

From “The Offal of the Magazine Trade” to “Absolutely Priceless”: Considering the Canadian Pulp Magazine Collection

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The other day I went into one of the stores in Ottawa to see just how bad the situation was here. In the store, forty-six different kinds of this trash were offered for sale. This is the offal of the magazine trade. No one should have to buy it. No one should be able to buy it.

T. H. Goode, Member of Parliament, 1949

This diverse range of magazines and paper-books, complemented by the behind-the-covers production materials and other archival documentation, creates an absolutely priceless opportunity to study Canada’s emerging publishing industry.

Michel Brisebois, Rare Book Historian for the National Library of Canada, 2002

IN 1949, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT T. H. GOODE exhorted the Federal Government of Canada to make the sale of both pulp magazines and comic books illegal. Most Members of Parliament concurred with Goode’s exhortation. Positing that the violence and questionable morality associated with pulp fiction and comic-book tales could damage young readers, the Federal Government chose to criminalize the production, sale, and even ownership of pulps and comics. These restrictions eradicated Canadian pulps from the nation’s literary landscape by both preventing the production of new materials and discouraging the preservation of existing ones. In 1996, however, the National Library of Canada purchased a former pulp publisher’s archive; this archive now constitutes the only known collection of Canadian pulp magazines. Celebrating their rarity, the Library created a public exhibition in 2002 that was designed to showcase the pulps as artefacts that provide “absolutely priceless” insight into a nearly-forgotten era of Canadian publishing. Clearly, this treatment of the pulps contradicts the 1949 government decision to ban the “offal of the magazine trade.” The radical disparity between the perception of the Canadian pulps in 1949 and

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their current vogue raises the question of cultural legitimacy, the question of how literary value is negotiated by governments, institutions, and readers, as well as how these values can change over time. In this paper, I trace the combination of social, economic, moral, and artistic rationales that determined the low cultural value of pulp magazines during the 1940s; I then go on to consider both the material rarity and perceived importance to social and cultural history that underpin the pulps' elevated cultural status as an archive at a national institution.¹

Part One: The Offal of the Magazine Trade

For the first four decades of the twentieth century, Canada imported vast quantities of American pulp magazines. These magazines generated and popularized formulaic genre fiction; indeed, Lee Server argues that

the pulp-created genres—science fiction, horror, private eye, Western, superhero—now dominate not only popular literature but every sort of mass entertainment, from movies and television to comic books. This legacy will remain long after the last of the pulp magazines themselves—haphazardly saved and physically unsuited for preservation—have all turned to dust. (15)

Part of their ethos, however, was grounded in representing acts of violence and risqué scenarios that were met with widespread moral disapproval. From a material vantage, several elements of the pulps suggested that they were a form of printed trash. They were mass-produced on cheap pulp

1 In their article "A New Model for the Study of the Book," Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker argue that texts pass through a "lifecycle" that consists of "five events in the life of a book—publishing, manufacturing, distribution, reception and survival—whose sequence constitutes a system of communication and can in turn precipitate other cycles" (15). For the purposes of this paper, I have chosen to discuss two distinct points in the lifecycle of the Canadian pulp magazines—their initial publication and reception, and their contemporary survival—in order to explore the ways in which archival politics define the cultural value of these magazines, as well as the ways in which the pulp archive shapes our understanding of the pulps' place in literary and publishing history. My focus on these two points necessarily leaves out the complex social, economic, and cultural forces that, over the last fifty years, have facilitated the transition from "trash" to "treasure" that the pulps have made. Similarly, I lead into an understanding of the pulps' position in the cultural hierarchy as they begin a new cycle in which their distribution, reception, and survival is fundamentally different from what it was fifty years ago, but I do not fully explore this new cycle. As both of these aspects of pulp magazines are well worth pursuing, I plan to study each of them in my PhD dissertation.

paper that was prone to rapid disintegration and bound with staples that rusted and fell out over time. In terms of their perceived literary quality, the stories that filled the magazines were penned by authors who were commonly referred to as “hacks,” and the pulp audience consisted primarily of working-class readers. By circulating within this class, the pulps were associated with a low social class in a way that further solidified their status as low literature (see Figure 16). That said, pulp magazines were a great success in the commercial sense: they attracted a large audience, thereby ensuring that thousands of pulp periodicals were distributed and sold in Canada each month.

