Introduction

‘William Le Queux, Master of Misinformation’

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Abstract

The Introduction prefaces a double special issue of *Critical Survey* examining the work of controversial popular author, journalist and amateur spy William Le Queux from 1880 to 1920. Known as the ‘master of mystery’, Le Queux was prominent in transmitting exaggerated fears about British national security before, during and after the First World War. The Introduction provides a historical and literary framework for the special issue and outlines its central premises: that cultural production in Le Queux’s era was intimately connected with contemporary socio-political forces; that this relationship was well understood by authors such as Le Queux, and often exploited for propagandist purposes; and that the resulting literary efforts were sometimes successful in influencing public opinion. The Introduction also outlines the overall finding that Le Queux’s work tended to distort his subject matter, misinform his readership, and blur the lines between fact and fiction in pursuit of his defencist agenda.

Keywords: defence propaganda, First World War, invasion fiction, William Le Queux, spying

The relations which exist between the social and political condition of a people and the genius of its authors are always very numerous: whoever knows the one is never completely ignorant of the other.

— Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2
(Cambridge: Sever and Francis, 1862), 72

[T]he age of fiction is coming – the age when religious and social and political changes will all be effected by means of a novelist... To get an idea to penetrate to the masses of the people you must put fiction round it, like sugar round a pill.

— Arthur Conan Doyle, cited in [Robert Barr], ‘A Chat with Conan Doyle’, *Idler Magazine* 6 (1894), 348

The world has been remade by William Le Queux.

— Graham Greene, cited in Roger T. Stearn, ‘The Mysterious Mr Le Queux: War Novelist, Defence Publicist and Counterspy’, this issue

This Introduction prefaces a double special issue of *Critical Survey* examining the work of the controversial popular author, journalist and amateur spy William Le Queux, covering the main period of his writing career from 1880 to 1920.¹ As his reputation as an author of romantic, sensational and alarmist popular fiction became established in the late 1890s, Le Queux gained the sobriquet ‘master of mystery’, which was widely used to promote his works. The title of this issue instead emphasises his recurrent tendency to obfuscate, distort his subject matter and misinform his readership.² In addition to its obvious sensationalism, what Le Queux’s work is particularly notable for its consistent blurring of the line between fact and fiction and its prominence in transmitting exaggerated fears about British national security before, during and after the First World War (WWI). The epigraphs selected for this Introduction evoke the special issue’s major premises that, as de Tocqueville’s contention suggests, cultural production in the period in which Le Queux was writing was intimately connected with contemporary socio-political forces; further, as Doyle’s comment implies, that this was a relationship that contemporary authors, such as Le Queux, were well aware of and used to deliberate and often propagandistic intent; and finally, in accordance with Greene’s wry conclusion, that these literary efforts were at times successful in their desired end of influencing public opinion.

The late Victorian and Edwardian periods have often been approached through the prism of two key socio-political anxieties about British national security: the fears of imminent large-scale conflict and of foreign invasion.³ These fears arose largely out of escalating tensions between the European ‘great powers’ – Britain, France, Germany and Russia – over dominance in Europe, particularly after the newly militarised German state unexpectedly beat France in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71). Security fears were further exacerbated by intense European competition for prized overseas territory, mounting anti-colonial sentiment within Britain’s own imperial possessions and growing internal agitation for social change within Britain. While these related sets of fears of external hostility, war and invasion and internal anarchism and decay were prominent in factual discourse and debate, they were given particularly lurid articulation in a body of popular invasion, anarchist and spy scare literature that reached a wide audience and helped swell the currents of xenophobia and militarism that circulated around the turn of the nineteenth century and continued to flow during the war years and beyond.⁴ Within this sphere, Le Queux was an active writer and campaigner who produced some of the most sensational and bestselling pre-war invasion and spy scare fictions, as well as a set of equally sensational and widely circulated (purportedly factual) pamphlets that disseminated the same types of concern during WWI. The twin pillars of his paranoid world view were that an advance guard of (predominantly German) spies was already at work in Britain preparing the way for war and invasion, and that Britain, thanks to social dissent and poor political and military organisation, was too weak and disorganised to face them.

Le Queux is a figure around whom much of the paranoia underpinning invasion and spy scares coalesced – an author who participated in national defence

as well as writing about it, through amateur and ineffectual but much-publicised attempts at spying and involvement with amateur defence organisations. He is important because his bestselling and controversial work did more than simply reflect contemporary invasion and spy concerns; rather, underpinned by his posturing as a defence expert, it helped to shape and popularise these fears for a mass audience outside the defence-minded circles in which he moved. His alarmist body of work also played a role in articulating and disseminating related, and sometimes conflicting, societal anxieties about British urban decay, anarchism and socialism and about the threat of Russian Tsarism, a role that remains little explored until now. Given these factors and the lack of sustained recent scholarship on him, we have selected Le Queux as the subject of this special issue, his works providing a window on the wider interplay between literature, propaganda and society in the turbulent period between 1890 and 1920. A prolific author with extremely high sales figures, an unprecedented publicity machine, close relationships with influential military and political figures and a much-debated record in amateur espionage, we believe Le Queux is worthy of thorough investigation. The subsequent sections of this Introduction provide a framework for the special issue by giving a brief overview of Le Queux scholarship to date, highlighting salient points in Le Queux's career, placing his writing in its literary and historical contexts, and summarising and identifying common themes and conclusions from the collected articles.

