuilding unique but it's not the case here: reading Sorcerer to The Crown felt like dining on a bland nouvelle cuisine entrée, pleasant and utterly forgettable.

"The realities of government do not always permit the unobstructed application of principle".

Zanna says

This book is extremely good fun. It sends up the imperialist, masculinist, racist and class-fixated culture of Regency England superbly while weaving an intricate and satisfying fantasy plot around deeply sympathetic central characters. I especially liked how different cultures have different magical philosophies and theories.

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

4 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <http://bibliosanctum.com/2015/09/11/b...>

So many comparisons have already been made to describe *Sorcerer to the Crown*, and I'm going to chime in too with "This feels like epic fantasy for fans of Gail Carriger." Zen Cho has created a world here that's reminiscent of Austen meets Tolkien, yet at the same time it's so wonderfully adaptable that pigeonholing this book into any one category makes it feel a bit remiss.

A Regency setting is what you will get though, even if the nature of the style and story is up for debate. "Fantasy of manners" is also a subgenre that frequently crops up in discussions of novels like this, with a focus on a rigid set of expectations within a hierarchical societal structure. One of the protagonists in *Sorcerer to the Crown* is Zacharias Wythe, the first black sorcerer in Britain who also holds the highest office in his profession, a fact that makes him the target of much opposition and bigotry from many of his so-called "socially-refined" peers who feel that a freed slave should not have risen so far above his station.

Institutional racism and oppression is a real menace in this story, even overshadowing the threats of war from France, the dwindling magical resources of England, and the political entanglements involving the matter of witches and belligerent visiting diplomats. In spite of all that's going on, Zacharias' greatest enemies end up being his own neighbors and fellows. Already plagued with ugly rumors surrounding the death of his predecessor and adoptive guardian, now it seems someone has decided to go even further by attempting to murder Zacharias. Just when he thinks life couldn't get complicated enough, along also comes Prunella Gentleman, a mixed-race young woman of considerable thaumaturgical power, and Zacharias takes it upon himself to mentor her in a society where women using magic is considered anathema.

The fleeting mention of Prunella in the book's blurb actually belies the huge role that she plays. While I adored Zacharias, to me it was Prunella who stole the show as the star of the novel with the sheer force of her personality. In every proper situation she somehow still manages to find a way to throw expectations back into the scandalized faces of those who naively thought they could use tradition to keep her in line. It was also very entertaining to see how often she bends etiquette to her advantage, wielding it as a weapon rather than letting it restrict her (as evidenced by a particularly hilarious scene where she proposes the use of gossip and rumor as a way to actually deflect potential damage to her reputation). I loved her for her frankness and her thoroughly unbreakable spirit, and because she is strong, ruthless, and determined – in other words, the opposite of everything the small-minded folks in this book say about women magicians.

I was also surprised at how light-hearted this novel was, some of its weightier themes notwithstanding. I definitely don't claim to be an expert in Regency fiction or books of this type, but it's my understanding that a particular style of humor is frequently employed and that it could be quite tricky to pull off. For what it's worth, I thought the author nailed it. There's some genuine wit in here, subtle but also infused with that certain Austenesque charm. That said, I wouldn't exactly call *Sorcerer to the Crown* an easy read, especially if you're not use to the style, which I'm personally wasn't. I confess to having a difficult time at the beginning of the novel while adjusting to the writing, which I thought it was a little hard on the eyes and it made reading slow. But eventually I did get into it, as you can see; once I reached a point where I could enjoy myself and start appreciating its cleverness and nuances, this novel was a pure joy.

Zen Cho crafts her setting with much love and care, evoking the Regency era and all its punctilious social arrangements but also manages to seamlessly weave in romance, adventure and political intrigue – and I haven't even gotten the chance to mention the magic and all the fantastical creatures yet. Dandy socialites, posh boarding school matrons and quarreling politicians share this wonderfully unique world with fairies, dragons and magicians. It is a truly delightful alternate history where magic is an integral part of life.

You really can't ask for more. *Sorcerer to the Crown* is a deftly written novel that thoroughly explores important issues, adding further depth to a story already rich with memorable characters and a pleasantly entertaining plot. Zen Cho is a new fantasy novelist who is immediately going on my list of authors to watch, and I'm looking forward to her next book in this series.

Kelly says

This review originally appeared on my blog, *Shoulda, Coulda, Woulda Books*.

