"Strangely Inorganic Patriotism": Serializing Invasion Fiction at the Turn of the Century

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“Strangely Inorganic Patriotism’: Serializing Invasion Fiction at the Turn of the Century”

I. Retrospection and Prophecy

The study of invasion fiction, or “future-war” narratives, is vexed by problems of hindsight and foresight. Points of contact between actual and imagined war come too easily to hand and the genre is too readily historicized. George T. Chesney’s story, “The Battle of Dorking,” was published in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* in May 1871 and is universally agreed to be the major instigator of the genre, despite the existence of a few forerunners. It deplored Britain’s debilitating “commercial” complacency and military unreadiness to defend itself, the consequences of which the narrator describes to his grandchildren 50 years after a humiliating invasion: “’Tis sad work turning back to that bitter page in our history, but you may perhaps take profit in your new homes from the lesson it teaches. For us in England it came too late.” Despite the setting of the narrative in a darkened future, the didactic message would have been clear enough to an audience able to read the story as adults rather than grandchildren and recognize the invaders as the Prussian army that had overwhelmed the forces of the Second French Empire in 1870-71. Chesney had sent the outline of the story to John Blackwood eleven days after France’s signing of the armistice, with Paris under the short-lived government of the Commune.

One of the last examples within this first, major phase of the genre was Arthur Conan Doyle’s story “Danger! Being the Log of Captain John Sirius,” which imagined Britain held to ransom by “Norland” when its food supplies are cut off by a small submarine force. The story appeared in the *Strand Magazine* in July 1914 as war coalitions were forming among the European powers, and in the preface to the 1918 republication of the tale Doyle made the point that in the hands of an astute observer (such as himself), this was a category of fiction whose separation from reality was only ever provisional: “It is a matter of history how fully this
warning has been justified and how, even down to the smallest details, the prediction has been fulfilled.” Doyle anticipated the accusation that he “should have taken other means than fiction to put his views before the authorities,” explaining that “he did indeed adopt every possible method, that he personally approached leading naval men and powerful editors”; also that he had written to the Committee for National Defence and “touched upon the matter in an article in The Fortnightly Review.” Doyle’s conjunction of military experts and editors, and the scenario’s passage between a popular weekly magazine and a more patrician review all show the social range of the format as well as its authors’ desire that the stories be read not only as entertaining fiction (especially if they proved to be somehow prophetic).

Between these weighted military bookends is a mass of invasion fiction that proliferated in popular print culture around the turn of the century—the subject of this article. Chesney’s original was translated, copied, and debated, but its influence on policy was limited compared to its initiation of a widely imitated literary genre. Many instances extended the format to novel-length narratives, which often appeared serially in magazines and newspapers before publication as single-volume novels. My focus is on invasions fictions that were the result of careful collaboration between authors and the owners of the publications where they were serialized, specifically between William Le Queux and Alfred Harmsworth, the founder of the Amalgamated Press, and between George Chetwynd Griffith-Jones and Cyril Arthur Pearson, another magnate of the new journalism. The first invasion fictions that resulted from these partnerships were The Angel of the Revolution in Pearson’s Magazine in 1893 and The Poisoned Bullet in Answers to Correspondents in 1893-94. Both authors were also journalists and the host publications were early or the first titles of their owners’ portfolios. According to one source, of over 200 titles launched in 1888, the single survivor was Harmsworth’s Answers to
Correspondents. Pearson’s Weekly must have entered a similarly competitive print environment when it went to market two years later.

Le Queux worked as a political reporter until the success of The Poisoned Bullet allowed him to concentrate on writing romances, of which he was extremely prolific. He published more than 150 works over a 40-year period, with representative titles such as A Secret Service, being Strange Tales of a Nihilist (1892), On the “Polar Star” in the Arctic Sea (1903), The Mystery of Nine (1912). Somehow, he also found the time to be an industrious writer of non-fiction of the sensationalist type; these works generally rely on a formula of exposure (“secret history,” “true record of,” “confessions,” etc.). An auto-generated anthology of his work—an innovation of our current publishing technology—indicates the volume of his output: it is over 14,000 pages long.

The Poisoned Bullet was subsequently published in 1895 as The Great War in England in 1897 (with a dedication to Harmsworth, “a generous friend and patriotic Englishman”). Answers was the first title in what would become the Amalgamated Press Empire run by Alfred Harmsworth with his brother Harold (known ennobled as Viscount Northcliffe and Lord Rothermere respectively), an empire which included Comic Cuts, Illustrated Chips, the Daily Mail, The Times, the Observer, and the Daily Mirror. Le Queux’s next invasion fiction published in a Harmsworth title, The Invasion of 1910, was published serially in 1906 in the Daily Mail and in the same year as a single-volume novel.

George Chetwynd Griffith-Jones was another prolific journalist-novelist who wrote under the pen-name of George Griffith. Griffith was simultaneously writing long journalistic pieces, with a special interest in modern travel, sometimes in the same issues as his serially published novels. The future-war narratives were The Angel of the Revolution and its sequel, Syren of the Skies, published in Pearson’s Weekly in 1893 and 1893-94 respectively. This was one of several
For Review Only

titles in Pearson’s portfolio that, like Harmsworth’s, soon expanded to include weekly magazines and newspapers (he bought the Evening Standard and launched the Daily Express in 1900). Griffith’s romances of war and technology appeared alongside other fantastical tales by writers including H. Rider Haggard and H. G. Wells, and were published as novels very soon after (with the latter’s title revised to Olga Romanoff). The invasion fictions of both Le Queux and Griffith were publishing successes: Le Queux’s The Battle of 1910 sold over one million copies worldwide and was translated into 27 languages. The Angel of the Revolution was immediately followed its publication as a novel (by the Tower publishing company, who had also published Le Queux’s first invasion fiction), which went through eight editions in its first year and its sequel.