Things we know about William Le Queux: contemporary Le Queux scholarship

Like his own novels, previous scholarship on Le Queux has been eclectic and inconsistent. The body of work can be split into a range of broad categories, including biographical material, literary criticism, historical studies and espionage research, and also a smattering of mentions in literary reference works.⁵ Published in 1923, *Things I Know about Kings, Celebrities and Crooks* is the closest Le Queux came to writing an autobiography.⁶ Though marketed as such, the book is best approached as an extension of his fictional output. Among numerous tall stories concerning Le Queux's close personal relationships with European monarchs and socialites, the work even claimed to reveal the identity of Jack the Ripper.⁷ Norman Sladen's ironically titled biography *The Real Le Queux* (1938), written a decade after Le Queux's death, borrows heavily and unscrupulously from *Things I Know* without adding much of substance.⁸ More recently, *William Le Queux: Master of Mystery* by Chris Patrick and Stephen Baister offers some valuable and entertaining insights, particularly in terms of Le Queux's early life and his later interest in radio technology, but it is based largely on inferences drawn from his fiction rather than archival research.⁹ The best biographical portrait remains 'The Mysterious Mr Le Queux: War Novelist, Defence Publicist and Counterspy' by Roger T. Stearn, and we are very pleased to republish it as the opening article of this collection, where it serves to provide the detailed biographical context on which the rest of the articles build.¹⁰

The pioneering literary historian I. F. Clarke played an important role in rediscovering Le Queux's work as a subject for academic study during the 1960s, notably focusing on Le Queux's production of fictional visions of invasion. In *Voices Prophesying War* (1966, 1992), Clarke probed the production and reception of these novels, and explored the genesis of Le Queux's bestselling invasion novel *The Invasion of 1910* (1906) in depth.¹¹ Similarly important is *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (1968), Samuel Hynes's pioneering work of cultural history. Exploring the same novel in detail, Hynes considers the 'amateurish and crude' Le Queux representative of 'a change in the mood of the English audience', whereby the literary appetite for 'good sense and decency' had deteriorated 'under the pressure of national anxiety'.¹² Since the publication of *Voices Prophesying War* and *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, a variety of literary and historical studies have touched upon Le Queux, though rarely in any great depth. Representative is 'The Germans are Coming!', Joseph Meisel's 1990 survey article of British narratives of German invasion, a thoughtful piece that nonetheless covered little new ground.¹³ Cecil Eby branded Le Queux in *The Road to Armageddon* (1987) as the high priest of Edwardian Germanophobia and described his novels circulating 'as freely as common coin', yet he remains indebted to Clarke throughout this chapter on 'Paper Invasions'.¹⁴ Another useful work is Petra Rau's *English Modernism, National Identity and the Germans* (2009), which locates Le Queux's work within a corpus of anti-German popular fiction and argues that such texts provide 'a valuable barometer for contemporary anxieties'.¹⁵ This point is further developed by Richard Scully in *British Images of Germany* (2012), who observes that although Le Queux is primarily associated with the demonisation of Wilhemine Germany, his novels nonetheless constantly looked to Germany as 'the model ... for national rejuvenation'.¹⁶

The tactical and strategic significance of Le Queux's imagined invasions has been a further avenue of debate. In his vast and detailed thesis 'The Invasion of the United Kingdom' (1968), Howard Moon emphasised that commercial interests often trumped military accuracy in Le Queux's writing. This was particularly apparent during the lengthy genesis of *The Invasion of 1910* prior to its controversial serialisation in the *Daily Mail* (discussed further subsequently), which saw Le Queux's thoroughly researched invasion plan altered by editorial request 'to allow ferocious Uhlans to gallop into every town from Sheffield to Chelmsford' in order to boost sales.¹⁷ Though Le Queux likely had little control over the whims of the *Daily Mail's* proprietor Alfred Harmsworth, Moon's inference is that he was a willing accomplice, more interested in success and notoriety than in strategic and tactical practicalities. Other critics have been more generous in this regard. Arguing that Le Queux arrived 'at a number of telling anticipations', Charles Gannon has suggested that his visions of future war compare favourably with the fluid military action of the Second World War.¹⁸ Another important voice in this debate is Michael Matin, who has reassessed Le Queux through the authorial dynamic of professional versus amateur, illustrating the divergences between military and civilian authors on the subject of invasion.¹⁹

