

Excerpts from:
The Roots of Genre in Fiction Magazines of the 1890s
 By Bonnie McKnight

Modern popular fiction is organized by genre, with labels like ‘mystery’, ‘science fiction’, ‘fantasy’, ‘horror’, and more. Literary critics are often credited with defining and applying genre labels, but this perspective ignores the significant role that the book trade has played in forging modern genre categories. Most introductory studies of genre, such as John Frow’s *Genre*, pay little or no attention to the importance of publishing or bookselling contexts. The material considerations of the publication and consumption of fiction are too easily ignored in discussions of genre. Thorough examination of selected fiction magazines from the 1890s reveals that many of the categories of genre fiction which developed in Britain in the twentieth century have roots in the material contexts of serial and short story publications at the end of the nineteenth century. The magazines and their publishers helped shape genres.

Although definitions of genre are never exact and will vary from reader to reader, British fiction in the early twentieth century came to be organised in bookshops and libraries according to genres.¹ Nevertheless, as Joyce G. Saricks reminds readers in her book *The Readers’ Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction*—directed at librarians to help them properly recommend genre books—‘we all know that there is tremendous overlap—*genreblending*—among genres and that it is almost impossible to make firm distinctions between the characteristics of one genre versus another’.² This is evident particularly in the developing genres of the 1890s, where stories of different types and themes were comfortably published next to each other, and each story could have elements of multiple modern genres. Keating says that this period was typified by a ‘relentless fragmentation and categorisation of fiction’.³ Though genres such as science fiction and fantasy did not become commonly used categories in the book world until the twentieth century, the magazine market of the late nineteenth century facilitated the emergence of genres that became more strongly established in the following decades.

Scholars have already traced the roots of at least two modern genres back through the fiction magazines of the 1890s. Mystery owes an immense debt to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and the detective who continues to find himself in new iterations throughout the generations since his first appearance in 1887. Sherlock Holmes is undoubtedly the most well-known product of the fiction magazines. Barry Forshaw’s *Rough Guide to Crime Fiction* credits Conan Doyle with ‘bring[ing] the detective novel to its greatest fruition’.⁴ Michael Ashley

¹ See Joseph McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain, 1914-1950*, Oxford Historical Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), p. 90 and Roger Luckhurst, ‘Science Fiction and Fantasy’, in *The Reinvention of the British and Irish Novel, 1880-1940*, ed. by Patrick Parrinder and Andrzej Gąsiorek, The Oxford History of the Novel in English ; 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 243 for examples.

² Joyce G Saricks, *The Readers’ Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction*, ALA Readers’ Advisory Series (Chicago ; London: American Library Association, 2001), p. 3.

³ P. J. Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English novel, 1875-1914* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989), p. 340.

⁴ Barry Forshaw, *The Rough Guide to Crime Fiction*, Rough Guides Reference Guides (London: Rough Guides, 2007), p. 3.

states outright that ‘the success of the Sherlock Holmes stories created the genre of detective and mystery fiction’.⁵ Nearly as well known is the author H. G. Wells, who published his first science fiction story, ‘The Stolen Bacillus’ in 1894 in the weekly *Pall Mall Budget* and encouraged the world to consider the impact of Martian invasion in 1896 with *The War of the Worlds*—first published in *Pearson’s Magazine*, one of *The Strand’s* competitors. Will Tattersdill in his book *Science, Fiction, and the Fin-de-Siècle Press*, argues that the magazines of this period are not only ‘a significant archive of early SF [Science Fiction] works’ but also ‘a physical form whose key features – temporality, repeatability, and above all breadth of authorship and subject matter – made them active agents in the rise of SF as a commercial entity’.⁶ The serialisation and short story format of magazines provided fertile ground for these and other genres to develop—but their ephemeral nature has also led to their being frequently overlooked in studies of both literature and book history.

While science fiction and Sherlock Holmes have received scholarly attention, other detectives, other genres, and magazines other than *The Strand* remain relatively neglected. The research undertaken here seeks to begin to address this gap by considering three *Strand* competitors and how each used and helped develop different genres in each one’s first year of publication. Though most of the genres discussed here did not become officially used as labels of fiction until the twentieth century, modern genres began to emerge thanks in part to the short stories published by these general fiction magazines. The genres that will be considered below are adventure, mystery, thriller, and supernatural.