Man, I hope the writer of this book was cackling as she wrote this. That's how I pictured her, especially as the book wore on, just sitting there, rubbing her hands and laughing as she typed, going, "Ooooh, I know what I'll do to them now!" I mean, that's what I would have been doing as I wrote this. I don't know if I could have restrained myself, because I would have been very pleased with just how clever I was. Maybe she could restrain herself, because doubtless she is less shocked about how great she is- I don't know. But anyway, I hope that gives you an idea of the spirit of the thing, because that's the best part of it.

I have to be honest, I wasn't quite sure about this one when I started. The tone seemed forced, like someone who had studied a great deal of Jane Austen and read a lot of Regency romances and was painstakingly trying to recreate the sentence structure, with the result that her characters sounded a good deal more wooden than they should (even the excellent concept of a protagonist- Zacharias Wythe, the somewhat hapless, well meaning Sorcerer Royal the book focuses on). And then of course, there was all the exposition to get set up and getting our protagonists, heretofore with no reason to be anywhere near each other, together. That part was okay- I kept going more for the concept than anything else- magic is commonplace in England, there's a whole long standing structure of magicians and familiars in place, it's tied up with politics and acknowledged as A Thing, but very much tied into an otherwise recognizable Regency society that can't be bothered to be that impressed (too busy being impressed with the knots in their cravats, obviously). You guys know that *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* is one of my favorite books, right? I couldn't love this concept more. I was going to stick around until the end (especially since it was clearly going to deal with some racial and class issues that simmered under the surface in that one in a more blatant way, and there were some cleverly placed unanswered mystery breadcrumbs placed out early on- well done, Cho.)

But then I hit what my kindle told me was about 40%. Remember how I told you guys reading *JS&MN* and losing patience to just hang out for *Strange*? Same damn thing here. Then *Strange* showed up and things got amazing pretty quickly and never got less amazing until the last page. I laughed out loud once, then twice, and then traded gasping and laughing for a sustained period pretty much almost until the end.

Okay, so basic plot: Zacharias Wythe is the Sorcerer Royal, like I told you above- but he inherited his position from his mentor and father figure, Sir Stephen Wythe, in suspicious circumstances that were never quite explained. He is clearly the most powerful magician living, so, as yet, he still holds the staff of office- but there is a louder and louder rebellion stirring amongst England's magicians about his leadership (not helped, of course, by the fact that this is the early 1800s and Zacharias is of African birth and appearance and some Englishmen don't like acknowledging that any "foreigner" can do anything better than they can- hey- actually, maybe this isn't just because it's the early 1800s. Ringing some bells). This situation is only made

more precarious by the fact that England seems to be in the process of losing the plentiful magic it once had, and has been for decades. No new magical creatures or familiars have appeared, and the borders to Fairy have been slowly, but inexorably closing.

Enter Prunella Gentleman, aka my new fictional best friend. She works at a magical school for young ladies where they are mostly taught to hide their gifts and pretend like magic doesn't exist (think of it like one of those boarding schools where rich people send embarrassing daughters who get pregnant young or show signs of mental health difficulties). She has lead a precarious life on the sufferance of someone who took her in- but then, early in the novel, she makes a discovery that changes her entire life and throws her in the path of Zacharias- leading to life-altering consequences for both of them. The surprise is so good and her course of action is so audacious and amazing I don't want to even hint at it, but suffice it to say that it leads to them making an amazing team in more ways than one.

Aside from the wonderful plot and an outstanding cast of supporting characters in the best Regency farce fashion, (Rollo! Damerell! Aunt Georgiana!) what's really wonderful in the back half of the book is Cho's increased confidence and ability to handle the tone, dialogue and rhythms of the genres that she's paying homage to- both Regency farce and epic fantasy. She really does a great job with ramping up the ridiculousness to just the right volume, while never quite forgetting the serious threats that underlie all of this conflict.

(BTW-Man, I hope this book is an indication that this mixed genre is here to stay. Can I just make up one of these cool new subgenre names for it to help marketers? "Bonnet fantasy"? "Carriage-wheels-and-magic-wands fantasy"? Hmmmm. Come on guys, we have to be able to come up with something to encourage people to do this more.)

Not to mention the serious girl power in this book. Prunella, my new BFF, is, as I mentioned, utterly fantastic, and I love the way the author goes about showing that to us. She never needs her to be admired and stared at as the belle of the ball (at least not more than briefly, before something goes terribly wrong), she doesn't need her to necessarily be Mary Sue. She just needs her to be determined, clever, to know what she wants and not be afraid of stating it (whether it's "feminine" or "feminist" or not), and of course to be a whole lot of fun. Although Zacharias is our ostensible hero, and so much of the book is from his point of view- and he really does a great job of playing the straight man and the tragic hero we want out of our epic fantasies, Prunella is really the true farcical heart of the novel- she gives it life and insanity and the heart palpitations we want out of an adventure. I told you guys, she's Strange- but way funnier, more self-aware, but just as ferocious when she needs to be. There's some pitiless stuff in here, and she's nobody's perfect heroine, and man, does she screw up, but it's enjoyable from beginning to end.