Perhaps the most concerted focus on Le Queux has come through studies of espionage fiction and its relationship to the emergence of the British Secret Service. Certainly, Le Queux was an important figure in the development of Edwardian spy fever – literary and actual – and David French describes him as the most successful and prominent of a body of writers who ‘urged their governments to make timely preparations’ against invasion and espionage.²⁰ He is also viewed as having a role in the emergence of the Secret Service Bureau (latterly MI5 and MI6), although the extent of this role is the subject of some debate. Nicholas Hiley has argued that Le Queux capitalised on his relationship with the head of the ‘Special Section’ James Edmonds, a fellow conspiracist and Germanophobe willing to take the wildest intelligence at face value. This included a portfolio of letters Le Queux received from concerned readers following the publication of his spy thriller *Spies of the Kaiser* (1909), reporting a range of credible and incredible espionage activities, which Edmonds seems to have used as evidence to support the case for establishing the Secret Service Bureau.²¹ Though it seems likely that the Committee of Imperial Defence treated such information with a greater degree of cynicism than Edmonds, they nonetheless came to accept that ‘a great deal of German espionage was being undertaken in Great Britain’.²² Christopher Andrew gives Edmonds more credit in *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorised History of MI5* (2009), distinguishing between Le Queux’s fictional output and his ‘intelligence’ and arguing that while Edmonds ‘was well aware’ that the adventures of *Spies of the Kaiser* were fictitious, he ‘continued to take Le Queux himself seriously’. In Andrew’s view, moreover, ‘Le Queux was more plausible in person than in print’.²³ On another note, David Stafford suggests that despite Le Queux’s commitment to vigilance and preparation, his novels display great ambivalence towards the secret service, whereby an institutionalised and universal system of counter-espionage retains an inherently Victorian amateur spirit.²⁴ Highlighting that the outbreak of war in 1914 ‘gave a new lease of life to the spy novel’, Panikos Panayi explores Le Queux’s wartime writings in *The Enemy in our Midst* (1991), shedding light on this little-explored body of work that significantly shaped prevailing anti-German feeling.²⁵

The aims of this collection are in part shaped by the desire to create a framework for this disparate body of writing. Research into Le Queux has rarely conformed to any clear guidelines or parameters, and as such, a sense of common intellectual purpose has never truly emerged among scholars of Le Queux. Aiming to address this shortfall, the contributors to ‘Master of Misinformation’ have approached their articles with several key questions or points of debate concerning the nature and extent of Le Queux’s writing and influence in mind. The central research question is to assess the nature of the relationship between Le Queux’s writing and contemporary socio-political concerns, particularly those surrounding invasion, internal dissent and spying. In doing so, this truly interdisciplinary collaboration aims to illuminate the complex interplay between literature, politics and society in Le Queux’s era. What all of the contributions have in common is that, while focusing on Le Queux’s writing, the

chapters are equally grounded in the biographical, historical and cultural contexts of late Victorian, Edwardian, wartime and post-WWI Britain.

Le Queux's writing career and its literary and historical contexts

Turning first to the invasion and spy scare phenomenon with which Le Queux is most closely associated, his first contributions to it came in the form of popular novels in the tradition of the fictional invasion tale. The key impetus for this speculative strand of late Victorian and Edwardian popular fiction was the shocking German defeat of France in 1871. Immediately afterwards, then-Lieutenant-Colonel George T. Chesney wrote to warn Britain of its own vulnerability in a dramatic short novel, *The Battle of Dorking* (1871), in which he depicted the successful, durable German occupation of Britain. Chesney's admonitory tale was a runaway bestseller which inspired a school of follow-on texts supporting and countering its assumptions, in which, over the subsequent decades, Britain was invaded by the European power or powers with whom relations were most hostile at the time. Chesney's tale also caused a storm of controversy, helping to start a public campaign for military 'preparedness'.²⁶ Indeed, one of the most striking things about invasion tales as a body of fiction is the demonstrable effect they had on public opinion, provoking variously irate or alarmed coverage in newspapers, parliamentary debate and army and navy organisation proceedings.²⁷ By the 1890s, as international relations deteriorated and changes in the literary marketplace led to an increased demand for sensational, topical serial and one-volume novels, the invasion tale had gained considerable momentum and it was at this point that Le Queux entered the fray. Perceiving the sales potential of the invasion serial, the savvy publisher Harmsworth (of subsequent *Daily Mail* fame) commissioned Le Queux to write an invasion serial for his high-volume weekly magazine *Answers* in 1893.²⁸ Serialised initially as *The Poisoned Bullet*, this bestselling tale featured both a treacherous foreign spy and the joint and bloody invasion of Britain by France and Russia – inspired by the recent alliance between those two nations. It was issued in book form in July 1894 as *The Great War in England in 1897*, going through eight editions by the end of the year and boosting Le Queux's fledgling writing career.²⁹ Its success in turn inspired yet more invasion scare follow-ups in the later 1890s, such as Louis Tracy's *The Final War* (1896) which reiterated Le Queux's optimistic conclusion that Britain would ultimately triumph, and these appeared alongside subsequent re-issues of Le Queux's text.³⁰

A decade later in 1906, there was a spate of invasion texts as diplomatic relations between Britain and Germany worsened following the first Moroccan crisis and the ramping up of the naval race between the two nations.³¹ Le Queux and Harmsworth (now Lord Northcliffe) led the way with another 'much-talked of' invasion 'sensation', *The Invasion of 1910*.³² Serialised in Northcliffe's hugely successful, Germanophobic *Daily Mail*, it seems likely to have been the highest-selling invasion tale and the most influential work in the genre after *The Battle of Dorking*. Its straightforward plot detailed the efficient German in-