Though these labels were not often used in the 1890s and were certainly not organized as they are today, the monthly magazines each used the elements of these genres in ways that supported their personal mission and contributed to the development of the genres as they are known today.

As the analysis below will show, the *Windsor Magazine* used elements of the adventure, supernatural, and mystery genres to differentiate between distinct serial contributions within each issue as well as to inspire reader loyalty through memorable characters. *Pearson’s Magazine* sought to entertain its readers with thrilling stories relating to the adventure and thriller genres in settings throughout the world. The *Pall Mall Magazine* provided more of an environment for literary experimentation, particularly fostering a variety of supernatural stories that would today be classified under the genre of horror.

The Strand and Its Competitors

The Strand Magazine was founded in 1891 by George Newnes, the press giant who had established the popular *Tit-Bits* magazine and the *Review of Reviews*. *Tit-Bits*, his first major success, began in 1881 with the idea of gathering tit-bits of interesting information, particularly news stories, and putting them together in one magazine. Though this type of miscellany was not new, Newnes found notable success through his reader competitions and insurance scheme. The *Review of Reviews*, started in January 1890, was similar, though more a digest than a miscellany, summarizing and commenting on pieces from other magazines.⁷

⁵ Michael Ashley, *Adventures in The Strand: Arthur Conan Doyle and The Strand Magazine* (London: The British Library, 2016), p. 10.

⁶ Will Tattersdill, *Science, Fiction, and the Fin-de-Siècle Periodical Press* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 1-2.

⁷ Ashley, *Strand*, p. 28.

The Strand was a new take on the miscellany, with a focus on new fiction and articles. It was very popular in its day and is well-known now for its introduction of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famous detective, Sherlock Holmes. The first issue of *The Strand*, dated January 1891, sold 300,000 copies with multiple reprintings.⁸ Holmes would not appear until the third issue, but his popularity was almost instantaneous. Circulation rose to more than half a million, and 'Doyle's name on the magazine cover soon meant sales would increase by a hundred thousand'.⁹

Through the Holmes adventures, Newnes and Doyle had refined a valuable new formula in which a character was serialized but the individual stories were not. Each magazine issue presented a fully contained short story that remained connected to previous stories only through the familiar and fascinating recurring characters of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson. In this way, readers could eagerly await the next issue of the magazine out of a desire to read more about the detective without having to remember the elements of a plot strung out over months of reading. Here, too, if readers missed an instalment of the Holmes series, they would not be tempted to give up reading any future parts because they had lost the thread of a larger story. When Conan Doyle's Holmes adventures were first concluded, Newnes and his editor Herbert Greenhough Smith continued in the same vein by publishing episodic adventures from various other authors, particularly Arthur Morrison's friendly private detective, Martin Hewitt, who later found a home in the *Windsor*.

Many other magazines would come to follow this formula, introducing various distinctive characters who appeared regularly over the course of several issues, as with the *Windsor Magazine* and the aforementioned detective stories by Morrison. Mystery was not the only genre that could flourish in this serialized fashion. Of the magazines studied here, *Pearson's* in particular published, from the outset, monthly episodes with a recurring character who was not a detective but instead an ambassador who regaled the narrator—and subsequently the readers—with his tales of political intrigue that would fit in today's thriller genre. These stories will be discussed in Chapter Two.

However, this episodic formula was not shared by all of *The Strand's* competitors; similar types of stories are noticeably absent from the first several years of *The Pall Mall Magazine*, which serialized only novels and non-fiction articles. This is distinctly different from *The Strand*, which consciously did not serialize novels, wanting each issue to be 'organically complete each month'.¹⁰ Nor was the entirety of the fiction in *The Strand* or any of the other magazines episodic. Generally each magazine would have one series running at a time, accompanied by various other self-contained short stories, poems, and non-fiction articles on a variety of topics. The *Windsor* chose to challenge this tradition of a single serial appearing at a time by launching two distinct serialized novels in its very first issue. This unusual phenomenon will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter One.