Convenience and durability have meant that these novels are more often read (as scholarly citations attest) in the more robust single-volume format than as PDF scans or from the crumbling pages of undigitized publications (the case with Answers). To read them in their original print context rewards the visual labour, for it shows how coherent the editorial line could be in these weekly magazines of miscellany, and how neatly the invasion fiction fitted into the surrounding material. Letter-writers reflected paradigmatically on the condition of Britain’s current navy on correspondence pages just as the fictional enemy’s forces gather. While an unopposable airship destroys the armies of Europe (at a time when no flying machine had successfully taken off), adjacent columns reported miraculous technologies from the present day—a speaking watch for example. These narrative were harmonized with their print environment: the battles of these invasion fictions were fought to the weekly or daily rhythms of the publications in which they appeared, often announced as splash headlines in the visual manner of reportage. The stories’ original presentation on the crowded pages of penny newsprint
was very different from how Chesney’s single-instalment story in *Blackwood’s* appeared: in two columns with generous white margins and no other content across 34 pages.

Accounts of invasion fiction that are not sensitive to the culture of the publications in which they were published miss the private interests that this type of narrative could be made to serve while ostensibly addressing national security. One overaccommodating thesis is that these anticipations were symptomatic of a general state of cultural anxiety in the *fin de siècle*. Barbara Tuchman’s history of the period refers to fear of invasion as a “psychosis,” and more recent assessments describe these narratives as articulating “a diffuse popular anxiety” or “a paranoid under-current to the brash and widespread confidence of jingoism in the late-Victorian period.”

While some instances of invasion fiction might deserve the “paranoid” label (the sudden proliferation of tunnel-invasion stories around the time that the channel tunnel was first proposed in 1882 for instance), the anxiety thesis does not feel tonally appropriate to the presentist announcement of invasion as front-page news in Harmsworth’s publication, nor invasion fiction’s generic enjoyment of national landmarks being spectacularly blown up.

A very different accusation comes from writers examining causes of World War One in the interwar period, who saw the amplification of danger in tabloid journalism to have been responsible for the hostility that precipitated conflict soon after. When Caroline Playne reflected in 1928 on the militarism that had preceded the war, she judged the Harmsworth Press to be “responsible in part for the creation and nurture of the mental folly and nervous fears which helped set the world on fire in 1914.” She was referring specifically to the zeppelin scare that was whipped up by the *Daily Mail*, and while there were in fact several airship raids on England in the war, the paper’s escalation of this danger from the sky produced numerous false sightings in the 1910s. A. Michael Matin takes pains to undo a determining retrospection that over-
represents this section of the press prior to World War One, pointing out the importance of publications that advocated for peace.\(^\text{14}\)

These applications of hindsight are the consequence of a category whose \textit{sine qua non}, the prediction of imminent war, came to pass. World War One gave these narratives the appearance of prophetic sight, however inaccurate the invasion scenarios were. Matin argues that the trenches were partly the result of a failure to imagine the outcome of war except as the result of decisive technologies and moral values.\(^\text{15}\) Playne’s account of her titular subject (\textit{The Pre-War Mind}) connected the speed of modern life—of modern journalism in particular—to a general inability to discriminate between fact and fancy. She refers to George Newnes’s origination of the cuttings format with \textit{Tit-Bits} (where both Harmsworth and Pearson learned their trade), and to \textit{Answers} and the effects of production of such shrill, mixed content for a modern reader: “Nervous impulsion will not let him read except at a gallop, and the journalism of the day, well aware of this, cares for him accordingly.”\(^\text{16}\) Holbrook Jackson made a similar observation that the machine culture of the popular press inclined the minds of the reading public towards nationalistic fantasies. Also singling out Harmsworth, he referred to the appearance of “a strangely inorganic patriotism” in the 1890s.\(^\text{17}\) The aim of this article is to supplement accounts of invasion fiction that historicize “patriotism” in terms of national mood and military confrontations with one that analyses the synthetization of “inorganic” patriotism in serially published invasion fiction in the new journalism, a hyper-competitive print environment where nation and editorial interests could profitably aligned and war could be imagined to gain competitive advantage.

What is there to be learned from these alarmingly racist, violent stories with their casual xenophobia and enthusiasm for war, which furthermore were so formulaic? Matin betrays some
frustration with the repetitiveness of invasion fiction when he distils (from over 100 examples) the ten motifs that “are so recurrent that they comprise virtually constitutive elements of the form.” Even the narrators seem occasionally to become weary of the format; late in The Angel of the Revolution we are told: “It would be both a tedious repetition of sickening descriptions of scenes of bloodshed and a useless waste of space, to enumerate in detail all the series of conflicts.”

The answer is that their repetitious quality was native to the periodical environment in which they appeared, where successful formulae could be systematically imitated and their value maximized by extending the narratives across long print cycles. What genre of fiction could be more native to this Darwinian scene—this “slaughterhouse of literature” to re-use Franco Moretti’s phrase—than these narratives of fitness, conflict, and survival that spliced their publications’ own struggle for existence onto national character and individual aspiration (social Darwinism’s constructive ambiguity)? These stories were structured by patterns of discovery and exposure that were entirely compatible with the values and appeal of the new journalism, while their celebration of innovation and technology in warfare corresponded to the promotion of their own production processes. The invasion fiction became a finely tuned machine of reproduction that served expansionist ambitions of their publications, which aimed to enlist new readers in the name of national interest.

II. Serial Plots

All but two of the invasion narratives considered here were published serially: The Great War of 189- (1892, Black and White Magazine), The Angel of the Revolution (1893, Pearson’s Weekly), The Poisoned Bullet (1893-94, Answers to Correspondents), The Syren of the Skies
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(1894, Pearson’s Weekly), The Great War of 1910 (1906, Daily Mail). The exceptions are The Spies of the Wight (1899), which was written by the journalist Francis Edward Grainger (under the pseudonym Headon Hill) and published by Pearson, and Doyle’s story “Danger!,” which was published across two weeks in Colliers in the US a month after its publication in one instalment in the Strand. Scholars have, of course, taken note of where many of these stories first appeared, and contextualized the narratives in light of campaigns for accelerated armament. Very little attention has been paid to the stories’ seriality, however, and how by abutting and facing regular columns, advertisements, and correspondence pages, they were one element in a system of daily or weekly publication that brought these heterogeneous elements into a recognizable entity designed to appeal to (and form) a community of like-minded readers.

