

## Source 1a

Hoppenstand, Gary. "Genres and Formulas in Popular Literature." A Companion to Popular Culture, Ed. Gary Burns, Wiley Blackwell, 2016, pp. 101-122.

The dime novel was a magazine-sized pamphlet publication of tightly packed print that featured a single story. This story was published on inexpensive pulpwood paper with a cover illustration that sold for a nickel or a dime (hence its name). Initially, the American frontier narrative--featuring the highly fictionalized exploits of such real-life frontier personalities as Buffalo Bill-- was the most popular type of dime novel published, but as the nation moved demographically from the country to the city, the dime novel also changed its focus to the city and replaced the frontiersman hero with the detective hero. [...]

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With the advent of publisher Frank A. Munsey's fiction magazine *Argosy* in October 1896, the American dime novel would soon be replaced by the American pulp-fiction magazine. [...] Like the dime novel, the pulp-fiction magazine was also printed on inexpensive pulpwood paper, but unlike the dime novel it typically featured a collection of stories instead of a single novel. Changes in postal rates that at one time advantaged the dime novel eventually contributed to the dime novel's demise as the dominant vehicle of American popular fiction. "Pulps" took advantage of the situation and

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would eventually go on to supplant the dime novels, with publishers such as Street & Smith transitioning their dime novel empire to pulp-fiction titles around the turn of the twentieth century. During the 1920s and 1930s, a dazzling array of pulp-fiction magazines appeared on newsstands--ranging from detective-fiction pulps, to horror pulps, to science fiction pulps, to "character" (or hero) pulps, and to romance-fiction pulps (as well as many other trendy story types, such as railroad stories and zeppelin stories)-- reaching their greatest popularity in the early years of the Great Depression.

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## Source 2a

"Pulp Fiction Central." The Vintage Library. 2008,  
<http://www.vintagelibrary.com/pulpfiction/PulpFictionCentral.php/>.

Pulp fiction magazines were the main source of everyday entertainment for the masses during the first half of the 20th Century. These magazines delivered action and heroes that were some of the most creative in literary history. Pulp heroes and their authors have influenced every medium including comics, movies, and television.

The Pulps delivered stories for every possible genre, including detective, western, adventure, spicy, spy/military, as well many other, smaller niche genres. The Pulps were also responsible for the creation of the hardboiled detective story as well as the sci-fi genre.

The pulps emerged out of the cheap “dime novels” of the late 19th century. From 1900 to 1920, the newspaper like dime novels evolved into the well known magazine format. Magazines such as *Argosy*, *All-Story Weekly*, and *Blue Book* dominated the field with general fiction stories. Tarzan and Zorro are two classics from this era come to mind quickly.

The 1920s saw the transformation from general fiction to genre fiction. The general fiction magazine *Black Mask* evolved away from standard fiction and cozy style mysteries into the home of Dashiell Hammet and the Hard Boiled Detective. Meanwhile, *Weird Tales: the Unique Magazine* provided an outlet for weird and fantastical writings which launched the fantasy and horror genres for writers such as H.P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, Clark Ashton Smith and many others. Soon came along *Astounding Stories* and *Astonishing Stories* which launched the Golden Age science fiction and speculative fiction.

The 1930s saw an explosion in terms of number of magazines and genres. This decade was the prime period producing some of the best (and worst) pulp fiction that impacted American entertainment then and continues to reverberate today with derivative works. The writing careers of Raymond Chandler, Erle Stanley Gardner, Robert A. Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, and many others began in the pulps.

With the 1940s and World War II, paper shortages and changing readers the pulps began their decline. The paperback industry was beginning to take hold. The Radio and Movie industry had been tempting away talent and competing for audiences for some time.

But the end for the pulps came in about 1952. Television was in its infancy and about to captivate a nation. But a collapsing newsstand distribution network effectively end the pulp fiction era.

Although the pulps were incredibly popular during its day most were destined to be forgotten quickly. Much of the innovation and creativity that occurred in the pulps has been forgotten or attributed to later mediums, authors and characters.