Following the success of *The Strand*, a variety of similar illustrated monthly fiction magazines appeared throughout the decade. Some were mere imitators; others were more innovative and found their own niches in the late-Victorian reading market. Each magazine

⁸ Ibid., p. 35.

⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁰ Reginald Pound, *Mirror of the Century: The Strand Magazine, 1891-1950* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1966), p. 30.

had its own inclination. The three magazines studied here each took a different approach to the format established by *The Strand* and published a variety of fiction of different genres by different authors. The *Windsor* hoped to provide moral yet entertaining fiction and articles for the home. *Pearson's* wanted to appeal to the most readers, and hoped to be 'the best sixpennyworth that has been hitherto produced', of 'unusual excellence'.¹¹ The *Pall Mall Magazine*, financed as it was by an ex-American millionaire, was perhaps the most lavish, with multiple plates per issue, many of them coloured. It was also the most open to experimentation, containing many more references to the supernatural than the other two.

The fiction magazines of the 1890s were fertile ground for the development of new styles of fiction, and without this market, the genres we know today would not have developed as quickly or as far. The material context of the fiction magazine with its short stories and serialized novels allowed for the development of fictional specialization that ultimately resulted in modern genres. Thanks to the early efforts of these magazines and their contributors, the reading public was prepared to accept future contributions to the genres of mystery, adventure, thriller, and the supernatural. The format of memorable characters in repeated adventures became a staple of twentieth century genre fiction, with characters such as Hercule Poirot, Jeeves and Wooster, Conan the Barbarian, Fu Manchu, and Father Brown capturing the public consciousness. Significantly, each of these iconic characters were first seen in story magazines like those examined here or their successors. Each generation of popular fiction grows from and builds on the preceding generations, and the modern genres enjoyed by millions today would not have developed without the work published by the general fiction magazines of the 1890s. Readers today can confidently locate fiction based on genres that began to find their own identities at the turn of the twentieth century.

Excerpt from Chapter One:

A Bid for Fortune and Guy Boothby

One of the other serialized fictions in the first year of the *Windsor* also relates to the mystery genre—though in this case the protagonist is not a detective and finds himself witnessing a criminal enterprise completely by accident. In fact, Guy Boothby's *A Bid for Fortune*, which later included the subtitle 'Or, Dr. Nikola's Vendetta' might more properly be classified a 'criminal mastermind' story than a detective story. From Svengali to Moriarty to Fu Manchu and Lex Luthor of the mid-twentieth century and beyond, the criminal mastermind has provided a foil for the heroic adventure protagonist for generations. The character of Dr. Nikola, *Bid for Fortune's* mastermind, is distinct and enduring—his description is discussed in detail below. Nikola is the second of the two characters to whom Ashley attributes the success of the *Windsor*.¹² His first appearance in *A Bid for Fortune* was followed by *Dr. Nikola*, serialized in the *Windsor* the following year, as well as two other novels in 1899 and 1901.

¹¹ C. Arthur Pearson, 'The Editorial Mind', *Pearson's Magazine*, 1.1 (1896), p.112.

¹² Ashley, *Storytellers*, p. 224.

From the *Windsor's* first issue, *A Bid for Fortune* follows the adventures of young Australian businessman Dick Hatteras as he falls in love with a beautiful young woman, whose father turns out to be the target of the eponymous Dr. Nikola's revenge. Dick finds himself caught up in and opposed to the criminal's enterprises in various ways around the world (see Figures 15, 16, and 18). The editors of the *Windsor* presented this novel as an adventure story, saying that Boothby 'has given proof of his capacity to keep alight in fiction the camp-fires of adventure', a style which 'has an abiding fascination for households in which nothing eventful ever happens'.¹³ In his eleven years as an author, Boothby published an astonishing number of stories and novels. Unfortunately, his career was cut short by his untimely death from influenza in 1905. Sutherland describes his bibliography as 'a mass of adventure romances and other popular genre fiction', including mystery.¹⁴ *A Bid for Fortune* is clearly an adventure story, but it utilises a variety of genres.