This mass circulation was impeded by the War Exchange Conservation Act, which was implemented on 6 December 1940. The Act was designed to allocate the consumer dollars of Canadian citizens to Canadian resources and products by reducing the presence of American goods in the marketplace. In pursuing this fiscal end, the Act simultaneously prohibited goods that were associated with escapism and immorality. As historian Tina Loo and criminologist Carolyn Strange point out, the pulps were banned “alongside such frivolous items as chocolate, champagne, and playing cards” (12); specifically, the pulps’ position in the list of banned items placed them between the decadence of “champagne and all other sparkling wines” and the “playing cards, in packs or in sheet form” (*Statutes of Canada*, 4–5 George VI, Chap. 2) that denoted the sins of gambling and greed. The Act was also very precise in outlining the nature of the printed materials that could no longer be imported. These materials included

periodical publications, unbound or paper bound, consisting largely of fiction or printed matter of a similar character, including detective, sex, western, and alleged true crime or confession stories, and publications, unbound or paper bound, commonly known as comics. (*Statutes of Canada*, 4–5 George VI, Chap. 2)

Notably, the Act did not target American magazines aimed at the middle and upper classes. As pulp collector Don Hutchison comments, the Act “deprived kids of their *Superman* and *Captain America* fix, and working-class readers of familiar pulp fiction titles [while the readers of] prestigious ‘slick’ magazines like *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Colliers* were unaffected by the restriction” (para. 2). The Act thereby enforced a double standard for rich and poor readers by defining the kinds of reading materials available for purchase in the Canadian literary marketplace. Further to this, it combined the inferior class status of the pulps with the

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belief that the pulps promoted moral degeneration. At the start of the war, then, the Federal Government of Canada sought control over the reading matter of Canadian citizens who possessed the least degree of economic and social power. Simultaneously, the Act signalled a generalized view of working-class readers as intellectually and morally inferior to other classes of readers. These types of denigration worked in tandem with the critically decried literary poverty of the pulps. The degradation of these magazines on social, moral, and artistic grounds firmly established them as inferior objects within the literary spectrum.

If the Federal Government had a secondary motive of controlling, or even eradicating, the dissemination of pulp magazines, it utterly failed in achieving its goal. Economic demands prevailed over political decisions. A large market existed for pulp fiction, and it did not vanish with the banning of the magazines. Until the National Library's installation of the Pulp Magazine Collection in 1996, pulp and comic book aficionados like Don Hutchison and John Bell believed that this demand was met entirely by an industry of plagiarism in which American tales were re-published in Canada using Canadian labour and printing materials. By making use of Canadian resources, these magazines could continue to sell American stories while paradoxically cashing in on wartime national pride by promoting themselves as both purveyors of Canadian culture and contributors to the Canadian economy. The magazines published under the title *Science Fiction*, for example, advertised themselves as "truly All-Canadian magazines, conceived, edited, and written in Canada by Canadians," and it encouraged readers to buy the magazines as a way of "spending our currency among ourselves [and] adding to our country's business" (Hutchison para. 4). Hutchison contradicts this rhetoric, noting that the "truth was exactly the opposite. All of the stories in the Canadian *Science Fiction* were lifted from U.S. editions of Blue Ribbon Magazines' *Science Fiction*, *Science Fiction Quarterly*, and *Future Fiction*" (para. 5). While such magazines prospered during the war, Canadian readers did, in fact, have magazines other than the plagiarized pulps to purchase.

Within five months of the War Exchange Conservation Act's implementation, *Toronto Star* reporter-turned-pulp-publisher Alec Valentine began supplying Canadian readers with the magazines they wanted. While his magazines included American content, he also solicited and published original stories by Canadian writers, just as the advertisements for his magazines claimed. In the ten-year span that his company survived, Valentine published over forty-four different magazine titles, with a title to represent every possible popular genre. *Yarns* told sports and adventure

stories intended for young readers, *Stag* offered pornography to college-aged men, *Bill Wayne's Western Magazine* contained tales of the wild west, *Romantic Love Stories* sold romance fiction to women, and *Uncanny Tales* ventured into the supernatural and the occult. Valentine also published a number of true crime and crime fiction titles that targeted all adult Canadians interested in stories of crime and detection. In fact, of all of the magazines that make up in the National Library's Pulp Magazine Collection, the crime titles are the most prolific: there more true crime and crime fiction magazines titles than all of the other titles combined, and the true crime titles often had longer print runs than many of the other magazines. *Startling Crime Cases*, for example, survived from 1943 to 1950, while *Bill Wayne's Western Magazine* seems to have lasted for only a few months in 1942. Altogether, crime magazines make up roughly sixty percent of the collection's 450 different issues. These issues are comprised of both crime fiction and true crime magazines, but the true crime magazine titles far outnumber the crime fiction magazines (see Figure 17).