## Source 3a

Hutchison, Don. The Great Pulp Heroes (revised). 1996. Book Republic, 2007.

They were gaudy. They were gory. They were glorious. And they were everywhere.

Back in the thirties and forties, every newsstand in places big enough to have sidewalks harbored stacks of magazines bearing enameled covers that were designed to flypaper the eyes with circus-poster brilliance.

And what titles they had: *South Sea Stories!* *Black Mask!* *Adventure!* *Super Science Stories!* *Hollywood Detective!* *Magic Carpet!* *Doc Savage!* *Railroad Stories!* *The Spider!* *Northwest Romances!* *Famous Fantastic Mysteries!* *Jungle Stories!* *Western Raiders!* *Zeppelin Stories!*

The roll call is endless. They were called the pulps. By definition they were magazines of popular fiction handling such staples as adventure, action, and romance. Between their birth in the first years of the last century and their demise in the middle fifties, they represented the greatest explosion of mass entertainment via the printed word that a thrill-seeking public ever experienced.

Variety was infinite. There were detective pulps, western pulps, science-fiction pulps, sports pulps, romance pulps, gang-war pulps, horror pulps, spicy mystery pulps, jungle and desert adventure pulps, and *The Shadow*. There were straight aviation pulps with names like *Dare-Devil Aces* and *Sky Fighters*, as well as macabre variants such as *G-8 and His Battle Aces*, which routinely ladled out titles like “Squadron of Corpses,” “The Headless Staffel,” and “Scourge of the Sky Beast.” From railroad yarns to pirate stories, from the center of the earth to the farthest reaches of the universe, the gaudy, gory, glorious pulp magazines delivered on their promise: something for everyone.

How to explain the euphoria of the pulps? Perhaps you had to be there. You had to be young-- at least in spirit. You had to

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be poor (most people were). You had to be part of that troubled, more innocent time. For armchair adventurers it was a Golden Age-- before television, when imagination and a need for heroes were coupled with a world of vicarious wonders. [...]

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It was a literary Gold Rush, but for the few who struck pay dirt (Hammett, Burroughs, Erie Stanley Gardner), hundreds of others found the panning tough. In his book *The Pulp Jungle*, author Frank Gruber confided:

There were in existence, at this time, some 150 pulp magazines, solidly established. A vast market for stories. But these were still Depression Days and the competition was fierce. It was a literary jungle and every writer was a tiger. You had to be brash, you had to be tough, you had to claw your way into the jungle and fight for your life every minute you were in it. There were more writers than there were magazines. All were hungry writers. [...]

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By the turn of the nineteenth century, the appeal of the dime novel had waned. Its characters, style, and action-oriented plots were soon transferred to the pulps, so called because a publisher named Frank Munsey had begun to print an all-fiction magazine titled *Argosy* on cheap pulpwood paper. Munsey had the idea that the story was more important than what it was printed on. He must have guessed correctly because the lowly pulp magazine

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went on to become the most popular form of reading material in America between World War I and the end of World War II.

Street & Smith, a dime-novel giant, began converting paper-covered books into pulp magazines as early as 1903. Eventually, *The Buffalo Bill Weekly* dime-novel series was transformed into *Western Story Magazine*, with old Bill held over briefly in a series of new stories. Likewise, that resolute but fictitious detective, Nick Carter, became editor emeritus of the newly created *Detective Story Magazine*. Other genres-- science fiction, love story, horror, war and aviation-- soon followed.

What made the pulps different from the weekly story papers and dime novels was that they were true magazines, generous in both size and variety of content. They were an all-permeating atmosphere, a delirious environment of irresistibly lurid covers, dynamic illustrations, worshipful letters, and breathless fiction. For only ten cents, or a little more-- the price of a magazine containing novels, short stories, departments, and artwork-- a reader could get lost in the violent lives of heroes and heroines as outsized and engrossing as any to be found in the great myths and legends.

As pulp publisher Henry Steeger once explained it:

Pulps were the principal entertainment vehicle for millions of Americans. They were an unflickering, uncolored TV screen upon which the reader could spread the most glorious imagination he possessed. The athletes were stronger, the heroes were nobler, the girls were

more beautiful and the palaces were more luxurious than any in existence; they were always there at any time of the day or night on dull, no-gloss paper that was kind to the eyes. [...]