The novel, which was serialized in the first eleven issues of the *Windsor*, contains elements of the supernatural, though they are not apparent in every instalment. Dr. Nikola is possessed of supernatural powers, including hypnotism and possibly telepathy. One of the earliest criminal masterminds, Dr. Nikola is clearly reminiscent of his predecessors Moriarty, *Trilby's* Svengali, and Wells's Dr. Moreau.¹⁵ Nikola has Moriarty's grand schemes, Svengali's hypnotism, and Dr. Moreau's interest in vivisection and scientific experiments. While both *Pearson's* and particularly *Pall Mall* contain multiple stories involving the supernatural, this is one of just three pieces of fiction throughout the *Windsor's* first year that involve any element of the supernatural.¹⁶ This is particularly interesting considering that despite the *Pall Mall's* strong supernatural tendencies, which will be discussed in Chapter Three, none of that magazine's serialized novels contained supernatural elements. The *Windsor* is the only one of the three magazines to have a serialized novel with any genre-specific elements other than romance. In fact, Boothby went on to publish another occult serial in the *Windsor* in 1898, in addition to the second Nikola novel.¹⁷ Though the supernatural is more common in the other two magazines, especially in the *Pall Mall*, neither of them contained any supernatural story that spanned more than a single issue.

The serialization of the novel ran from January to November of 1895, and the first book edition of the completed novel was published that same year by Ward, Lock & Bowden. In Liveing's brief treatment of the *Windsor* he attributes the magazine with bringing its publishers 'into close personal contact with many authors and authoresses whose work subsequently appeared more permanently in the shape of books issued under the Ward Lock imprint'.¹⁸ This was true of the Martin Hewitt tales, and it was equally true of *Bid for Fortune*. The 1895 book edition was printed with most, if not all, of the original illustrations

¹³ 'Foreword', p. 2. The editors also used the description of this novel to subtly disparage Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes by concluding 'the world is not yet so completely cured of marvels that every novelist is reduced to evolving analytic significance from the buttons of the heroine's shoe!' This is particularly ironic considering the presence and origin of the *Windsor's* own detective

¹⁴ Sutherland, *Longman*, p. 73.

¹⁵ John Sutherland, 'Introduction', in *A Bid for Fortune, Or, Dr Nikola's Vendetta*, by Guy Boothby, Oxford Popular Fiction (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp xv-xvi.

¹⁶ One of the crimes Martin Hewitt solves involves hypnotism, and one of the Christmas short stories is a dramatic ghost story. Beyond these two stories, other references to the supernatural are made only in passing.

¹⁷ Ashley, *Storytellers*, p. 225.

¹⁸ Liveing, p. 74.

by Stanley L. Wood, most running in line with the text, with more than ten full-page plates (see Figures 17 and 18, 21 and 22). In fact, the style of printing and binding is very consistent with the *Chronicles of Martin Hewitt* published that same year and the *Adventures of Martin Hewitt* published the next year; all three are bound in cloth, lettered and blocked in gilt with a reproduction of an image from the magazine story on the lower right corner of the front cover. *Adventures* and *Bid for Fortune* are even bound in the exact same colour of cloth (compare Figures 17 and 11).

A cheap edition of *Bid for Fortune* was printed in 1900 by Ward, Lock & Co, part of the sixpenny reprint trend that started in the late 1890s, often for railway reading. Joseph Shaylor in 1905 wrote that over a thousand sixpenny reprints of ‘most of our popular books’ were presently in circulation and that they were ‘chiefly bought by summer travellers, for they cost little and can be thrown away when done with’.¹⁹ Indeed, sixpenny editions of *Bid for Fortune* are extremely scarce; according to WorldCat, the British Library holds the only copy in any major library, and no copies are currently on the online market. The cheap reprint is particularly eye-catching. The cover image is a compelling colour version of one of the original illustrations by Wood (see Figure 19)—fitting with Eliot and Nash’s assertion that ‘by the early 1900s these paperbacks were being issued in strikingly designed coloured covers’.²⁰ Though the original illustrations were evocative in black and white, the vibrant colours in the image of Dr. Nikola and his cat reposing in a smoke-filled study, walls lined with skulls and weapons, bring the image to life. Particularly notable are the stares of the villain and his feline companion. As the central, though often behind-the-scenes, figure, Dr. Nikola is drawn much as he is described in the story itself, particularly with his ‘extraordinary’ and ‘dreadful’ eyes which were ‘as dark as night, and glittered like those of a snake’.²¹ As one of the doctor’s main characteristics throughout the tale is his striking appearance, the cover is quite appropriate and serves as an immediate attraction to the story. This same image, but without the added colour, also serves as the frontispiece for the 1895 edition. Besides the striking cover, this cheap volume contains fewer illustrations than the previous edition: no in-line illustrations and only four plates in total, all black and white full-page reproductions of drawings from the original—which are also found in the first book edition (see Figures 20, 23, 24, and 25).