In The Poisoned Bullet the invading Russian and French catch the public and military unawares. Once “suddenly and rudely awakened” and after suffering a series of violent defeats at sea and across the country Britain eventually triumphs through an alliance with Germany and recovers both her martial prowess and global pre-eminence. There is also an individual contest between the athletic and appropriately named Geoffrey Engleheart (“a tall, athletic young fellow of twenty-six, with wavy brown hair [...] and handsome, well-cut features”), and his Russian counterpart, a Jewish agent in the pay of Russia masquerading as a German aristocrat, whose methods are theft, poison, and assassination. The miniature narrative imitates the wider conflict, and marriage is the reward of individual valour just as victory is at the national scale.

Le Queux ends the later novel, The Invasion of 1910, on a different note, as Britain’s hard-won victory over the invaders proves to be pyrrhic. In the final chapter, “How the War Ended,” the narrator (whose views we can only take to be Le Queux’s) deplores the profligacy of socialism, whose two creeds are said to be “Thou shalt have no other god by Thyself” and “Let
us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.”23 This corruption of English fortitude was also referred to in the earlier novel, in which the urban looters and anarchists are described as “the scum of the metropolis” and punished accordingly. In The Invasion of 1910 appeasement (promoted in the liberal press) prevails and inclines the population to sue for peace at any price, for although the invasion has been defeated marine trade remains under the control of the German merchant fleet following Britain’s failure to maintain her own.24 The lesson of this scenario for its original readers was not only that Britain must be ready to defend herself militarily, but the navy must also secure trade abroad through aggressive protection of overseas interests. The right-minded press—not least through narratives such as this one—is shown to have an important role in shaping military and civilian policy in the expanding public sphere of news and debate. Le Queux entirely dispensed with a romantic sub-plot and heroes in this latter invasion narrative, giving it the feel of a speculative history from the near future.

The Angel of the Revolution preceded Le Queux and Harmsworth’s first collaboration, coming to an end two months before The Poisoned Bullet began, and its narrative differs significantly from the format begun by Chesney and adapted by Le Queux and others. The crucial difference is that the narrative follows the invention and use of an unopposable weapon—a heavily gunned airship—by an impoverished engineer who is also the main character in the story. Richard Arnold is persuaded to sell the design to an all-powerful “Brotherhood,” described as “an international secret society underlying and directing the operations of the various bodies known as Nihilists, Anarchists, Socialists.”25 Their organization is enabled by near-perfect intelligence, penetration of military and governmental hierarchies, and immense wealth. They protect themselves with codes of loyalty, secrecy, and implacable violence—values shown to be far more effective than democratic government. Armed with an air fleet of this new technology,
they precipitate global war by provoking conflict between France, Britain, Germany, and Russia into conflict in Afghanistan. When the world (or at least its northern hemisphere) is in a state of general war and Britain is on the point of being overwhelmed by the Russian-led coalition, they bring their air force into play. Fulfilling dreams of an Anglo-Saxon federal government, the Brotherhood activate their secret five million American members to revolt against the oligarchic government and make common cause with the beleaguered British nation. Arnold is able to direct his fleet against Russia’s now hopelessly defunct technology of weaponized air balloons, rescue the beautiful nihilist Natasha from Russian imprisonment, securing her love through a display of aerial acrobatics.

The climactic ending of the war for London is the occasion for Natasha (the eponymous “Angel of the Revolution”) to sing the polyglot Hymn of Freedom, “a song at once of victory and thanksgiving, for the last battle of the world-war had been lost and won, and the valour and genius of Anglo-Saxondom had triumphed over the last of the despotisms of Europe.” The Brotherhood withdraw to their mountain stronghold (Aeria), and the Anglo-American federal empire is guaranteed by their maintenance of the war machines in case of future need. It’s a perplexing resolution, not least because the nihilists approve an Anglo-Saxon settlement that restores property rights on pain of death—as announced by the English aristocrat Alan Tremayne, one of the Brotherhood’s most senior commanders. The eugenicist bent of the fantasy is underlined in the sequel, in which the Brotherhood have renamed themselves the “Aerians.”

The entanglements of invasion fiction with periodical culture in this period went much further than the professional background of these authors and the publications they appeared in. Across the genre news of foreign attack travels from the coast to the metropolis via Reuters telegrams and the urban population receives the shock of invasion first as front-page news.
first instalment of *The Poisoned Bullet* on 23 December 1893 did not appear under its own title, but as a front-page headline: “Invasion of England! War Declared by France and Russia. The Enemy Already Advancing. Manifesto by the Tzar.” Le Queux’s later novel, *The Invasion of 1910*, appeared in the *Daily Mail*, which had invested heavily during the Second Boer War in the infrastructure that allowed it to be first with news of conflict abroad. In the fictional frame of the second instalment of the story (15 March 1906) the anxious capital waits anxiously for reports that are delivered by none other than the paper in which the story was published:

> All through the morning, amid the chaos of business in the City, the excitement had been steadily growing, until shortly after three o’clock the “Daily Mail” issued a special edition containing a copy of a German proclamation which, it was said, was posted everywhere in East Norfolk, East Suffolk, and in Maldon in Essex, already occupied by the enemy.²⁸

This is a very different presentation of invasion from the subsequently published novels, where the front-matter (Le Queux’s authorial prefaces and the testimonials) immediately neutralized any ambiguation of news and fiction that could be achieved by the co-option of reportage’s realia. Appearing on newsprint, without this didactic editorial scaffolding, enabled the scenario’s presentism to be maximized, for serial publication made reportage and anticipation almost interchangeable. The first instalment in *Answers* (23 December 1893) concluded by making the point explicit: the story was said to deal “not with the vague, shadowy, and distant future, but with the almost immediate present, and will appear week by week in ‘Answers,’” under the title ‘The Poisoned Bullet’.”