I was never more delighted than when I saw, in parentheses after the title, that this was only Sorcerer Royal #1- which hopefully means there's more to come. I don't think it's spoiler-y of me to say that I want to see how Prunella continues her reign of terror and mayhem in the next book and who she shocks to their core next.

I am sorry I was ever wary of this, anyone who ever recommended this to me! More fool I, please be as smug as you like! You deserve it.

TheBookSmugglers says

Delightful books are delightful.

I am completely, utterly enamoured with Sorcerer to the Crown, Zen Cho's first novel. A wonderful and charming book that pays homage to Regency romances and Fantasy novels at the same time that interrogates some of the problematic aspects of those genres in regards to race and gender. It's like this book was written for me.

Zacharias Whyte is a freed slave and a talented magician who just so happens to have recently become Sorcerer Royal of the Unnatural Philosophers of Britain. His fellow magicians are not exactly happy about it because Zacharias is not only a black man and not exactly a gentleman but also the events surrounding his mastery of the Sorcerer Royal's Staff (that only answers to the One True SR) are shrouded in mystery. WHAT exactly happened that night, everybody wonders. And so the magicians and sorcerers whisper and gossip and plot behind Zacharias' back because that is the polite thing to do, as we know. Microaggressions are always the way to go too. And Zacharias knows everything about those.

Within the story, there is a truth universally acknowledged that:

England's scarcity of magic was a matter of common knowledge among the magical.

What with the magic no longer freely flowing from fairyland and the number of familiars declining to the point where no magician has even seen a familiar in ages. The familiars are magical creatures from fairyland that devote their lives to the service of a magician (at a Great Cost) who is then considered a sorcerer. This is the Right and Proper way of doing things, of course.

But ANYWAYS, the lack of magic is terrible and the magicians have been anguishing over that and trying to hide it from the Government because magic and the status quo are directly connected and even though the Sorcerer Royal should be independent from politics this is really Zacharias being completely naïve and a fool for believing that POWER is as uncomplicated as that.

And here is the funny thing about this so called scarcity of magic: because if you move your eyes away from London and the Unnatural Philosophers and the gentlemen and look at other places – like the school for gentlewitches where “inconveniently magical daughters” are sent to learn restraint because women's bodies and little brains simply can't cope with magic as everybody knows – you will see magic abounds, really. But inappropriate magic doesn't count.

“Shameless, impudent, meddling females, who presumed to set at naught the Society's prohibition on women's magic, and duped the common people with their potions and cantrips!”

HAHAHA. This book, it is awesome. Because that's the setup and we know that something awesome is going to happen to disprove that. Like have a myriad of different women from all over the world, doing amazing things from heroism to villainy – the women are the ones to move the plot along, and to sort out all the problems.

Zacharias Whyte, SORCERER ROYAL: secondary character.

AND THEN.

Enter Prunella Gentleman. WOMAN.

An orphaned, mixed race, half-Indian WOMAN.

Who has more magic in her little finger than many gentlemen in their entire bodies. Who knows how to wield such magics in ways that are preposterously dangerous, completely outrageous and incredibly cool.

Prunella, who has something like a thousand familiars. OK, I exaggerate but this is an important point because of the ways that it's all connected to history, power and family.

Prunella Gentleman who has the guts and fortitude to do anything to get what she wants. And those who dare stand in the way and tell her she can't because of her gender?

Prunella is all like: I shall do what I please, SIR. *saves England*

Prunella had once thought life in London would be all flirting and balls and dresses, hitting attentive suitors on the shoulder with a fan, and breakfasting late upon bowls of chocolate. She sighed now for her naïveté. Little had she known life in London was in fact all hexes and murder and thaumaturgical politics, and she would always be rising early for some reason or other!

Prunella, incorrigible busybody. Who meets Zacharias and then nothing will ever be the same again. And I just love the dynamics between Zacharias and Prunella and even though the romance is an obvious (but super welcomed) development, the subtlety of it is delicious especially in how Zacharias is anything but ambitious while Prunella could easily run the universe. An example of an interaction between them:

Your amoral ingenuity in the pursuit of your interest is perfectly shocking," said Zacharias severely. "Yes, isn't it?" said Prunella, pleased.