The true crime titles represented in the archive include *Best True Fact Detective*, *Certified Detective Cases*, *Chief Detective Stories*, *Daring Crime Cases*, *Factual Detective Stories*, *Feature Detective Cases*, *Line-Up Detective Cases*, *Scoop Detective*, *Special Detective Cases*, *Startling Crime Cases*, *True Bootleg Crime Cases*, *True Gangster Crime Cases*, and *Women in Crime*. There are only four fiction titles, including *Daring Detective*, *Dare-Devil Detective Stories*, *Five Star Detective Stories*, and *World-Wide Detective*. Both the true crime magazines and the crime fiction magazines featured sensational covers and salacious stories with titles like "The Nude Corpse on the Burned Mattress" or "The Morphine Eyes and the Pill of Death." Between 1941 and 1945, Valentine's publishing house sustained itself with the monthly production of fifteen top-selling true crime magazines and four crime fiction magazines. The four fiction titles were Valentine's foundational magazines as his publishing venture got underway. All of them first appeared between May and July 1941, just a few short months after the trade embargo was established, and all of them appear to have ceased publication after the ban on pulps was lifted at the end of the war and American magazines once again flooded the Canadian market. The true crime magazines continued to sell in mass quantities until the collapse of Valentine's magazine business in 1949.

According to Toronto book collector George Flie,² who purchased the pulp archive from Alec Valentine in 1987, Valentine realized within his

2 I would like to thank George Flie and Michel Brisebois for their first-

first few months as a publisher that the Canadian public seemed to prefer true crime stories over any other genre. Explanations regarding the survival of the true crime magazines are speculative at best. One possibility is that the true crime pulps tended to publish more stories set in Canada than the crime fiction pulps. By employing a backdrop of the Klondike Gold Rush or the wild west of the prairies, the stories in the true crime magazines offered a sensationalized slice of Canadian history and social life that may have appealed to a large group of Canadian pulp readers. Another possibility is that the true crime magazines appealed to a desire to know about events that actually happened. A third reason may lie in the fact that true crime tales presented events that showcased the power of the legal and judicial systems to maintain social order and security in Canada, and these suggestions of order may have been reassuring during the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War era. As David Skene-Melvin notes in *Crime in a Cold Climate*, in many Canadian true crime tales “the common thread is the assertion of national authority ... represented particularly by the scarlet tunics” of the RCMP (10). Law enforcement officers were consistently portrayed as ethical, intelligent, and devoted to the protection of the public, while law-breakers were always apprehended and brought to justice. In this way, Strange and Loo argue, the actual contents of Canadian pulp magazines were “not only respectful but morally conservative” (14), thereby contradicting the arguments against them as objects of social and moral corruption. However, any such evidence of moral certitude was disregarded in 1949 when the National Council of Women of Canada, Parent Teacher Associations, and Kiwanis Clubs of Canada lobbied Members of Parliament to outlaw crime pulps and crime comics.

In response to the lobby, David E. Fulton, Member of Parliament for Kamloops, introduced Bill 10 on 4 October 1949. The bill, which was colloquially referred to as the “Fulton Bill,” targeted children’s comics that specialized in crime stories, yet it encompassed crime pulps directed at adults as well. After a series of debates that took up issues such as censorship, the education of Canada’s youth, and the sustainability of Canada’s publishing industry, the Federal Government made an amendment to Section 207 of the Criminal Code on 5 December 1949. This section, which dealt with obscenity laws, now stated that it was an offence to make, print, publish, distribute, sell, or own “any magazine, periodical or book which exclusively

hand insights into how the Pulp Magazine Collection was compiled, preserved, and eventually archived at the Library.