vasion of a disastrously unprepared Britain and a considerable amount of effort went into its planning and promotion. Northcliffe funded Le Queux's thorough reconnoitring of the invading army's route and provided him access to military consultants – including Field-Marshal Earl Roberts, revered veteran of half a century of colonial wars.³³ The controversial advertising campaign, referred to above in relation to Moon's thesis, featured 'sandwichmen ... parading the streets of the West End dressed in uniforms of the Imperial German Army' and provoked parliamentary censure.³⁴ *The Invasion of 1910* was an explicitly propagandist novel, its admonitory and often hysterical tone apparent in the following explicit warning: 'The repeated warnings had been disregarded, and we had, unhappily, lived in a fool's paradise, in the self-satisfied belief that England could not be successfully invaded'.³⁵ It was written in support of Roberts' vocal campaign for 'universal military training', and, in turn, publicly championed by Roberts – as the sensationalist advertising campaign stressed.³⁶ To this end, a facsimile letter from Roberts was inset into the preface of all first editions recommending it to 'everyone who has the welfare of the British Empire at heart'. The serial version of *The Invasion of 1910* reached an audience of millions in the *Daily Mail*, then the biggest daily paper.³⁷ And the book version's sales figures also seem impressive, though not perhaps as impressive as the one million copies claimed by Le Queux, as this collection demonstrates.³⁸ The strong sales figures and reactions to the text imply that Le Queux had both an astute understanding of and a degree of influence upon the current popular thinking or zeitgeist regarding national security.

As well as driving tales of future war, the threat of invasion also figured prominently in the intersecting body of spy fiction which emerged in the 1890s (as discussed in the previous section), and which Le Queux helped to instigate, alongside writers like E. Phillips Oppenheim, Erskine Childers and John Buchan. Stafford credits Le Queux with creating the first significant modern spy plot in *The Great War in England in 1897*, which implicates the machinations of a treacherous German-Jewish counter-spy in the outbreak of war.³⁹ Le Queux returned to the theme frequently, proffering a French master spy in *England's Peril* (1899), while *The Invasion of 1910* rehearsed his much-touted conviction that an advance column of German agents was already present in England. Le Queux's key spy novel was *Spies of the Kaiser*, the controversial 1909 bestseller which (as noted above) has been implicated in augmenting the defence fears that led to the creation of the British Secret Service Bureau.

Le Queux's prolific literary efforts were not confined to the invasion and spy tale; in fact, the romance genre dominated his oeuvre. For instance, in 1906 Le Queux published twelve novels in addition to *The Invasion of 1910*, many of which fall into the romance category.⁴⁰ His invasion and spy tales also typically featured hackneyed romance plots, as did his very first forays into writing fiction in the 1890s – a set of Russian-themed thrillers designed to capitalise on and romanticise the current popular British interest in Russian revolutionary activity. These early novels, including *Guilty Bonds* (1891) and *Strange Tales of a Nihilist* (1892), demonstrated a reasonable knowledge of contemporary Russian

politics and made a notable contribution to the emerging glamorisation of Russian 'nihilism' and the consequent vilification of Tsarism, a position seemingly at odds with the generally conservative political outlook of Le Queux. More indicative of this outlook was a recurrent strain in Le Queux's writing which demonised British socialism, depicting it as a disease of the British body politic which left the nation even more vulnerable to outside threats, as exemplified by *The Unknown Tomorrow* (1910) which depicted the dire consequences of a future socialist takeover of Britain.

Moving on to the war years, Le Queux turned his hand from fiction to producing a considerable amount of scaremongering propaganda, such as the small, cheap, pamphlet-style exposés *Britain's Deadly Peril* (c.1915), *German Spies in England* (c.1915) and *The Way to Win* (c.1916), the latter written in March 1916 and predicting Britain's 'coming victory' just months before the Somme campaign began.⁴¹ Also typical is *The Secrets of Potsdam* (c.1917), subtitled 'A Startling Exposure of the Inner Life of the Courts of the Kaiser and Crown-Prince', purportedly revealed by the German informant Ernst Von Heltendorff and 'chronicled' by Le Queux, but reading more like fiction than some of Le Queux's most sensational novels.⁴² Also prominent is the large, luxury volume *The War of the Nations: A History of the Great European Conflict* (1914), which is full of on-location photographs and dramatic, specially commissioned illustrations. The irony of commissioning someone as pathologically indisposed to telling the truth as Le Queux seems to have been to write a 'history' seems glaring; on the other hand, this mendacious tendency made him the ideal candidate to produce propaganda, as *The War of the Nations* in essence was. Like the small tracts, it is full of Le Queux's favourite scaremongering hobbyhorses – the presence of an advance guard of German spies in Britain (and also in Belgium); the dastardliness of the 'War Lord' Kaiser's long plans for war cloaked beneath a rhetoric of peace; endlessly exaggerated versions of German atrocities in Belgium – not just sanctioned but explicitly ordered for tactical purposes by the Kaiser; and of course, on the other hand, the heroism of the 'splendid' Tommies.⁴³ These 'factual' texts were accompanied by fictionalisations of the same themes, such as *At the Sign of the Sword: A Story of Love and War in Belgium* (1915), the title summing up the plot, in which the heroine falls into the hands of the Kaiser's drunken, barbaric 'hordes' and is on the point of 'dishonour' before her timely rescue by the dashing Belgian officer-hero.⁴⁴

The pamphlets seem to have sold well: the front matter in *The Way to Win*, published in early 1916, notes the sales of 120,000 copies of *German Spies in England* and fourteen editions of *Britain's Deadly Peril* by that date, for example. Le Queux at this point seems to have become a one-man propaganda machine, and, given the number of publishers churning out his war pamphlets and fictions, one considered profitable by the industry. It is also worth observing that the works mentioned here are just a selection of the very many more similar works Le Queux produced during the war years, and hence, even though he reused material considerably between them, he must have been working at a

frantic rate. As this brief summary of Le Queux's extensive output from the 1890s to the war years indicates, his oeuvre, though facile and riddled with contradictions, was influential and engaged with a wide range of internal and external national security concerns, yielding fertile material for the analysis in the collection's articles.