One drawback of serializing an invasion narrative was that readers might only arrive once it was underway and be disinclined to catch up with the story. The formulaic nature of the plot
and its entirely stock characters would have mitigated this problem but other measures were
taken to enlist the irregular reader as a regular. One was trailing the narrative in friendly
periodicals as a major event. Harmsworth had limited resources to promote Le Queux’s story of
1893-4 but no lack of chutzpah. Comic Cuts and Illustrated Chips (launched by Harmsworth in
1890) trailed and boosted The Poisoned Bullet, and the latter offered that “The Editor of
ANSWERS will send post free upon receipt of post-card, with name and address, the opening
chapters of the grand new war story, “The Poisoned Bullet”” on 13 and 20 of January 1893. The
same formula was applied more widely to the Daily Mail’s publication of The Invasion of 1910,
but the most bombastic appeal to readers who had missed the first instalments of an invasion
story appeared as an “Important Notice” in the 30 December issue of Answers: “To everyone
who has at heart the welfare of our country we will send, post free, twelve printed sheets
containing the opening chapters of our war narrative, and the opinions of great men on our
present naval condition.” To redeem this offer, readers should make “immediate application” to
“Answers War Department, 24 Tudor Street, E.C.” With the addition of an office pigeon-hole,
the magazine suddenly acquired a war department and would be “contributing” to national policy
concerns in weekly instalments.

The periodical narration of a future war allowed cumulative pressure to be applied to
target-readers. The ninth of Matin’s ten recurring motifs of the genre is geographical specificity
of the conflicts and familiarity of the landmarks destroyed. Harmsworth / Le Queux turned this
to the purposes of marketing their story. Like virtually every British instance of the genre the
final confrontation in The Invasion of 1910 was a battle for London, but it was only in Le
Queux’s handling that the enemy makes such a long journey through the country’s other towns
and cities to get to the capital. According to Clarke, Harmsworth insisted that Le Queux plot a
German invasion strategy that took in as many cities and towns as possible, specifically those where the circulation of the publication that carried the narrative could be increased (figure 1). In *The Invasion of 1910*, he even placed advertisements in the provincial papers, and maps “showing the district the Germans would be invading next morning in the *Daily Mail*.” These teasers indicated the direction of the fictional advance on London and also Harmsworth’s strategy for expansion outwards from the capital. Tyrone Slothrop’s map in *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973) has a similar, double significance: the sites of his sexual conquests anticipate the impact zones of the V2 rockets during the Blitz. In the libidinal economy of newspaper circulation, Harmsworth’s targets were noted in advance, establishing a curious alignment between his business interests and those of the fictional enemy. *The Invasion of 1910* was promoted in London by men in Prussian-blue uniforms and spiked helmets, who suddenly appeared bearing sandwich-boards advertising the imminent war as if it had already begun.
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Harmsworth also used the format for more personal ambitions. In 1895 he bought the *Portsmouth Mail* and commissioned William Laird Clowes to serialize a war narrative (*The Siege of Portsmouth*) that was published in it every day during the three weeks of his campaign to be elected to the local parliamentary seat. A poster advertised the story by explaining that “the names of prominent townsmen will be introduced in this remarkable work, and all those who do not wish to be left behind in the rush for the ‘Mail’ should go to their newsagents today and give an order for the paper to be delivered at their house regularly.”

This campaign was not successful but the incident indicates a willingness to exploit invasion fiction to promote private, rather than national interests.

The consequence of involving so much of the country in narrative destruction was that the plot became extremely repetitive: one battle followed another as the German grand tour of England embraced a maximum readership. The publication schedule of the magazine or newspaper required a major battle for every week or an instalment for every day. The strategy of the invasion was therefore harmonized with the interests of the publication in which it appeared, creating tension within the form as realism of prediction was obliged to allow the rhythms of publication to govern plot development. Serialized narration could, however, help establish a chronological realism, because discourse time became harmonized with story time. The narrative timeframe of *The Poisoned Bullet* was four months and it was published over five; *The Invasion of 1910* spanned four fictional and real months, and *The Angel of the Revolution* also synchronized its two timeframes (of nine months).

The inclusion of the methods of reportage was essential to the plot of these stories. News of landings arrives at the metropolis in *The Poisoned Bullet* via news services and is quoted directly as “by Telephone through Dalziel’s Agency” and “Reuter’s Telegrams.”
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War of 189-: A Forecast begins with a report of the attempted assassination of Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria wired in “by telegraph from our own correspondent, Mr Francis Scudamore,” a well known war journalist of the day. The appeal of this pseudo-realist technique of narration again appears to be tactical but also part of what Andrew Griffiths describes as the “novelisation of the news.” At the time of serializing The Poisoned Bullet Harmsworth was still largely in the business of cuttings magazines but by the publication date of The Great War of 1910 the Daily Mail was firmly established in the news industry as being first with news of overseas affairs. S. J. Taylor, in his history of the Harmsworth dynasty, records the Daily Mail’s elevation to a paper of note during the Second Boer War (1899-1902) when it invested heavily and rapidly in infrastructure that allowed it to be first with the news once conflict began on 13 October 1899. By 18 October, the Daily Mail had chartered a daily express train from London to Manchester to deliver news to readers in northern England quickly and soon after opened an editorial office in Cape Town with dedicated cables to relay developments to the British capital. They also invested in staff and expertise, on “war correspondents […], on maps and interpretation in London.” In recognition of his prominence in public life after the Mail’s coverage of this war, Harmsworth was ennobled as Lord Northcliffe in 1904. Lord Roberts’s endorsements would have been even more valuable at this point, having been in place as commander of British forces in South Africa for part of the Second Boer War.

That the realia of “live” war coverage was incorporated in the Daily Mail’s invasion fiction of 1906 is not surprising, but for the same techniques to be included in the Answers serialization in 1893-94 suggests the anticipation of invasion to have been a preparation for future conflicts and their reportage. Harmsworth was nothing if not a careful planner: there were 65 dummy issues of the Daily Mail before it first went to the newsstands on 4 May 1896. It
seems that in Harmsworth’s hands, the imagination of future war was carried out not only to rehearse military scenarios and inform national policy, but to prepare the journalistic practices for reporting wars to come. The commercial success of these narratives’ publication as novels shows that invasion fiction could succeed outside serial presentation but the single-volume format could not recreate the liveliness of the stories’ original context and obscures the uses to which the format was put in Harmsworth’s titles.