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As the Roaring Twenties marched to a cataclysmic market crash, many North Americans had learned to accept organized crime (created by Prohibition) as “big business” and gangsters as a form of barbaric royalty. But the glorification of gang rule took an abrupt turn in the Great Depression when Americans awoke from their paralysis of fascination and began looking for new heroes who did not reflect the rule of force over ideals. As usual, the pulps were there to supply what the public desired.

Pulp avengers-- individuals of strength, speed, brains, and stamina-- arose to do battle with working-class America’s perceived enemies: gangsters, bankers, punks, fiends, lawyers, politicians, and threatening foreign hordes [...]

Much has been made of the pulp magazines as training grounds for serious literary authors ranging from MacKinlay Kantor to Tennessee Williams. The fact is that most of the pulps treasured by collectors today represent an unpretentious, calculatedly disposable literature that was too exciting to be respectable and too much fun to be taken seriously. [...]

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Say what you will of the great pulp heroes, but they were a beguiling lot. With their narratives yoked to gut emotions, they brought messages of a limitless world of adventure and experience, a great shining universe that was full of color and juice, where heroes were not forced to do homework, mow lawns, go to bed early, or eat up their vegetables. It was all fantasy, of course-- heroism rampant with seldom a dull or ugly moment-- but it got a lot of readers through some hard times and filled their minds with hope, wonder, and even inspiration.

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## Source 4a

Smith, Erin A. “How the Other Half Read: Advertising, Working-Class Readers, and Pulp Magazines.” Book History, Vol. 3, 2000, pp. 204-230.

Named for the untrimmed, rough wood-pulp paper on which they were printed, pulp magazines were unambiguously “trash”-- cheaply produced escape literature designed to be thrown away once read. Hundreds of pulp titles crowded newsstands during their heyday in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, their garish covers competing for the attention of their ten million regular readers. Although most often featuring stylized, brightly colored paintings of scantily clad women or men engaged in violence on their covers, these 7 x 10 inch magazines were remarkably unassuming on the inside. Column after column of uninterrupted, densely packed print greeted the reader, punctuated only by an occasional pen-and-ink line drawing and

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a few pages of ads clustered at the front and back. A reader could expect to pay between five and twenty-five cents for roughly 130 pages of stories between 1896 and 1953, a great deal of fiction for

the money. Although “respectable” magazines published on more expensive, “slick” paper-- *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *Cosmopolitan*, *The Saturday Evening Post*--often sold for less, their substantial production costs were subsidized by advertisers. Pulp magazines were ubiquitous between the wars, but few of them survive. First, few readers deemed them worthy of preserving. Second, pulp paper is delicate and decomposes rapidly. Most titles were quite literally read to pieces.

The evidence about who read pulp magazines is sketchy. The absence of data itself suggests a primarily working-class readership, since slick-paper magazines during this period did a great deal of market research about middle-class consumers. That these widely practiced techniques were not applied to pulp magazine audiences suggests that publishers did not believe their incomes were large enough to make them worth courting as consumers. Scholars concur that pulp magazines targeted those who were in some way marginal readers-- adolescents, the poorly educated, immigrants, and laborers. The largest volume of sales came from the Midwest. One survey by Popular Publications found that the typical reader was “a young, married man in a manual job who had limited resources and lived in an industrial town.” Pulp publisher Harold Hersey maintained that most readers were office or factory girls (romance pulps), soldiers, sailors, miners, dockworkers, ranchers, rangers, and others who worked with their hands. Their taste for “trashy” reading matter was cause for social concern. Cultural commentators throughout the 1930s and 1940s lamented that the proletariat read little else besides pulp magazines.

This popular perception that working-class readers preferred pulp magazines to more reputable publications was confirmed by studies done at the University of Chicago library school in the 1930s. One study found that 55 percent of the pulp magazine audience had only a grade school education, 29 percent had a high school education, 7 percent had some college, and 9 percent had college degrees. Other statistics indicate that residents of a working-class Chicago neighborhood read detective and adventure pulps roughly ten times more often than middle-class residents of a St. Louis suburb [...]