'Master of misinformation': themes and conclusions

Following Stearn's seminal biographical article on Le Queux, Antony Taylor's article, "At the Mercy of the German Eagle": Images of London in Dissolution in the Novels of William Le Queux' opens Part I of this issue. Taylor examines the internal threats to Britain present in the account of urban decay in Le Queux's fiction, especially in a set of texts which demonise homegrown British versions of social dissent such as socialism and anarchism. Focusing on the centrality of London in Le Queux's writing and rooting his work in a broader corpus of popular catastrophe fiction, Taylor explores Le Queux's representations of the dissolution of London, a city brought to the brink by foreign invasions, internal dissent, demographic strains and socio-political collapse. Taylor argues that the capital acts as a metaphor for the wider nation in Le Queux's writing, whereby 'the physical environment of London determined the country's ability to fight back against potential occupation'.

Pursuing the complex question of the influence of Le Queux's propagandist work is A. Michael Matin's two-part article, 'Gauging the Propagandist's Talents: William Le Queux's Dubious Place in Literary History. Parts One and Two', which uses a cutting-edge methodology based on risk-perception analysis to theorise that Le Queux was an effective promoter of hyperactive national security risk assessments.⁴⁵ As the first part of Matin's article demonstrates, a close examination of the mechanisms of invasion fiction suggests that these texts likely effected their ends by what we can retrospectively identify as their authors' intuitive grasp and exploitation of powerful judgement-skewing factors associated with potential sources of harm of a sort that cognitive scientists and risk-perception analysts have recently begun to pursue rigorously as empirically testable objects of inquiry. Of key interest is the factor referred to as cognitive availability, a facility for readily envisioning specific risk scenarios, Matin pointing out that the fear-eliciting aim of the invasion genre is succinctly captured in Le Queux's account of his intention for *The Invasion of 1910*: 'To arouse our country to a sense of its own lamentable insecurity'.⁴⁶

Brett Holman's article, 'William Le Queux, the Zeppelin Menace and the Invisible Hand', shifts the focus to Le Queux's prolific wartime writing, which to this date remains almost completely unexplored. A historian of early aviation and air panics, Holman frames Le Queux's factual and fictional wartime writings in the context of late Edwardian and wartime Zeppelin scares. Holman argues convincingly that though Le Queux abandoned ideas of naval-led invasion in favour of the increasingly plausible threat of German aerial attack, his war narratives remain fixated on the unfounded premise of a network of

enemy agents and saboteurs already at work within Britain, revamped as the concept of the 'Invisible Hand' for wartime consumption.

Opening Part II is Michael Hughes's article 'William Le Queux and Russia'. Further highlighting the disingenuous and contradictory nature of Le Queux's work and thought, this article provides a much-needed reconsideration of Le Queux's largely overlooked engagement with Russia. It analyses Le Queux's representation of both the Tsarist Empire and the forces that opposed it, spanning Le Queux's early Russian nihilist romances to his later 'factual' histories of Rasputin, *Rasputin the Rascal Monk* (1917) and *The Minister of Evil: The Secret History of Rasputin's Betrayal of Russia* (1918), also churned out during the war years. Le Queux's approach to Russia is seen to be a mass of contradictions, initially chastising Tsarism and courting nihilism while later romanticising the Romanovs and using Rasputin as a scapegoat for the ills of autocracy. Hughes for the first time places Le Queux's works in the context of the military and political implosion of Russia that culminated in the country's withdrawal from the war with Germany in March 1918. He examines the intertwined relationship of declining Russophobia and emerging anti-Germanism in Le Queux's fiction, concluding that figures such as Rasputin became 'figurative and literal expressions of the expansion of the German bacillus into Russia'. His analysis elucidates how Le Queux's works played a role in cementing the image in the British imagination of Rasputin as debauched and dangerously pro-German.

Attempting to shed more light on the contradictory positions evinced by Le Queux, Harry Wood's article, 'Radical Reactionary: The Politics of William Le Queux', offers some thoughts on the complex political ideology that underpinned Le Queux's work. Accepting that accurately placing Le Queux on the political spectrum is a task beset by challenges, Wood argues that Le Queux is best approached as a product of the Edwardian 'radical right', an anxious, hyper-nationalist and populist mind-set located on the far right of the spectrum. Though Le Queux's writings are above all else inconsistent, Wood shows that 'the ideas and anxieties that colour his invasion fiction echo many of the *causes celebres* that characterised the extremes of the Edwardian right', such as anti-socialism, anti-Liberalism, rural revivalism, and fears of physical degeneration and social decadence.