III. Synthetic Opinion, Machine Tastes

Looking through the crumbling pages of *Answers* reveals how the novel’s and the magazine’s case for naval armament was carefully reinforced by the cuttings and miscellanea that made up the rest of the issue’s content. A stanza from a poem by Alfred Tennyson appeared in the first instalment of the story (23 December 1893) containing the lines “Her fleet is in your hands, / And in her fleet her fate.” Harmsworth was extracting and re-using elements from W. T. Stead’s campaign in the *Pall Mall Gazette* for Naval expansion, where the full poem had been printed on 23 April 1885 as “The Truth about the Navy. A Warning by Lord Tennyson.” In the same issue was a discussion below the headline “Are Dark Times Coming for Great Britain?” that simply reported the opinion of the *Daily Telegraph* that the navies of Russia and France were preparing for possible invasion. The article quoted the view that “This is the most serious moment for England since the morning before Trafalgar.” Another article under another interrogative headline ("Is an Attack on Britain Possible?") quoted the *Pall Mall Gazette* and speculated that the new class of French torpedo boats “could, on the first night after war was declared, dash into our harbours and ports across the Channel within a few hours” (original emphasis). The scene was set for the novel’s opening and the reader primed to agree with the
narrative commentary that “England had calmly slept for years, while military reforms had been
effected in every other European country. Now she had been suddenly and rudely awakened!”

Correspondence was used as content in Harmsworth’s magazine, which allowed for
staged dialogue and the production of a community of like-minded readers agreed on the need
for pragmatic militarism. The use of correspondence was another adoption of an existing
formula: both Harmsworth and Pearson had started out at George Newnes’s cutting magazine
*Tit-Bits*, which formalized its community of readers as “Tit-bitites.” Through that magazine’s
“Answers to Correspondents” section, Newnes had created “an impression of editorial
accessibility and reader involvement.”40 Readers of *Answers* were encouraged to think of
themselves as a similar community (the “Answerites”) and a socially aspiring new class with a
stake in society; Harmsworth regularly boasted of his audience that their salary was £100 but
they expected one day to earn £1000.41 Calling the correspondence page a “parliament” implied
a degree of representative authority, consistent with W. T. Stead’s description of the new
journalism as “a vast agora, or assembly of the whole community, in which the discussion of the
affairs of State is carried on from day to day in the hearing of the whole people.”42 The
readership was invited, it seemed, to subscribe to an opinion on a subject whose importance to
the nation was underscored by invasion fiction’s imagination of the consequences of inaction.43

Letters printed on 20 January 1894 also indicate a curated orthodoxy. The author of the
first letter expressed the view that “everyone ought to serve in the Volunteers until he is at least
efficient. Surely, it would not be such a terrible hardship for the sport-loving youth of this
country to put in, say, fifty drills per annum?” Who could object when conscription was
presented as a conducive to health and morale? Only the second correspondent, a stereotypical
liberal who signs off as “A Man of Peace” and whose presumably confected letter advised
“disbanding our army and considerably reducing our navy” in order to demonstrate “how Great Britain could rely upon its moral support alone for safety.” A third letter, from a reader in Paris, confirmed the hostility of the French and a fourth thanked *Answers* for alerting the public to “their almost imminent danger, that they would with one accord by aroused to the national peril, which is, in the opinion of all naval and military authorities, so near at hand.”

Lord Roberts’s letter in support of Le Queux’s scenario should be seen in this print-context, as one element among many that reinforced the case for armament.

Dear Sir,

I entirely concur with you in thinking it most desirable to bring home to the British public in every possible way the dangers to which the nation is exposed unless it maintains a Navy and Army sufficiently strong and well organised to meet the defensive requirements of the Empire.

Believe me,

Yours faithfully, Roberts [facsimile signature].

This letter appeared in *Answers* in the edition of 21 April 1894, near the conclusion of the story, so its original presentation was very different from its inclusion in the novel’s front matter. In the magazine, it was another, albeit higher-profile instance of the paradigmatic correspondence and mutually reinforcing elements that made up the paper’s editorial stance. These techniques—letters, authoritative opinions, dire warnings, caricatures of opposing views—were powerful means of persuasion, which enveloped the late-nineteenth-century reader in a social network of confirmation bias that we would now call a filter-bubble.

*Pearson’s Weekly* included less correspondence, but its regular columns and features indicate an audience inclined to favour the casting of an inventor as the central character in a
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martial adventure. Like Answers, this was a weekly, penny publication that consisted of cuttings from other periodicals, short humourous material (jokes and sketches), and extensive advertisements on its front and back pages for clothing, gadgets, and health products; the reader was told that these, like the magazine itself, were cheap at the price. There was correspondence on the “Questions Worth Answering” page, where both sides of an exchange were contributed by readers at a week’s delay. A ½ crown was paid for the selected questions, and printed answers were paid, pro-rata, at 2 guineas per column. These pages show a recurring interest in military readiness. “Which Arm of Military Service, Cavalry, Infantry or Artillery, will Probably be Found the Most Efficient in the Next War?” and “Which has been the longest period of complete peace among the Powers of Europe?” were questions from the 21 January 1893 issue, the first instalment of The Angel of the Revolution.

The fit between Griffith’s story and the other magazine content is especially striking in the next week’s issue. This instalment of the novel introduced Richard Arnold into the narrative with his exclamation: “Victory! It flies! I am master of the Powers of the Air at last!” In the same issue, the “Something New and Strange” page reported inventions, for example “A Wonderful Rope,” “A Speaking Watch,” “Telegraph without Wires,” and “An Ink Erasing Electrosine Pencil.” At the end of this section, readers with inventions of their own were invited to write in and enter into a joint venture with the paper. “The letter will be handed to a gentleman well known in connection with patents, who will put himself in communication with its sender.” Columns in later issues reported the invention of “an automatic boy [...] who can walk up and down a hill unaided,” “a flying machine,” and “a new quick-firing gun” (1 and 8 April 1893). The magazine tempted the mechanically minded reader with the fantasy (realized in Griffith’s adventure) that he could get rich quickly by marketing the productions of his (or her) workshop.
in partnership with the newspaper. These were consistent with the schemes and promotions that both Pearson and Harmsworth had used to make their early titles stand out in the marketplace of periodical popular culture. Answers’ success has been attributed to an inventive get-rich competition: an income for life offered for the closest estimate of the amount of gold held in the Bank of England at the end of trading on 4 December. There were 718,000 entries.\textsuperscript{45} Pearson’s \textit{Weekly} was promoted at its launch in 1890 with the elaborate gimmick of spraying the pages with eucalyptus oil as protection against ‘flu.\textsuperscript{46}