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Who, then, were the readers addressed or called into being by *Black Mask*? The reconstructed readers that emerge from these advertising appeals were overwhelmingly working men preoccupied with rethinking gender, class, and cultural identities in light of emergent consumer culture. They were working men struggling to make sense of a world in which the bulwarks of

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artisanal culture-- autonomous and remunerative work, homosocial work and leisure spaces--were eroding. These readers had lost a sense of collective gender and class identity, because the production in which they were engaged had become less important than the consumer goods they could (or could not) afford to buy and display. For three decades, advertisers in *Black Mask* appealed to these anxieties in complex and contradictory ways. They promised job training and body-building to reconstitute the residual culture of autonomous, manly artisans while simultaneously pushing the impression management necessary for the consumer society that contributed to its decline. Every individual worker socially and economically enabled by his new-found facility at impression management was also one less citizen of a disappearing artisanal culture.

Yet *Black Mask* readers had strong ties to a residual culture of skilled artisans, even into the 1940s, if the ads are to be trusted. Advertising appealed most often to a worker’s desire for autonomous, unalienated labor, offering him vocational training to fit him for skilled and interesting work. Meaningful work, moreover, was as deeply enmeshed with manhood as it was in the homosocial worlds of the previous century. The physical prowess, patriarchal male supremacy, and free agency that manhood implied in the culture of artisans was still alive and well on the pages of *Black Mask*, however many purchases it might require to maintain.

Further, the world of impression management was still so new as to require all sorts of bolstering-- long-winded, didactic explanations of how dressing for success could improve your career trajectory, for example. The strength of the residual artisanal worldview for readers is evident in the two-pronged attack advertisers made on it. In some cases, ad men insisted that impression management not only did not conflict with an artisanal worldview, but would actually help a working man get recognition for his expertise. In others, ad men forcefully argued for the inadequacy of traditional forms of authority in order to urge their replacement by corporate experts. The need for such strategies testifies to the-- at best-- uneasy rapprochement between consumer culture and working-class life for *Black Mask* readers.

The fiction that accompanied these ads engaged similar issues, but often in more complicated ways. Although not engaged in production work, hard-boiled private eyes were forever doing battle with their employers and the police to protect their right to conduct their cases with manly autonomy. They were obsessively interested in details of dress and décor, making judgments about suspects and witnesses based on their self-presentations. Their physical and rhetorical prowess filled the pages of *Black Mask* with tough talk and fistfights. They were forever rescuing damsels in distress or returning uppity women to their appropriate, subordinate places.

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Hard-boiled private eyes, with their monomaniacal dedication to work, anxiously overdone manliness, obsessive interest in clothing and interiors, and tough-talking machismo were the perfect salesmen for the products advertised in *Black Mask*--job-training by correspondence, body-building programs, elocution lessons, and conduct manuals. After hard-boiled fiction had sold readers on the benefits of skilled, autonomous work, physical prowess, and the importance of reading how class and power are embodied in dress, speech, and manners, it only remained for advertisers to step in with the necessary products. Pulp advertising and pulp detective fiction were engaged in a complex relationship of reciprocal influence, and this relationship engaged both the everyday concerns of white working-class men and the products of the new consumer economy.

In some ways, pulp magazines can be seen as empowering to readers, offering individual (male) workers the skills necessary to make sense of bourgeois culture. These texts also urged individual workers to train themselves for work that was still comparatively autonomous. In other ways these ads and this fiction urged readers to think of themselves exclusively as individuals, closing off possibilities for conceiving of themselves as a class with common interests worth pursuing collectively. Learning to read how class, gender, and status are embodied was a useful skill for men without hereditary access to wealth, higher education, and institutional power. Learning that this knowledge was an individual matter, obtained in the privacy of one's home in one's spare time, and not a matter of collective importance to everyone (including women) lacking institutional access was not politically enabling. In *Black Mask* between the wars, however, the two were inseparable. One learned to read class and power in the social world, but learned to read only in individualistic, masculinist ways...

