



Ailise Bulfin, *Gothic Invasions: Imperialism, War, and Fin-de-Siècle Popular Fiction*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2018, 288 pp.
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Opening with a captivating elaboration on the imaginary intrusion of the Chinese horde in M. P. Shiel's *To Arms!*, Ailise Bulfin's *Gothic Invasions: Imperialism, War, and Fin-de-Siècle Popular Fiction* elucidates the persistent gothic expression, in late-nineteenth-century British popular fiction, of the anxiety about foreign invasion at the pinnacle of British imperialism. Invasion anxiety, Bulfin argues, articulates a form of cultural paranoia in *fin-de-siècle* Britain: a paranoia which inverted the realities of the British imperialistic expansion and engendered the production of popular fiction which encapsulates rather a "white colonial version of empire writing back" (20). Discussing an era when the imperial dominance of the British Empire across the globe remained nearly unrivalled, Bulfin traces the origin of invasion anxiety to the circulating presumption that "the practice of imperialism is in some way causative of invasion" (15). Bulfin demonstrates that the contemporaneous conversation on British imperialism, in which Queen Victoria, John Seeley, and J. A. Hobson partook, reveals the British society's "clear understanding of empire as a dangerous endeavour predicated on military force" (6). With increasing hostility from other European powers and recurrent colonial resistances, the overstretched project of British imperialism was thought to expose the supposedly insulated island to the danger of foreign invasion. In an ironic twist, this presumption spawned the societal concern that Britons would be subjected to the same kind of military violence from foreign forces on their home soil which the British Empire perpetrated against its colonial subjects.

Considering the pervasiveness of invasion anxiety in late-nineteenth-century Britain, Bulfin thus urges us to understand and explore this cultural concern “as an overarching influence on fin-de-siècle popular fiction” (14). Such a critical focus, Bulfin posits, enables us to group together *fin-de-siècle* popular fiction of disparate genres and analyse these fictional works “from a transgeneric perspective” (15). This approach is permitted not only by the theme of invasion characterizing such narratives, but also by the employment of “the gothic mode” (13). Bulfin’s meticulous analysis shows that *fin-de-siècle* popular fiction of various genres – including science fiction, crime fiction, yellow-peril fiction, and future-war fiction – invariably resorts to the literary conventions and tropes of the gothic to illustrate the unthinkable experiences of invasion. With an emphasis on the ideas of the evil “Other” and the breach of boundaries, the gothic mode materializes a “suitably gruesome fictional form to this persistent social anxiety [of invasion] across a range of fin-de-siècle popular narratives” (4); enriches the very dark natures of the alien invaders; and amplifies, in a sentimentally evocative language, the disturbing effects wrought by foreign invasions on British soil.

Each of the five chapters in *Gothic Invasions* examines a range of *fin-de-siècle* popular fictional texts which, although written by different authors, channel the anxiety of foreign invasion through the medium of the same type of gothic or gothicised characters. Bulfin dedicates the two chapters in Part One to the study of invasion fear embodied by conventional gothic monsters. Chapter 1 focuses on the calamitous incursions into Britain of vampires, mesmerists, and demons in the works by Stoker, Marryat, Doyle, Marsh, and Kipling. Foregrounding the colonial backgrounds and military affiliations of the gothic invaders, Bulfin maintains that the fear of these literary villains registers “the inverted logic of invasion anxiety” and rather betrays the atrocities of British rule in India and the West Indies (58). Positioning the works by Boothby, Doyle, Marsh, Stoker, and Haggard in conversation with the Egyptian Question, Chapter 2 considers the portrayal of the violence of vengeful mummies as voicing concerns over the increasing military aggression of Britain in the region. By illustrating the significance of the Suez Canal to the British imperialistic project in the second half of the nineteenth century, Bulfin contends that the proliferation of Egyptian-themed gothic fiction at the *fin de siècle* should be interpreted as a paranoid response to the geopolitical interests of the British Empire.

Organized by the genre of the popular texts it studies, Part Two expounds the manifestation of invasion anxiety embedded in crime, yellow peril, and science fiction. These genres of popular fiction are shown to draw on the gothic mode in their dissemination of the cultural fear of invasion. Bulfin illuminates the gothicisation of master criminals, Chinese immigrants, and the soldiers of European rival nations in fiction penned by popular writers such as Shiel, Boothby, Le Queux, and Wells. Chapter 3 centres on master criminals in crime fiction, arguing that the scale of the havoc wrought by these gothicised figures amounts to a form of foreign invasion. With a focus on the proliferation of the yellow-peril myth worldwide, Chapter 4 pays attention to the gothic representation of Chinese invaders in yellow-peril fiction. Bulfin’s analysis in this chapter shows how Chinese emigration into British colonies sparked suspicions of Chinese incursions into Britain and how popular authors capitalized on the public sentiments towards the Boxer Rebellion to disseminate this yellow-peril myth. The last chapter of the book considers science fiction which, depicting the invasion and occupation of Britain by its European rivals, underscores the brutality of European soldiers through gothic techniques.

The importance of Bulfin's book is twofold. Firstly, by reorienting our attention to the anxiety of invasion, *Gothic Invasions* proposes a new critical focus in approaching *fin-de-siècle* popular fiction. Secondly, Bulfin's book brings to the fore the intersection of British imperialism, cultural paranoia, and the gothic in popular works published before the outbreak of the first World War. Even though a more detailed interpretation of the primary texts in each chapter would have helped readers to better understand the literary concerns and the cultural contexts Bulfin's study centres on, *Gothic Invasions* is a precious addition to the scholarly corpus on popular fictions. It is a thoroughly researched and elegantly written book that will prove useful to anyone interested in Gothic Studies, Postcolonial Studies, nineteenth-century British popular fiction, and/or Victorian literature at the *fin de siècle*.