This conjunction of technological boosterism with the promise of reward and/or security were common to invasion fiction and the periodicals in which they were serialized. It underpinned many of the advertisements for dubious cures to all the maladies that accompanied modernity. One “notice to readers” promoted the “Electropathic and Zander Institute,” whose electric cures could alleviate an enormous list of ailments:

- Nervous Exhaustion, Physical Debility, Neuralgia, Sleeplessness, Brain Fag, Hystera, Epilepsy, Melancholia, Paralysis, St Vitus’ Dance, Rheumatism, Gout, Sciatica,
- Lumbago, Defective Circulation, Poorness of Blood, Indigestion, Diarrhoea, Liver Complaints, Flatulence, Constipation, Kidney Disorders, Internal Weakness, Tropical Diseases, Impaired Vitality, Pains in the Back, Weak and Languid Feeling, Chest Complaints, Corpulence, Rupture, &c.\textsuperscript{47}

Invasion fiction was a genre which imagined far worse physical harm in order to prevent it with scenarios that alternated between excitement at the technologies of future war and alarm at the consequences that could follow. Le Queux’s and Harmsworth’s stories were themselves an invigorating tonic that could counteract “weak and languid feeling” and initiate readers into the secrets of successful modern living.
These crowded pages of *Answers, Pearson’s Weekly*, and the *Daily Mail* were very different from those of *Blackwood’s* and suggested a very different reader. Instead of the full-page, two-column text of “The Battle of Dorking,” these serial narratives of war were surrounded by advertisements, humourous anecdotes, crime reports, and images. If the cheerful commercial hubbub of *Answers* and *Pearson’s Weekly* was an “assembly of the whole community” (to requote W. T. Stead), then it was more of a bazaar than a debating chamber. This distinction in tone, visually manifested in page layout, is a reason to calibrate invasion fiction according to publication context and pay attention to the social dimension of the format’s address. In addition to his ten motifs of invasion fiction, Matin adds another quality that recurs, though it “cannot be categorized as a constitutive or near-constitutive motif.” This is “expressions of disdain for civilians in texts written by military and naval professionals.” Specifically, these disdained civilians were the “literate and enfranchised populace” who were beneficiaries of the 1867 and 1884 Reform Acts. Matin is right not to suggest that this patrician orientation was universal to the genre, for invasion fictions of the type discussed here embodied precisely the opposite dynamic: of a socially aspirational populace who had only recently acquired a forum where their opinions on national affairs were solicited. Some of the invasion fictions published in the penny and half-penny press had military endorsements (Lord Roberts’s testimonial or the “Naval chapters by H. W. Wilson” in *The Invasion of 1910*) but their orientation was plebeian rather than patrician, like that of the new journalism in which they appeared that Kate Campbell summarizes as “‘the masses’ against the classes.” Harmsworth was more than happy to exploit this “disdained populace’s” sense of exclusion from government and military policy as a driver of ongoing subscription. Invasion fiction could be especially effective in securing a
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...disenfranchised demographic as readers when they could identify as the victims of bad military planning in an imagined war.

The invasion scenarios delineated in these publications reproduced the values that their host periodicals traded upon: romanticized accounts of discovery and exposure, and the celebration of technological culture. Pearson’s Weekly, as pointed out, promoted design innovation and machine achievements of all kinds. Griffith dedicated the novel of The Syren of the Skies (the sequel to Angel of the Revolution) to Maxim Hiram, a developer of flying machines and rapid-firing guns; he himself reported on new technologies, including a series of articles on “How I Broke the Record Round the World” that overlapped with several of the instalments of The Syren of the Skies. When Harmsworth launched the Daily Mail on 4 May 1896, the first issue included an article titled “The Explanation,” which attributed the sale of such a substantial newspaper for a half-penny to another order of technology:

Our type is set by machinery, and we can produce many thousands of papers per hour cut, folded and if necessary with the pages pasted together. It is the use of these new inventions on a scale unprecedented in any English newspaper office that enables the Daily Mail to effect a saving of from 30 to 50 percent and be sold for half the price of its contemporaries. That is the whole explanation of what would otherwise appear a mystery.50

It says a lot about the profile of the targeted readers of the paper that Harmsworth decided to address them in this way. They were thought to appreciate a bargain, though one that was delivered by efficiency rather than through meanness. In the same vein advertisements offered luxury items at affordable prices. Harmsworth himself had risen from poverty to extreme wealth and his early titles’ get-rich competitions tantalized readers with comparable upward mobility.
His and Pearson’s papers celebrated technology as the evidence of a world being transformed and a new era of social volatility in which the right-minded, newly enfranchised populace would be increasingly invested. The newspapers themselves were perfected in the white heat of machine innovation, as streamlined and robust as George Griffith’s airship, “against whose hull of hardened aluminium, bullets, even if they struck, would simply splash and scatter, like raindrops on a rock.” Backward-looking competitors to the new journalism would go to the wall when faced with these efficiencies and the Daily Mail’s cost-value ratio. There would be conflict and even danger in the new technological order, making it essential to be on the side of modernity, an orientation which purchasing the newspaper itself constituted as this and other types of “explanation” implied.

Titles such as the World’s Work made behind-the-scenes accounts of how the modern world operated their principal content (as if transatlantic modernity were a machine that could be diagrammatically explained). A photo-essay of 1903 described the systems designed by “Messrs. W. H. Smith & Son—The Great Distributors of Literature” and narrated the production of daily newsprint as a heroic, daily achievement of modern organization. The essay drew readers’ attention to the period between the editor’s final approval of the day’s paper late at night and its delivery to the door in the morning; its sections include “Receiving the Papers and Parcelling them Out,” “Beating the Clock,” “The Rush to Catch the Trains,” and “How the Flood of Print is Daily Poured through the Country.” Photographs of “The Book and Magazine Floor at ‘Smith’s,’” “The Receiving Room of W. H. Smith & Son,” and even of “Where They Make the Station Bookstalls” accompany the enthusiastic copy. The article concludes with a vision of a well ordered world, confirmed by the punctual delivery of news to the consumer:
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At six o’clock at the coffee-stall there were tired men resuming collars and ties and
widening the sweat from their brows. “I shall get two hours sleep this morning, and I shall
be in bed for twenty hours at the weekend,” said the young man who had beaten the
clock. For he had given you your morning papers.52

The country was vulnerable to invasion because this well-ordered life was not installed in the
country at large, from the top of government to the man in the street—so went the implication of
the fictions as part of a new literary culture. Military planning was not up to speed with the
advanced imagination of the press; its armaments were not as modern as those imagined by
journalists. It is not surprising then that some of the invasion scenarios were also technological
dreams that fulfilled fantasies of both machine culture and reportage, in which journalists might
even have a decisive role to perform.