or substantially comprises matter depicting the commission of crimes, real or fictitious” (*Hansard* 5 Dec. 1949 2690).³ George Flie, who was in high school during the 1950s, recalled campaigns in his community to collect and destroy the pulp magazines and comic books that had recently been deemed criminal objects (2003). The political and social panic over pulp was not, however, the only factor in the demise of the magazines. The 1950s ushered in the cheap paperback novel. The content of the novels was similar to that of the pulps, but the format offered more fiction at a lower price than pulp magazines. Changes in material production thereby coincided with federal legislation to end pulp publishing, while the social campaigns to destroy the already-existing pulps obliterated the remnants of a once-thriving aspect of Canadian literary production. How, then, did the pulps come to be installed within the National Library’s collection of rare books and artefacts, a position that freights them with cultural significance?

Part Two: Absolutely Priceless

The pulp archive, which currently resides in a locked, underground vault at the National Library, is made up of nineteen boxes of magazines (all of which are in pristine condition), five boxes of publisher’s materials, and roughly one hundred of the original paintings that were used as cover art. The collection was compiled by Valentine himself throughout the 1940s. Unfortunately, Valentine’s archival methodology created some gaps in the completeness of the collection. As Flie explained, Valentine used to send every single copy of each magazine title he published to the newsstands. If some of the magazines did not sell, the news dealers would send them back to him. He maintained one copy of each title that was returned, but he discarded the rest of the copies. Not surprisingly, some issues would occasionally sell out, while other titles would consistently sell out each month. As a result, some of the magazines are missing issues from their print runs, while other magazines that we know of, such as *Romantic Love Stories*, are not represented in the collection at all. That said, Valentine estimated that he saved seventy-five percent of everything he published. Given the campaigns for their destruction and their inherently ephemeral nature, this relatively comprehensive collection is remarkable.

Equally remarkable are the production materials that Valentine preserved. These consist of a chaotic array of photographs, galley pages,

³ This legislation is still in place. It is now listed under Section 163 of the Criminal Code, “Offences Tending to Corrupt Morals.”

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newspaper clippings, letters from authors, a few manuscripts, advertising copy, and many other miscellaneous pieces. Given the enormous amount of printed matter that Valentine published, the remnants of production in the collection can only be a tiny fragment of the work that the publishing house completed each month for ten years. The situation is in keeping with Robert Darnton's observation that "publishers usually treat their archives as garbage. Although they save the occasional letter from a famous author, they throw away account books and commercial correspondence, which usually are the most important sources of information for the book historian" (127). Without any apparent logic driving the selection of publisher's items that were preserved, the pulp archive presents intriguing and potentially unanswerable questions about itself.

Answers to questions about the pulp archive's recent history are more easily pursued. The archive's transition from a privately-owned publisher's archive to a publicly-owned institutional collection began when Flie purchased Valentine's archive from him in 1987. Doubtful of their value beyond his personal attachment to them, Valentine had been storing his pulps in a backyard shed that faced onto an alley. Unsure of their value himself, Flie moved the magazines to his own storage site and set out in search of other Canadian pulps. In nine years, he did not discover any other issues; the absence of other magazines persuaded him of the rarity of his collection. In 1996, he decided that the time had come to pass the archive along to a public place of preservation, so he contacted Michel Brisebois, with whom he had worked before. According to Brisebois:

George called me up. He said—and this is a great line—"I've got something really unusual here ... but, well, it's not the kind of thing you would be interested in." Of course I was intrigued and, after discussing the collection with him, I went down to Toronto to see the magazines for myself. (2003)

Upon viewing the collection, Brisebois realized that he had never seen this line of periodicals before and suspected that the magazines did not exist anywhere else in the world. He returned to Ottawa to draft a proposal for their purchase which, he knew, would require substantial funds. His argument in favour of their preservation was grounded in the idea that these few pulp magazines were all that remained to represent an otherwise lost aspect of Canada's literary culture and print heritage. In being treated as artefacts of Canada's publishing history, the significance of the pulps was marked by shift away from their initial status as cheap, manufactured, throwaway consumer items and toward a position of material

rarity and cultural interest, a position that endowed the pulps with an elevated monetary value.