Complementing Matin's examination of the potentially skewing effects of invasion fiction on readers' risk perception is Ailise Bulfin's article, 'The International Circulation and Impact of Invasion Fiction: Case Study of William Le Queux's *The Invasion of 1910*'. It has long been assumed by Le Queux scholars that *The Invasion of 1910* reached a wide audience, and arguments as to its potential influence have been based on this fact. Bringing scrutiny to bear on this assumption, Bulfin's article carries out a thorough investigation into the extent of the text's circulation and the nature of responses to it. In doing so, it uses Marie Corelli's proven bestseller *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895) as a comparator for Le Queux's novel because the sales data for and public responses to Corelli's novel are reasonably well documented. Based on this comparison, the article shows that successful invasion tales like *The Invasion of 1910* sold

in comparable numbers to other bestselling novels (though not to Corelli's phenomenal success), making them mainstream and not an odd subcategory of popular literature, as they are often viewed. More specifically, it shows that despite the more realistic sales figures deduced for *The Invasion of 1910*, the text punched above the weight of the average bestseller in terms of its social influence, receiving parliamentary censure, extended newspaper coverage, parodic ripostes and multiple documented individual reader responses. Overall, this analysis provides a more precise yardstick against which to measure the popularity of Le Queux's work and other invasion novels, and in doing so offers further insight into the workings of the popular fiction industry and the nature and extent of invasion fears in the early twentieth century.

Finally, the second part of Matin's article examines the continuation of risk exaggeration in Le Queux's prolific wartime propaganda writing, demonstrating that despite Le Queux's literary clumsiness and his utterly formulaic approach, his skill at manipulating the minds of his readers becomes apparent when his writings are viewed through the lens of cognitive science and risk-perception analysis. Matin concludes by placing Le Queux's wartime work as a national security writer within the context of the simultaneous efforts of the official British government propaganda campaign, shedding new light on the shifting sands of literary culture at this watershed moment when authors were for the first time being enlisted formally and systematically as propagandists by the wartime state.

As is evident even from the summaries of the individual articles in this special issue, inconsistency, or even flat out self-contradiction, is a key feature of Le Queux's work. This tendency not only exacerbated the potential for Le Queux's work to misinform its readers, but also throws into sharp relief the central contradiction that emerges in the combined analysis between views of Le Queux as a genuinely concerned exponent of national security and as a cynical manipulator of public opinion for profit. From a related perspective, and speaking to our inability to ever successfully adjudge which of the above descriptions better characterises Le Queux, is the fact pointed out by several contributors that archival traces of Le Queux's life are surprisingly scanty, especially given his prominent position over many decades. As Wood observes, this makes it challenging for researchers to reach any firm conclusions on his activities or his views. Placed side by side with his self-presentation as mysterious and his tendency to embellish (and even lie about) his achievements, it even suggests the possibility that his papers were deliberately destroyed.⁴⁷ A related trend in Le Queux's work that many of the articles in the collection highlight is Le Queux's consistent blurring of fact and fiction, which further signals his works' capacity to misinform. As Hughes observes, his fictional works recurrently deploy claims for a factual basis (usually in the form of confidential documents entrusted to the author) to the fictional events they depict in order to enhance their dramatic power and marketability. Conversely, as Holman explains, Le Queux's purportedly factual WWI pamphlets inter-

spurse known facts with completely spurious information. This information is often attributed to characters that seem to be invented by the author, while the texts repeatedly deploy fictional devices to retain reader attention. The emerging consensus is that these were not just successful sales tactics, but were designed to help deliver the ideological payload of Le Queux's work – to increase its success as propaganda for defence 'preparedness'.

In terms of evaluating that success, most contributors conclude that Le Queux's fiction had some effect on popular thinking, or in other words, on how a significant proportion of people believed events were likely to unfold in the future, especially on beliefs in the likelihood of war and/or invasion occurring in the near to medium future and in the presence of a large network of German spies at work in Britain. It is, however, very difficult to substantiate this kind of claim, and creating a methodology to capture and quantify the effect of the fiction and scares is elusive, as Matin discusses. It is one thing to claim that the scares influenced belief, it is another thing to work out whether and/or how this translated into an impact on behaviour – on many levels: for example, on xenophobia, inflated optimism/pessimism about future events, paranoia, voting behaviour, political support, participation in voluntary defence organisations, support for increased defence spending, and ultimately on willingness to support the nation's decision to go to war or to personally volunteer for service. However, each of the articles considers this question and suggests potential instances in which Le Queux's work was influential. As Hughes argues, Le Queux did not 'invent' the Rasputin myth for a British audience, but he did play a significant role in developing it, building on motifs that were already present to construct a narrative that then fed into Rasputin's legend. This reciprocal process of influence is similar to that outlined by Holman's article on Le Queux's promotion of paranoia about a German 'Invisible Hand' of spies and saboteurs at work in wartime Britain. Taylor's account of how Le Queux's fiction participated in disseminating concerns about London as a 'new Rome' in the process of lengthy and agonising disintegration similarly describes it as a 'catalyst for British debates about the economic, military and spiritual exhaustion of the empire in the face of new national and imperial rivals'. And in a similar vein is Wood's view that while Le Queux's writing had little intellectual influence on radical right thinking in Britain, his novels provided this developing ideology with a prominent popular platform. Matin's application of risk-perception theory to Le Queux's techniques demonstrates their potential cognitive impact on readers in terms of producing a heightened perception of threat and insecurity. And Bulfin's article, which documents a number of demonstrable instances of the impact of *The Invasion of 1910*, concludes that it came to provide a convenient shorthand for referring to pro-defence views on the necessity of preparing for invasion in transnational popular discourse before and during the war, helping to bring defence anxiety to a wider audience internationally than those who paid close attention to political reportage and speeches. It should be noted that Le Queux's fantasies probably weighed more with defence-minded members of political and military elites, particularly with

radical right sections of these, ‘super patriots’ as Michael Humphries designates them, who shared a set of beliefs with many (though certainly not all) of the authors of invasion fiction.⁴⁸