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## Source 5a

Steranko, James. The Steranko History of Comics. Supergraphics, 1970.

The nation was in the mood for swift justice!

It was an era of crime, of Dillinger, Bonnie and Clyde, Pretty Boy Floyd. Crime was front page news. There were crimes of passion, crimes of revenge, crimes for gain, crimes for kicks.

The movies countered with their own brand of violence, with Bogart, Garfield, Greenstreet, Cagney and Edward G. Robinson. And bullet for bullet, the pulps matched them all.

Pulps were untrimmed magazines named for the soft paper flecked with shreds of wood fibre on which they were printed. Publishers used pulp paper because there was nothing cheaper available. Pulps had little to do with quality! The key word was quantity! Publishers became successful by relentlessly asking themselves this question: How can I print more books, more often, more cheaply?

Those who most frequently answered that enigma made fortunes. Sometimes made fortunes then lost them. Profit margins were often as small as several hundred dollars per issue after everyone was paid. If everyone was paid! The idea was to have as many copies of as many books on the newsstands as possible.

Many titles were started only to be dropped after a few issues. Some bombed with a single issue. Others scored and lasted for decades. A few were so successful that publishing empires were built around them.

Pulps measured 9-1/2" x 7 1/2" and had 114 to 162 pages between full color enamel stock covers. Most had 128 pages which featured a lead novel of some 50,000 to 60,000 words and a half dozen short stories totaling an additional 20,000 words.

Some pulps were issued weekly, some monthly, others bi-monthly or quarterly, but at most times 250 titles were on newsstand display. Every month chalked up a staggering total of twenty million words!

Those words told every kind of story imaginable, no plot was too remote, no idea too fantastic [...] Newsstand browsing in those days became an adventure.

The pulps were cheaply printed, luridly illustrated, sensationally written and cost a thin dime. They were aimed at the masses, the vast lower and middle classes who needed an inexpensive medium of entertainment. But pulps did more than simply entertain; they thrilled, startled, fascinated, horrified, shocked and astonished. And one thing more, they sold!

A fraternity of dime noveleers created hundreds of characters amid thousands of stories to satiate the public's omnivorous appetite for pulp fiction. Long before the comics, the pulps boasted dozens of super heroes. Not super in the sense of x-ray vision or the ability to fly, pulp heroes were usually men whose senses were modified. Somehow, it all seemed to be within the realm of believability [...]

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Stories were all plot. Characterization was almost non-existent. It would have slowed down the juggernaut velocity of the script. Chapters were epigrammatic and swiftly paced. Paragraphs were terse, never more than a few sentences. Sentences were clipped and precise. Dialogue was always to the point. every single word kept the story moving. Authors composed laconic word pictures that read with furious speed [...]

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The big change in detective fiction had started after WWI. Realism took the form of detached cynicism and began to erode the curt, romantic approach that existed. Polite conversation gave way to tough, trenchant dialogue with the burning quality of a chunk of dry ice. Characterizations tended to reveal the flaws in the personalities of the players. Action replaced intellectualism.

"Elementary, my dear Watson," was superseded by, "'Shut your mouth, damn you,' the Brain greeted, 'Or I'll cook you right now!'" By the time the depression had rolled around, the public had

learned to welcome the hardbitten, hardboiled philosophy the pulp private dicks offered and accepted it as their own [...]

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They were all about as appealing as a pack of sideshow freaks, yet in the purple prose of the pulp thrillers they found acceptance. Why? Perhaps because, even though they lacked the elements necessary for transcendental meditation, they could allow a brief suspension from the pressures of a depression-torn nation. Or maybe they showed that freaks exist in our world, even closer than we supposed.

The pulp represented the commonest of escape literature. Compared to the dilemmas encountered in the dime novels, the challenge of day-to-day existence did indeed seem to pale. The elemental struggles and eventual victories vivified the determination of American youth caught in the stress of living. Pulp heroes held out the hope of personal achievement to every red-blooded American who could afford a dime. And in those days a dime might a well have been a dollar [...]

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