

**A Publicity and Marketing Analysis of *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* by Susanna Clarke,
Published by Bloomsbury**

The term “unfiction” is fairly new, but perfectly describes a large back catalogue of literature. It’s primarily used online, mostly in the horror genre, to describe media that’s narrative is completely rooted in fiction but is relayed like its contents are real. Often, the story is relayed through fake VHS tape or other footage, a website organized by a fake organization, a video game, or a combination of all different mediums. Popularized online through ARGs (Alternate Reality Games), unfiction projects have seen a boom in the last 5 years that publishers should take advantage of to market to new, younger readers. *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* is written as a piece of unfiction, attempting to pass itself off as a biography while still making it clear to readers that the story itself is fictional. Creating a new edition that deliberately brands itself as a piece of unfiction will appeal to readers that don’t typically engage with fantasy books. Clarke wrote the novel from the perspective of a biographer who researched two magicians. This type of narrator perfectly places *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* into the unfiction genre, and the copious footnotes with references to fake texts and events within the story’s universe create lore expansion that’s equally popular at the moment, even with readers outside fantasy and sci-fi novels. If you search for any unfiction series online, hundreds of results will pop up not only for the series itself and all the ones similar to it, but also for massive threads dissecting and discussing the series and videos picking apart the clues left to put the whole story together. Even if viewers have all the pieces, they still discuss the impact of the story and praise it for its quality, which *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* already has. Unfiction prompts online discussion, which facilitates new interest in a piece of unfiction media, which would drive up sales of the book. Focusing marketing toward a hot genre will increase interest in the book and its sales, while also giving it a refresh that will appeal to current teenagers and young adults that were babies or children when it was first published. Though the book is only 2 decades old, this refresh is needed to reup interest in the book and drive sales up again. It’s no secret that print publishing is becoming more expensive, and as a result is a riskier venture. Any new editions would have to be sure to turn a profit, which this modern revamp of Clarke’s novel will definitely do.

IDEAL READER

The white glow of a laptop’s blue light digs its way into the grooves of Ella’s eye bags. She didn’t dare look at the clock on the bottom right corner of the screen, choosing instead to stay buried in the calm tones of the video narrator’s voice to convince herself it couldn’t be that late. Even if it was, the thought of disrupting such an effective storyteller by hitting “pause” struck her as rude. The way the narrator explained and analyzed the plot of a video game that had never existed enthralled and fascinated her. She didn’t know what drew her to unfiction, but she couldn’t get enough. Maybe it was the possibility that a horrific video game with secrets buried deep within to expose the greedy corporation that released it could exist. Perhaps considering timelines where humans lived under the threat of demons that could replace them or a living statue that roamed an abandoned mall thrilled Ella in ways she hadn’t experienced before. Truthfully, it all likely boiled down to the fascination with the stories a website documenting a

(fake) lost puppet show could tell. The thought of real scenarios that mirrored the fictional stories netizens could spin lit Ella up.

Though she primarily dove into online storytelling, recently she found herself picking up more and more books. She thought her favorite genre only existed online, as it was admittedly incredibly niche, but a little bit of research led her to volumes thick and thin that danced along the line of reality and fiction. Though she enjoyed run-of-the-mill fiction, she always wanted something more. Something that imitated reality but left enough clues to make it clear the story was completely rooted in fiction, save for a few details. In recent years, she'd shifted to narratives that relied on an online format to succeed, but a return to her favorite childhood pastime-- reading while actually holding a book in her hand-- had brought about a sense of peace and a return to a form of wonder she missed. Granted, much of that had to do with her focus on narratives centered around magic. Magic... A thing only achieved by tricks and sleights of hand in the real world made real between the satin black cover on those pages.

Discussion, discussion. That was her favorite part of storytelling. Whether it was online or in person, she loved hearing others' opinions and theories on the events they all were engaged with. To pretend said events were real despite their grim or fantastical elements made it that much more enthralling. She'd keep coming back for more, even when her mind started to fade.

(Media referenced, in case I need to do that for proper credit purposes:

1. *Shipwrecked64*-- video game created by Squeaks D'Corgeh
2. *The Mandela Catalogue*-- Video series by Alex Kister
3. *The Oldest View*-- Video by Kane Pixels
4. *Welcome Home*—Web ARG created by Clown PartyCoffin)

NEW COVER COPY

Original Cover Copy

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, two very different magicians emerge to change England's history. In the year 1806, with the Napoleonic Wars raging on land and sea, most people believe magic to be long dead in England--until the reclusive Mr Norrell reveals his powers, and becomes a celebrity overnight.

Soon, another practicing magician comes forth: the young, handsome, and daring Jonathan Strange. He becomes Norrell's student, and they join forces in the war against France. But Strange is increasingly drawn to the wildest, most perilous forms of magic, straining his partnership with Norrell, and putting at risk everything else he holds dear.

New Cover Copy:

War and magicians go hand-in-hand.