The four chosen drawings in this edition evoke both adventure and the supernatural, with two of them showing the main character Dick Hatteras in the midst of fist fights (Figures 23 and 24) and the final image of Dick holding his rescued damsel in a protective embrace (Figure 25). The other image is another representation of the hypnotist doctor, again with his haunting eyes and staring cat. This picture also includes a defiant Dick Hatteras, fists clenched, prepared to walk away from the man who has just tried and failed to hypnotize him, and yet his head turns back, eyes still fixed upon the man who would become his nemesis (Figure 20, compare with Figures 21 and 22). In the 1895 edition, this plate is found directly opposite the page describing this attempted hypnotism: ‘He stared fixedly at me for more

¹⁹ Joseph Shaylor, ‘Reprints and Their Readers’, *The Cornhill Magazine*, 1905, 538–45, pp. 539–40.

²⁰ Simon Eliot and Andrew Nash, ‘Mass Markets: Literature’, in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, ed. by David McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 424–425.

²¹ Guy Boothby, *A Bid for Fortune; or, Dr. Nikola’s vendetta*, (London: Ward, Lock & Co, 1895), p. 126 and 50.

than half a minute before he answered. There was no escaping those dreadful eyes, and the regular sweep of those long white fingers on the cat's black fur seemed to send a cold shiver right down my spine. Bit by bit I began to feel a curious sensation of dizziness creeping over me'.²² Throughout the tale, Dr. Nikola maintains this inexplicable pull on the people around him. Though the paranormal aspects of the tale are subtle, two of the five chosen illustrations depicting the hypnotic eyes of the criminal mastermind emphasize the supernatural, while the other three accentuate the adventure.

An advertisement in the back of this edition describes it as 'beautifully printed from clear type on antique paper, bound in artistic covers, lithographed in nine colours, and all illustrated'.²³ This advertisement describes nine such publications in the same series, including *A Bid for Fortune* and *A Study in Scarlet*, as 'a marvel of cheapness' and 'the most beautifully produced sixpenny novels ever introduced to the public'.²⁴ One of the other books listed, *Jewel Mysteries*, is a collection of detective stories by Max Pemberton, who wrote many pieces of genre fiction.²⁵ These sixpenny novels and authors as advertised by Ward, Lock & Co provided opportunities for the publishers to present genre fiction in appealing and affordable editions. Just like the magazines, the sixpenny editions of the stories were printed on cheaper paper in double columns—they were even sold for the same price. In this sense, the sixpenny books represent a convergence of the book and magazine formats, with genre stories finding a home in both.

²² *Fortune*, 1895, p. 126.

²³ 'New...Sixpenny Novels', *A Bid for Fortune; or, Dr. Nikola's vendetta*, (London: Ward, Lock & Co, 1900).

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Pemberton was known for his 'Jules Verne-like stories of imaginative adventure' and wrote a large number of short stories for many of the general fiction magazines and published a number of books, including *The Phantom Army: Being the Story of a Man and a Mystery* and *Queen of the Jesters and her Strange Adventures in Old Paris*. See Sutherland, *Longman*, p. 502 and 'Authors : Pemberton, Max : SFE : Science Fiction Encyclopedia' <http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/pemberton_max> [accessed 25 August 2017] and 'Stories, Listed by Author: Pemberton, Max' <<http://www.philsp.com/homeville/FMI/s/s5629.htm#A146329>> [accessed 25 August 2017].