"Said Prunella, pleased".

_ Prunella Gentleman, you are my patronus.

When talking about the book and its inspirations and influences, Zen Cho most commonly mentions Susannah Clarke and Georgette Heyer's regencies but there is one work that I thought about the most when reading *Sorcerer to the Crown*. In many ways I think this book is in direct conversation with another sensational read from earlier this year, *Uprooted* by Naomi Novik, especially with the way that both novels examine the relationship between power and class, between power and the social strata which inevitably places women in a subordinate position within the status quo. Both books question and subvert this really well and look at the ways that women create and wield magic. Both books converse with feminism and with topical issues within SFF and they are both incredibly light, delightful, charming and friendly in ways that we don't usually see in mainstream Fantasy.

This has been an incredible year for reading so far. *Sorcerer to the Crown* is another favourite and a strong top 10 contender.

Carly says

In *Sorcerer to the Crown*, comedy of manners meets fairyland, and the result is pure unadulterated fun. The story takes place in an alternate reality where magic, once a primary occupation in the best of families, is slowly falling out of favour as England's atmospheric magic dries up. While the nonmagical part of society may be preoccupied by their victories and failures in the Napoleonic war, magical society is engrossed by scandal. Sir Stephen, the old Sorcerer to the Crown, has died under mysterious circumstances, his familiar has disappeared, and the man who has taken up the staff is none other than an emancipated slave Sir Stephen picked up on his travels and raised as a thaumaturge. Zacharias himself never wanted to be Sorcerer to the Crown; he'd much rather continue his research into restoring England's atmospheric magic. Instead, his new role throws him into imperialistic politics, plots against his life, meetings with the Fairy Court, and, most

frightening of all, giving a speech at a school of gentlewitches on the dangers of magic.

Sorcerer to the Crown is definitely a comedy of manners, and I think it very successfully integrates some shoutouts to authors such as Austen, Wodehouse, and even Hornug. Although the entire sequence of events is triggered by a speaking visit to a girl's school (Yes, I see what you did there), the greatest influence upon style and plot is definitely Austen. I'm not generally fond of Austenesque alternate magical realities, but Cho really did her research and has created a charming book with much of the amusing commentary as the authors she references:

"Can you conceive of anything more absurd? [...] He might as well seek to persuade us that a pig can fly--or a woman can do magic!"

The friend observed that so could pigs fly, if one could be troubled to make them.

"Oh, certainly!" replied the first. "And one could teach a woman to do magic, I supposed, but what earthly good would a flying pig or a magical female be to anyone?"

It's been over a decade since I've read it and the book is exceedingly dim in my memory, but I think if you enjoyed *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* and are (still) waiting anxiously for the sequel, *Sorcerer to the Crown* is definitely worth a look. From my very vague recollections and a helpful recap from a friend, there are certain similarities in the plot, including the heavy focus on parties and politics and the ways in which these familiar themes are altered by the presence of magic. Sure, Regency or Napoleonic fantasy stories are dime a dozen, but I think Cho's story is elevated from the rest of the rank and file by her examination of political issues surrounding racism and sexism. In Zacharias's world, women are considered "too delicate" for magic, and are strongly discouraged from practicing it. The other major character, the "inconveniently magical" Prunella, is forced to make a decision between practicing her craft and finding a functioning place in society, and she is coldly pragmatic about her options. Both Prunella and Zacharias are pioneers for their minority in the area of magic, and Cho deftly presents the pressures they face to be "model minorities." Zacharias, in particular, has been subject to endemic racism all his life, exoticised, belittled, and dismissed. Sir Stephen's advice to him was always to simply take it, to never lose his courtesy, and to outperform and defy expectations. Cho touches upon the stifling weight of responsibility that Zacharias lives under. As he says at one point,

"I would not have been rescued from my bondage if not for Sir Stephen's conviction that he could make of me something extraordinary. I was told that I must prove the African's ability to English thaumaturgy."

As a pioneer in diversity, Zacharias is tasked with the responsibility of the magical reputation of his entire race. Prunella faces similar issues, but she is far less willing to accept such an unfair burden and instead uses all the "*amoral ingenuity*" she possesses to remove such obstacles in her path.

If you're looking for a gentle, often silly story of Napoleonic-era magic that still manages to dip into some more interesting themes, then *Sorcerer to the Crown* is definitely worth a look.

~~I received an advanced reader copy through Netgalley from the publisher, Penguin Group, in exchange for my honest review. Quotes were taken from an advanced reader copy and while they may not reflect the final phrasing, I believe they speak to the spirit of the novel as a whole.~~