From these points of intersection, an interesting conceptualisation of Le Queux’s role as essentially that of a populariser of germinating contemporary ideas has emerged; there is a consensus that he was rarely an innovator or instigator, but had what may be conceived of as an intuitively populist knack which allowed him to pick up early on emerging concerns and provide popular articulations of them in fictional and ‘factual’ form. His work achieved sufficient popularity to ensure these concerns were disseminated to a wide and even mass audience, Le Queux from a cognitive perspective helping to prime readers’ imaginations to be receptive to certain ideas. Speaking figuratively, Le Queux was not just surfing the wave of defence paranoia, but helping it to build momentum. As Hughes puts it, Le Queux had become a significant figure in reflecting back to his readers a set of fantasies and conspiracy theories that had some grounding in truth – but were above all the product of an attempt to interpret the complexity of contemporary events through the prism of hidden forces and malign intentions. Among other things, this confirms that the ‘post-truth’ era is not as new as it seems.

Overall, the achievements of the special issue are: to make Stearn’s foundational work on Le Queux more widely available; to bring to light the previously unknown influence of Le Queux’s Russian fiction and non-fiction on the lasting popular image of Rasputin (Hughes); to situate Le Queux within the topical literature of urban decay linked to the unprecedented growth of cities in the late nineteenth century (Taylor); to reposition Le Queux’s politics beyond traditionally conservative, ‘Tory’ views and place them within a set of much wider and often contradictory views including those of the politically disaffected, even proto-fascist radical right (Wood); to systematically investigate the circulation and social impact of one of the key pieces of pre-war invasion fiction (Bulfin); to showcase Matin’s cutting-edge application of risk analysis to the literary text; and to bring critical scrutiny to bear on Le Queux’s almost completely neglected wartime writing (Matin and Holman), especially his articulation of aerial threat (Holman). Taken together, the articles in this study of Le Queux shed valuable light not just on the fascinating figure of the individual writer, but on the wider workings of the British literary marketplace and its relationship with important historical socio-political forces in the crucial period before, during and after WWI.

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Notes

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2. The special issue is based on the findings of an interdisciplinary workshop entitled 'William Le Queux, Master of Misinformation', held at Trinity College Dublin in 2015 and organised by the issue's editors, which brought together Le Queux scholars from around the world for the first time.
3. For various accounts of these concerns, see Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980); Andrew Morris, *The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of War and Rearmament, 1896–1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984); Norman Longmate, *Island Fortress: The Defence of Great Britain 1603–1945* (London: Hutchinson, 1991); Fred Bridgham, ed., *The First World War as a Clash of Cultures* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006); William Mulligan, 'Britain, the "German Revolution", and the Fall of France, 1870/1', *Historical Research* 84, no. 224 (2011), 310–327; and T. G. Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind: The Making of British Foreign Policy, 1865–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
4. For general treatments of this body of fiction, see David Stafford, 'Spies and Gentlemen: The Birth of the British Spy Novel, 1893–1914', *Victorian Studies* 24 (1981); I. F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War: Future Wars 1763–3749*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Antony Taylor, *London's Burning: Pulp Fiction, the Politics of Terrorism and the Destruction of the Capital in British Popular Culture, 1840–2005* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).
5. For an example of this last category, see the entry on Le Queux in Sandra Kemp, Charlotte Mitchell and David Trotter, *Edwardian Fiction: An Oxford Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
6. William Le Queux, *Things I Know about Kings, Celebrities and Crooks* (London: Eveleigh Nash and Grayson, 1923).
7. Various contemporary reviews inadvertently reflected this quality. Praising the book, the *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* suggested that it proved 'once again ... that fact is often stranger than fiction' (27 October 1923, 9).
8. Norman Sladen, *The Real Le Queux* (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1938).