Given the cost entailed, Brisebois was concerned about the Acquisition Board's response to the pulps. "Public, institutional libraries," he noted, "tend to be conservative in their acquisitions, choosing to acquire materials only after they've become well-established as important resources for well-accepted disciplines" (2003). While works like Michael Denning's *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America*, Erin Smith's *Hard-Boiled: Working-Class Readers and Pulp Magazines*, and Sean McCann's *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism* speak to the growing scholarship in popular print culture, the field is still an emerging rather than a fully established discipline. With this in mind, Brisebois got two letters from experts—both of which were designed to legitimate the collection—to submit with his proposal. One letter was from a graduate student in sociology, Mary Louise Adams. She argued for the collection's potential to serve in the research of Canada's history and social politics. The other letter was written by John Bell, the Senior Archivist at the University of Toronto Library. Bell is also a comic book collector who donated what is now known as the John Bell Canadian Comic Book Collection to the Rare Book Division of the National Library in 1996. He argued authoritatively for the collection's rarity, excellent condition, and usefulness as a foundation for research in several academic fields. In emphasizing the scholarly value of the pulps alongside their rarity and their importance to understanding Canadian heritage, the letters of Adams and Bell indicated the pulps' increased academic, social, and cultural legitimacy. The Acquisitions Board did, of course, approve the purchase. Granted the straightforward name the Pulp Magazine Collection, the former publisher's archive was installed at the National Library as a new addition to the Library's Rare Book Collection. In this new domicile, the pulp archive contains the material objects that, on one hand, elucidate a particular aspect of Canadian history and, on the other hand, strengthen and enrich an emerging academic discipline.

While this new significance does not remove pulp magazines from the realm of mass culture by elevating them to the level of elite literature, their placement in the National Library means that they physically co-exist alongside the works that make up Canada's canon of high literature. Capitalizing on this co-existence, the Library's press release on the Pulp Magazine Collection states:

The connections
between the low
literature of the
pulp and the
high literature
represented by
some of the
Library's other
collections
make possible
a complex,
synchronic
understanding
of literary
history.

while Canada was celebrating literary giants such as Gabrielle Roy, Irving Layton, and W.O. Mitchell, a flourishing home-grown publishing industry, catering to a different readership, was already in full swing.... Because their activities were considered on the margins of literary production in Canada, most "pulp fiction" publishers did not keep their printed and production materials. "This diverse range of magazines and paper-books, complemented by the behind-the-covers production materials and other archival documentation, creates an absolutely priceless opportunity to study Canada's emerging publishing industry" said Rare Book Historian Michel Brisebois. ("Trashy Tabloids" para. 3)

The inclusion of the pulps in the archive therefore re-creates the publishing context in which works designated as either high or low literature co-existed during their initial circulation in society. As a resource for literary study, these non-canonical texts receive a new importance and meaning in the ways in which they connect with canonical works. The connections between the low literature of the pulps and the high literature represented by some of the Library's other collections make possible a complex, synchronic understanding of literary history. As such, the pulps do not become canonical texts, but rather serve as a counterpoint to the texts that make up the traditional literary canon.

The pulps' current rarity, along with the the recent alteration in their scholarly usefulness, suggests the reversal of their status as once-threatening cultural items. As articles of mass consumption in their own era, millions of identical copies of each pulp magazine title were published each month. These issues were then replaced by nearly identical issues the next month. The constant replication of pulp magazines, and the rapid spread of pulp fiction among Canadian readers, gave the pulps the aura of an epidemic. Pursuing this phenomenon, Boris Groys' essay "Movies in the Museum" presents a metaphor of disease that explains the way in which mass culture is widely perceived in modern society. According to Groys:

Every copy is like a rat. The appearance of a rat signifies that there are rats here, and that soon there will be many rats. Reproduction and distribution have a positive image in contemporary, mass society because the commercialized culture of today is always vying for even greater distribution. Despite this, a primeval fear of uncontrolled reproduction and distribution remains present subliminally and has an impact on our culture. Everything that spreads, whether it is McDonald's,

Madonna's songs, or the movie *Titanic*, is not only an object of fascination because of its commercial success; it also reminds us immediately of cholera or the plague. (104)

This fear of contagion was a fundamental part of the pulps' debased position in the literary field of the 1940s. While pulp literature was too widespread to be effectively eliminated, official institutions—public libraries, archives, and universities, for example—resisted the inclusion of such materials in their collections. Even the physical quality of the magazines played into the dirtiness of pulp reading materials: the ink used to print the stories tends to sully the reader's fingers, while the paper itself rapidly dries out, causing older pulps to litter the reader's floor with flakes of pulp dandruff.