To defeat the French, the English military recruits help from the Learned Society of York Magicians. They send the best of their remaining magicians: the fussy and traditional Mr. Norrell, whose well-trained tricks turn the tide of the war, cement him as a hero and sends the practice of magic into a blooming renaissance. From this rebirth emerges a promising trainee: Jonathan Strange, whose raw talent requires Mr. Norrell's careful mentorship. The pair help cement a victory for England in the Napoleonic Wars and uncover dastardly

plots by peers. But after the war ends, Strange's hunger for power grows stronger, drawing him toward a darkness that thrives off the young and naive and forever puts the very safety of England he once fought for in jeopardy and risks the lives of those who once supported him.

Through careful research and meticulous footnoting, Clarke's narrator spins an enthralling and entertaining unfiction biography that manages to feel as real as the concrete world outside its pages.

New Cover Copy Rationale:

For this cover copy, I looked at different biographies and used those cover copy summaries as reference. For this project, I've been marketing the book with an "unfiction" angle, since the story itself is written as though it was real history. With this in mind, I focused on the setting of the Napoleonic Wars and the main characters' involvement in it. From what I saw, biographies tend to give a summary of the subject's life, while books about historic events summarize the major points of the event, so I focused on summary. I didn't want to give away the whole book, but since the original cover copy reveals that Strange dabbles into dark magic, I figured mentioning that point was okay. This fictional biography is about two people, so I wanted to make sure a point in the cover copy was how their paths cross and their important connection to not only each other, but the Napoleonic Wars.

Although I've been taking references from the nonfiction genre for this project, it's important that I still make it clear that this book is fictional. Heavily emphasizing the importance of magic in the story helped with that. "Unfiction" is becoming an increasingly popular genre, though it's primarily used to describe online horror projects. Despite that, I feel *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* fits the unfiction genre pretty well, so leaning into that angle more now that the genre is becoming popular has been fun.

A last note for a hypothetical new edition: we should absolutely remove the review from Neil Gaiman due to recent allegations.

NEW AUTHOR BIO

1. Susanna Clarke (born 1 November 1959) began *Jonathan Strange* in 1993 and worked on it during her spare time. For the next decade, she published short stories from the *Strange* universe, but it was not until 2003 that Bloomsbury bought her manuscript and began work on its publication. The novel became a best-seller.

2. Constant travel throughout her childhood created a fascination with the real and fantastical in Susanna Clarke. Her interest in the practical parts of the world led her to pursuing degrees in philosophy, politics, and economics from St. Hilda's College at Oxford. Despite her "practical" degrees, Clarke loved storytelling, leading to the creation of her first novel, *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*. Her research for the book was thorough and accurate, diving deep into life, social customs, and political dynamics in the 19th century. The detail, accuracy, and extensive lore of *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* led to Clarke selling the manuscript for publication before it was finished.

3. For this version of Clarke's bio, I focused more on the ways the real world combined with fantasy and the fantastic in her life. When reading interviews with her, I found it interesting how much of her early life contrasted to the type of person she seems to be nowadays. Typically, audiences wouldn't think that a writer would get degrees in politics and economics, especially one who would go on to write books about magicians and massive mazes in other worlds. With this reverse engineering, I want to turn the marketing

of the book toward the fictional biography/ unfiction angle. Often, author bios for nonfiction books and biographies focus on their research backgrounds or their credibility to write about the chosen subject. Although Susanna Clarke didn't research her book subjects, because she created them herself, she extensively researched England during the 19th century. She dug deep into social dynamics, politics, and everyday life during the Napoleonic Wars and Victorian Era, as well as what every type of building might have looked like and who would have lived inside. She wanted to ensure accuracy for her setting, which helps *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* feel more like a true story than fiction. While I wouldn't want to trick anyone into thinking *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* is nonfiction, marketing it like a biography would be marketed could attract a wider audience who enjoys the writing style of nonfiction books. I also feel this angle helps sell a side of Susanna Clarke that is often ignored. While her chronic illness and love of writing are important steps to publication, her education and research are compelling for shifting to the angle of an unfiction biography.

MEMO TO NEW JACKET DESIGNER

Hi Michael,

Hope all is well! I'm reaching out because we're ready to move to discussing cover design for the new edition of *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*. As you may have noticed, previous editions have not changed their design much, if at all, making it difficult to distinguish between them unless the reader looks at the inside cover or copyright page. We want this edition to lean more into the "unfiction" angle of the narrative and its structure. As we start to think about marketing, we want readers to know they're picking up a work of fiction, but we'd like to mimic covers for nonfictional works, specifically biographies, for the cover design of this edition.

As with many biographies, we'd like to feature images of the characters on the front cover. This is, of course, more difficult because they are fictional characters. There are illustrations of the characters in the book, but we understand using those might be difficult as well. However, if you're able to incorporate the images of the titular characters on the cover to emulate biographies of well-known individuals, that would be amazing. Ominous woods and mirrors are important to the narrative, if you need any inspiration outside of character sketches.

We feel it's important to mention that the book was, at one point, adapted into a BBC mini-series, so there's an edition with the show's poster as the cover. Although it features our leading characters, we'd like to steer away from using the image from this cover at all if possible.

Please let me know if you have any questions or need more information from us, feel free to reach out! We can't wait to see what you come up with and look forward to touching base soon.

Sincerely,
Sonia Joshi