9. Chris Patrick and Stephen Baister, *William Le Queux: Master of Mystery* (Chippenham: Antony Rowe, 2007).
10. This article originally appeared as Roger T. Stearn, 'The Mysterious Mr Le Queux: War Novelist, Defence Publicist and Counterspy', *Soldiers of the Queen* 70 (1992), 6–27. *Soldiers of the Queen* is the journal of The Victorian Military Society, and the article is reproduced with acknowledgements.
11. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War*, 122–124. Clarke also edited several collections of narrative extracts, including *The Tale of the Next Great War, 1871–1914* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995) and *The Great War with Germany, 1890–1914, Fictions and Fantasies of the War-to-Come* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997).
12. Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), 43.
13. Joseph S. Meisel, 'The Germans Are Coming! British Fiction of a German Invasion 1871–1913', *War, Literature, and the Arts* 2, no. 2 (1990), 41–79.
14. Cecil D. Eby, *The Road to Armageddon: The Martial Spirit in English Popular Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987), 35 and 9.
15. Petra Rau, *English Modernism, National Identity and the Germans, 1890–1950* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 1.
16. Richard Scully, *British Images of Germany: Admiration, Antagonism and Ambivalence* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 114.
17. Howard Moon, 'The Invasion of the United Kingdom: Public Controversy and Official Planning' (unpublished PhD diss., University of London, 1968), 311–316.
18. Charles E. Gannon, *Rumors of War and Infernal Machines: Technomilitary Agenda-Setting in American and British Speculative Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), 47.
19. A. Michael Matin, 'The Creativity of War Planners: Armed Forces Professionals and the Pre-1914 British Invasion-Scare Genre', *ELH* 78, no. 4 (2011), 801–831.
20. David French, 'Spy Fever in Britain, 1900–1915', *The Historical Journal* 21, no. 2 (1978), 355.
21. Nicholas Hiley, 'Decoding German Spies: British Spy Fiction 1908–18', *Intelligence and National Security* 5, no. 4 (1990), 55–79. See also Nicholas Hiley, 'The Failure of British Counter-Espionage against Germany, 1907–1914', *The Historical Journal* 28, no. 4 (1985), 835–862; and Nicholas Hiley, 'Introduction', in William Le Queux, *Spies of the Kaiser* (1909; repr. London: Frank Cass, 1996), vii–xxxii.
22. Panikos Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst: Germans in Britain during the First World War* (Providence, NY: Berg, 1991), 37–38.
23. Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorised History of MI5* (London: Penguin, 2009), 14.
24. D. A. T. Stafford, *The Silent Game: The Real World of Imaginary Spies* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 28.
25. Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst*, 158–162.
26. For more on Chesney's text and the instigation of the invasion tradition, see Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War*; and Scully, *British Images of Germany*.
27. For more on the influence of invasion fiction, see A. Michael Matin, 'Scrutinizing the Battle of Dorking: The Royal United Service Institution and the Mid-Victorian Invasion Controversy', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 39 (2011), 392–393; and Patrick M. Kirkwood, 'The Impact of Fiction on Public Debate in Late-Victorian Britain: *The Battle of Dorking* and the "Lost Career" of Sir George Tomkyns Chesney', *Graduate History Review* 4, no. 1 (2012).
28. I. F. Clarke, 'Future-War Fiction: The First Main Phase, 1871–1900', *Science Fiction Studies* 24 (1997), n.p., <http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/clarkeess.htm> (accessed 1 November 2016). *Answers* had an impressive weekly circulation of 375,000 in 1892; see Dennis Griffiths, *Fleet Street: Five Hundred Years of the Press* (London: British Library, 2006), 127.
29. See the front matter for William Le Queux, *The Great War in England in 1897*, 11th edn (London: Tower, 1895), <https://archive.org/details/greatwarinenglan00lequ> (accessed 10 January 2017).
30. See, for example, the F. V. White edition of *The Great War in England in 1897* issued in 1897.

31. Invasion narratives published in 1906 include W. Wood, *The Enemy in Our Midst: The Story of a Raid on England* (London: John Long, 1906) and 'General Staff', pseud., *The Writing on the Wall* (London: William Heinemann, 1906).
32. 'News Notes', *The Bookman* 30, no. 175 (April 1906), 2.
33. For details, see Roger T. Stearn, 'The Mysterious Mr Le Queux: War Novelist, Defence Publicist and Counterspy', this issue.
34. 'German Uniforms and Street Advertisements', Hansard HC Deb (14 May 1906), vol. 157 cc187–188, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1906/may/14/german-uniforms-and-street-advertise> (accessed 13 July 2016).
35. William Le Queux, *The Invasion of 1910: With a Full Account of the Siege of London; Naval Chapters by H. W. Wilson, Introductory Letter by Field-Marshal Earl Roberts* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1906), 333.
36. *Ibid.*, 403. For the compulsory military service campaign, see Roger T. Stearn, "'The Last Glorious Campaign': Lord Roberts, the National Service League and Compulsory Military Training, 1902–1914", *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 87, no. 352 (2009), 312–330.
37. Griffiths, *Fleet Street*, 132–133.
38. William Le Queux, *German Spies in England* (London: Stanley Paul, n.d. [1915]), 17. For more on the novel's sales, circulation and social impact, see Bulfin, 'The international circulation and impact of invasion fiction: Case study of William Le Queux's *The Invasion of 1910*' in this issue.
39. Stafford, 'Spies and Gentlemen', 496.
40. *The English Catalogue of Books for 1906* (London: Sampson Low, 1907), 210, <https://archive.org/details/englishcatalogu09lowgoog> (accessed 12 June 2016). *The English Catalogue of Books* discloses forty-seven Le Queux titles published in the period from 1901 to 1905.
41. William Le Queux, preface to *The Way to Win* (London: Simpkin, n.d. [1916]).
42. William Le Queux, *The Secrets of Potsdam: A Startling Exposure of the Inner Life of the Courts of the Kaiser and Crown-Prince, Revealed for the First Time by Ernst Von Heltzendorff* (London: London Mail, n.d. [1917]).
43. William Le Queux, *The War of the Nations: A History of the Great European Conflict*, vol. 1 (London: Newnes, n.d. [1914]), 3, 42–43. For a detailed account of the extent of German atrocities in the early stages of WWI, see John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).
44. William Le Queux, *At the Sign of the Sword: A Story of Love and War in Belgium* (London: Jack, 1915), 118, 155.
45. The second part is published in Part II of this issue.
46. Le Queux, *The Invasion of 1910*, ix–x.
47. Some Le Queux correspondence exists in the papers of Le Queux's collaborator Lord Frederick Roberts at the British National Army Museum and in the papers of Le Queux's long-term correspondent and literary agent Douglas Sladen at the Local Studies Library (Richmond, London).
48. Michael Humphries, "'The Eyes of an Empire': The Legion of Frontiersmen, 1904–14", *Historical Research* 85, no. 227 (2012), 136.