Tainted objects in and of themselves, crime pulps compounded their diseased character by trading in images and stories that detailed the degradation of the human body. Taking up all forms of physical violence, crime magazines made the human body the central figure in the formulaic patterns of their fiction. As genre fiction tends to be as copycat in nature, the fiction of the pulps provided variations on the same stories time and again. In this sense, the fiction itself contributed to the sense of rat-like reproduction of copies that surrounded the pulps. At the same time, pulp content recounted stories of murder, kidnapping, and theft. While the Canadian stories consistently showed investigators capturing murderers, locating missing individuals, and recovering stolen property, the crime and debauchery associated with the pulps was persistent. Compounding this problem, selling the magazines involved wrapping the content of the magazines in blatantly sexual images that carried a different connotation of dirtiness. Typically, these images were of voluptuous women in low-cut dresses and high heels who were either being held captive at gunpoint or wielding a gun or knife themselves. The explicit cover art was then framed by titles like "Red Lust," "Death and a Dame," or "Murder by Moonlight." Flirting with licentiousness and immorality, crime pulps conjoined pornography and murder, thereby evincing a fixation on the exploitation and destruction of the human body. These tales of physical and moral debasement fit together with the plague-like threat of mass production, setting pulp fiction apart from the far less invidious aspects of literary production represented by W. O. Mitchell and Gabrielle Roy.

At the present moment, the pulps have lost their mass readership and have been succeeded by media like the internet, television, and cinema. Largely forgotten, and lacking much influence over large numbers of readers, pulp magazines have lost their position as a perceived threat to

the fabric of society. Instead, the magazines are thought of as artefacts of interest to specialists working in fields as various as print culture, criminology, and working-class studies.⁴ While the Library's purchase of the pulp archive was a statement of academic and cultural legitimacy, it was also a statement of restriction: the very rarity of the pulps is at the centre of recent pulp magazine reading practices. The pulps' new-found legitimacy is built into their new position as a publicly-sanctioned archive. Reviewing the origins of the word "archive," Jacques Derrida traces a connection between the interpretation of an archive and its physical location:

the meaning of "archive," its only meaning, comes from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded. The citizens who thus held and signified political power were considered to possess the right to make or represent the law. On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that *place* which is their house (private house, family house, or employee's house), that official documents are filed. The archons are first of all the documents' guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archive. (2)

While the archive's position at the National Library is not related to the making of laws, nor is access to the Pulp Magazine Collection completely restricted to the guardians of the documents, a similar politics of authority surround the pulp archive and its new residence. Housed in Ottawa, the Library's role as a purveyor of national culture implies that pulp magazines now play a role in presenting Canada's heritage. As a rare collection, access to the pulps is limited to those pursuing critical work on pulps. While this measure is in place largely to protect the magazines from rapid disintegration, the effect of it is essentially one of discrimination: professional

4 Recent work on Canadian pulp magazines includes *True Crime, Truth North: The Golden Age of Canadian Pulp Magazines* (2004) by Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo, which showcases several Canadian pulp covers as well as images of publishing artefacts found in the National Library's Pulp Magazine Collection. The book also provides insight into the treatment of justice and morality in a selection of true crime tales. For work on American pulp magazines, see Erin Smith's *Hard-boiled: Working-Class Readers and Pulp Magazines* (2000) and Sean McCann's *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism* (2000).

readers have the privilege of working both in, and on, the archive, while other readers are barred from it.