IV. Embedded Narrators

The Invasion of 1910 begins at the very moment of the day when the article in the
World’s Work ends: at first light, on streets that are empty save for sub-editors “walking down
Fleet Street together soon after dawn on Sunday morning, 2nd September.” The rhythms of
newspaper production are again synchronized with the future-war narrative, for the calm of that
morning hour, whose subjective possibility is a function of newspaper production, is a
microcosm of the peace before invasion. The normally busy London thoroughfare “was quiet and
pleasant in the calm, mystic light before the falling of the smokepall.”53 The story is set in
motion by the operations of news networks: the two work for different papers, and their
professional small-talk concerns the sudden failure of telephone and telegraph lines with the
coastal town of Yarmouth where German advance troops have cut all communication with the
capital. Suspense (though the reader presumably knows already what is in store) is sustained with a discussion of the mechanics and processes of news networks. One observes “I tried in every way—rang up the Central News, P.A., Exchange Telegraph Company, tried to get through to Yarmouth on the trunk, and spent half an hour or so pottering about, but the reply from all the agencies, from everywhere in fact, was the same—the line was interrupted.” The other replies in the same expository manner. One of the pair is prompted by investigative conscience to enquire at a Post Office on the way home, where these servants of public life piece together the revelation of invasion from telegraph and telephone reports. The introduction of war into the narrative is caught up with the production of the modern newspaper and—paradoxically—the story is launched when the paper’s means of receiving a story breaks down.

Journalism’s expansion since the early nineteenth century was due in part to the need for news of the Napoleonic wars. It is not surprising that the future-war narrative found so comfortable a niche in periodical culture, whose development depended on bringing information of conflict to an audience before they had experienced it themselves. In invasion fiction those methods of reportage were synthetically phoned in from a fabulated future, but the reliance on the infrastructure of reportage was disabling as well as enabling and circumstances of the plot made it difficult to narrate war without access to newspapers. Conan Doyle’s story “Danger!” runs up against the problems that come with the necessary isolation of a war machine. John Sirius is the commander of the submarine fleet that successfully blockades Great Britain, but without any means of ship-to-ship communication he and the captains of the other vessels struggle to meet in British waters and when they do, they have to shout to one another while floating on the surface. As the story is narrated from Sirius’s limited first-person perspective (his Captain’s log), Conan Doyle needed a means to show how the campaign of explosions and
sinkings was affecting the blockaded nation. This is achieved—for Conan Doyle and for Smith—by regularly surfacing and demanding at gunpoint a copy of the latest newspaper from a passing ship. Articles from the *London Courier* or the *Western Morning News* helpfully report on the national state of affairs, specifically the rising prices of wheat, maize, and barley, which could not otherwise be brought into the narrative frame. Equally, it can hardly be the responsibility of John Sirius to provide Matin’s tenth motif of the genre: a didactic conclusion regarding the country’s best course of action to avoid such a crisis. It is a cutting from *The Times* that is included to do so, reporting the settlement between Britain and “Norland” and listing the immediate priorities to become self-sufficient in food production and begin digging a submarine tunnel to allow food to be imported directly from the continent.55

Richard Arnold’s airships may determine the outcome of war but being airborne for long periods of time (again, without the imagination of wireless technology) made it difficult for the story to be assisted by the dissemination of news that a conveniently embedded journalist would facilitate. During the annihilation of the Russian air balloons, the narrator regrets that no journalist is present to scoop the story: “The journal which could have published an exclusive account of the first aërial skirmish in the history of the world would have scored a triumph which would have left its competitors a long way behind in the struggle to be ‘up to date’.”56 The lament is insincere as host periodical of this story was just such an up-to-date publication, one which celebrated technological modernity and achieved—in fiction—precisely this exclusive on-board copy. As the plot of *The Angel of the Revolution* expands to include developments on three continents the narrative can no longer be managed from a single point of view. We sense the hard-pressed voice of Griffith himself when the narrator externalizes the difficulties of keeping up a narrative on so many fronts. There are so many engagements “that the combined efforts of

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the war correspondents of the European press proved entirely inadequate to keep pace with them in the form of anything like a continuous narrative.” That said, his flagship “Ithuriel” is the ideal technological solution to the journalistic challenges that international war presented: its speed is unprecedented (capable of flying at over 200 miles per hour) and it offers a bird’s-eye view of armies, cities, and of course the destruction that it is itself uniquely able to deliver. Unlike John Sirius’s submarine, confined to the murkiness of British waters, it is an ideal instrument of both war and reportage. The Daily Telegraph (and other papers) are on hand to tell the parts of the story that require a terrestrial perspective on the progress of the world war.

Invasion fiction was amenable to the new journalism’s adoption of long-running campaigns and also to the appeal of investigative reporting that could penetrate false appearances and present the true state of social and political affairs to its readers. As the invasion narrative expanded from the story to a novel-length treatment, the plot against Britain had space to become a more elaborate one that required detective work and exposure—elements that a modern newspaper or magazine was well placed to simulate. Spies of the Wight has the journalist-narrator Monckton foil German plans for espionage and invasion. In the opening chapter, Monckton’s short trip upstairs to receive his assignment (to surveil the treacherous Baron Von Holtzman) involves a recapitulation of the apparatus of a modern newspaper:

As I put my foot on the private spiral iron staircase that runs from the machine-room in the basement to the general offices, thence to the compositors’ floor, and, higher still, to the editorial rooms above, the three great Marinoni presses down in the central “well” of the building pulsed to a standstill, after tossing off the last of the damp sheets, which five minutes later the newsboys would be crying outside in Fleet Street as our “special edition.”
He is given the complementary assignments of spying and reporting by his supernaturally informed editor, Shirley Wreford, representative of the investigative but mysterious power of the modern press, which is described in the novel as “that modern inquisition which insists on getting to the back of things, or arraigning its discoveries before public opinion, and on pronouncing judgment before constituted authority has begun to move.” The editor, and the modern newspaper, has an extraordinary ability to root out and expose Britain’s enemies amid the sublime complexities of modern life.