The audience for the Pulp Magazine Collection at the Library has become a narrow audience, one that consists of academics and specialists. Rather than circulating widely among working-class readers as a form of escapist entertainment, Canadian pulps are now contained in one location and directed at a specific readership. If one is among the privileged few, the way in which one approaches the magazines is institutionally determined. Erin Smith points out the ways in which institutions inform reading practices in her discussion of working-class readers. As she explains:

social and institutional structures [are] related to literacy, education, and cultural production.... Describing how these structures enable and constrain reading practices, Elizabeth Long distinguishes between “social infrastructure” and “social framing.” Social infrastructure is composed of the institutions in which reading is taught and carried out—families, schools, libraries, bookstores, book clubs, and so on. Social framing refers to collective and institutional processes [that] shape reading practices by authoritatively defining what is worth reading and how to read it. (7)

The framework in which pulp reading is now carried out insists that the magazines be read with serious, critically-oriented intentions, and that the actual reading takes place under institutionally-defined conditions. Once the reader has requested a particular box of pulp magazines, and the librarians have removed them from the Library’s vault, the only place in which one can read the magazines is within view of the surveillance camera in the Rare Book Room. In order to get as far as the Rare Book Room, the reader must obtain a library card, which involves proving that one has both academic credentials and a legitimate reason for accessing rare materials. Ironically, the pulps now possess a cultural significance that requires their protection from the mass readership for which they were once published.

The ways in which non-professional readers approach the magazines is also fundamentally and radically different from the reading practices of the pulps’ audience in the 1940s. Where readers were once able to purchase magazines at newsstands and read them during their leisure hours, non-professional readers now access the collection through public exhibitions that display selected items from the archive. The exhibition attendee is free to read about the magazines via the informational blurbs provided by curators, but the magazines themselves are safely stored behind glass.

In order to get as far as the Rare Book Room, the reader must obtain a library card, which involves proving that one has both academic credentials and a legitimate reason for accessing rare materials.

For this reason, non-professional readers cannot actually read the magazines. Instead, they are presented with selected images and fragments of text, all of which are accompanied by explanations regarding how these images and texts ought to be understood. In this way, the pulps are tied to an educational purpose. This purpose is part of the larger framework in which professional readers are also expected to read the pulp magazines at the Library with educational or critical questions in mind. These questions are typically embedded in particular academic methodologies that define the ways in which the magazines are read. Such an approach is in direct opposition to the perception of pulps as escapist, frivolous, or dangerous that was prevalent in the 1940s. The distinction between these two ways of reading is very much a part of the legitimating process that alters pulp magazines from pop-culture trash to a viable subject of study. This alteration is by no means definitive or complete; such ambivalence, according to Pierre Bourdieu, should come as no surprise. As he points out, a newly legitimate field of study is “distinct from a solidly legitimate activity, [as] an activity on the way to legitimation continually confronts its practitioners with the question of its own legitimacy” (131). In their shift from an ephemeral phenomenon to a position of permanence in Canadian history and culture, the Pulp Magazine Collection involves its readers in a process of further establishing and maintaining the legitimacy it was granted upon its installation in the Rare Book Collection.

As noted earlier, the National Library’s role as an official upholder of national memory and culture implies that to learn from the collection is to learn about Canadian history and identity. Moreover, the pulp archive’s presence in the Library suggests that is a significant aspect of Canada’s literary heritage. No longer deemed ephemeral pieces of trash, Canadian pulp magazines now garner treatment as an important aspect of Canadian culture. That said, the location of the Library, which is within view of the Parliament Buildings and the Supreme Court, also situates the reading of the archive. Its position serves as a reminder of the legislation that criminalized the pulps fifty years ago. Visiting the archive is therefore enmeshed with the question of the magazines’ academic, social and cultural legitimacy and the reader is always aware that the pulps’ presence in the National Library is a reflection of their altered position in the cultural hierarchy. In turn, the force of that hierarchy in determining the preservation of, and access to, different texts inverts yet echoes the forces that shaped pulp production and reception in their own era.

In summary, then, Canadian pulp magazines have gone through three transitions in terms of their cultural value. In the 1940s, they were a

form of cheap mass art that was widely read and so derided that political decisions and social campaigns worked to erase them from the cultural landscape. In the fifty years following the criminalization of producing, selling, and owning crime pulps, a small private collection survived in a back yard shed; it was overlooked as culturally significant but nonetheless protected from dispersion or destruction. At this time, the pulp collection is the only known remnant of a widespread literary phenomenon. As such, the collection possesses financial worth in equal part to its increasing cultural legitimacy. In spite of efforts to ban them, and in spite of their own inherently biodegradable nature, the pulp archive has survived, and its survival and current place of preservation marks the social and historical significance of their place in Canada's literary heritage.

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