I never knew quite how he gained and retained touch with every social and international undercurrent; but whether it was the first whispering of a Continental imbroglio that had to be caught and sifted, or a new grouping of City financiers that had to be dissected, he somehow and somewhere managed to get his information. Numberless were the sensations which he served up to an expectant world.

We are accustomed to the claim that embedded journalism ensures the transparency of war reporting but in these examples from invasion fiction embedded narration was closer to the confected thrills of espionage and conspiracy fiction. Le Queux did not acknowledge any relation of the invasion’s meandering progress to his employer’s circulation targets in his preface to The Invasion of 1910 and instead finessed the geographical range of his research by romancing his use of modern travel to itemize the infrastructure of modern life. He gathers intelligence on the German’s likely strategy as if a spy himself. The choice of verb is telling:

Before putting pen to paper it was necessary to reconnoitre carefully the whole of England from the Thames to the Tyne. This I did by means of a motor-car, travelling 10,000 miles of all kinds of roads, and making a tour extending over four months. Each town, all the points of vantage, military positions, all the available landing-spaces on the
coast, all railway connections, and telephone and telegraph communications, were carefully noted for future reference.\textsuperscript{62}

*The Real Le Queux: The Official Biography of William Le Queux* (1939) subjected the writer to a double-process of disclosure and mystification. While appearing to tell his “real” story, it recycled myths of the author’s own inventions. Norman St. Barbe Sladen states from the outset that Le Queux was a real spy who wrote popular novels to defray the cost of his investigations, and who once had to detect a plot to prevent his own assassination by foreign agents.\textsuperscript{63} He is described as having a network of informants in the political and criminal underworld (like the fictional editor Wreford in Hill’s novel), who warned him of an *actual* German invasion plan that he reported to British intelligence only to be disbelieved. *The Invasion of 1910*, by this account, was in fact a description of a real plot, disguised as fiction, in turn disguised as authentic news in the *Daily Mail*’s formatting of the invasion fiction as reportage. The novel can thus be said to have fulfilled its generic objective of making a real invasion threat fictional.\textsuperscript{64}

The category of invasion fiction did not originate in serial form, nor in the new journalism, but it did precipitate and flourish in that niche, where environmental factors such as the adoption of long-running campaigns and a demotic social dynamic suited the genre’s loud spoken call very well. There it could dramatize future machine technologies for relaying news of war to the public within narrative frames of discovery and revelation. The format was extended in this print environment, setting the scene for new genres: espionage and conspiracy fiction, which would also be quick to cast journalists in key roles in complex plots. Wreford, the editor-in-chief of *Spies of the Wight*, could be Harmsworth, or Pearson, or W. T. Stead, or George Newnes. Monckton stands equally well for the romancers Le Queux and Griffith. Where *The
Battle of Dorking had been primarily a diagnosis of national weakness, these later invasion fictions were celebrations of the powers of the modern press.


3 Clarke, Voices Prophesying War, 1966, 30.


5 Conan Doyle, 6.


10 Michael Hughes and Harry Wood, “Crimson Nightmares: Tales of Invasion and Fears of Revolution in Early Twentieth-Century Britain,” Contemporary British History 28, no. 3 (July 3
For an account of the response to this proposal, which included a petition organized by the Nineteenth Century (and signed by Alfred Tennyson, T. H. Huxley, Herbert Spencer, and the Archbishop of Canterbury among many others), see Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War*, 1992, 96.


13 Playne, 102–3.


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24 Le Queux, 547.


32 Nine months may seem quite a short time for the design and build of a fleet of airships, as well as their subjugation of the world’s armies and the consequent declaration of peace, so one realism (unity of time) could be said to counteract another (of content), though predictions about the length of the First World War were shown to be similarly, disastrously, optimistic.

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35 Andrew Griffiths, The New Journalism, the New Imperialism and the Fiction of Empire, 1870-1900, 2015, chap. 2.

36 Taylor, The Great Outsiders, 55.

37 Bourne, Lords of Fleet Street, 30.

38 Taylor, The Great Outsiders, 33.

39 Dennis Griffiths, Fleet Street: Five Hundred Years of the Press (London: British Library, 2006), 117; Kathryn Ledbetter, Tennyson and Victorian Periodicals: Commodities in Context (Routledge, 2016), 141.


43 Kate Jackson is more generous in her account of Newnes’s relation to his readers than I am of Harmsworth and his. For her, this correspondence community proceeds from Newnes’s interests and background in collectivism and philanthropy; the letters pages were “a kind of journalistic,
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discursive equivalent of a settlement house, offering mutual support, a wide range of social
services, and a sense of citizenship and community to its readers”(Jackson, “George Newnes and


46 Griffiths, *Fleet Street*, 137.


Reading University.

53 Le Queux, *The Invasion of 1910*, 3.

54 Richard Daniel Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading

55 Conan Doyle, “Danger! Being the Log of Captain John Sirius,” 48–49. In his non-fictional
argument for national defence, Conan Doyle also recommends the construction of a tunnel to
allow troops to deploy to Europe (France is imagined to be an ally for the immediate future).


57 Griffith, 181.

58 Kate Campbell suggests that Matthew Arnold’s coinage of the “new journalism” in 1887 was
prompted by the *Pall Mall Gazette*’s “Maiden Tribute” campaign against the sexual exploitation


60 Hill (pseud.), 10.

61 Hill (pseud.), 10–11.

62 Le Queux, The Invasion of 1910, vii (emphasis added). This reconnaissance—also supplemented by detailed maps—was a large part of the plot in a more celebrated instance of the genre, Erskine Childers’ The Riddle of the Sands (1903).


64 It is worth repeating the similarity with Childers’ novel, in whose preface the invasion plot’s “editor” reflects that “the secret discovered being of such a nature that mere suspicion of it on this side was likely to destroy its efficacy” (The Riddle of the Sands, Crime Classics ed, Crime Classics (London: Atlantic Books, 2009), vii).