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MUSCLES FLEXED AND SKIN EXPOSED:
MASCULINITY IN THE IMAGES OF HARD-BOILED AMERICAN PULPS

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A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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A square-shouldered and visibly strong detective takes aim at two scarred and ugly crooks as they wrestle with a beautiful blonde-haired, blue-eyed woman in red. This describes a general portrait of the covers of the hard-boiled crime pulp magazines of the early to mid twentieth century. The working-class readers of these magazines lived during Prohibition, the Depression, two catastrophic world wars, corrupt urban governments, industrialization, and violent labor strife. In this milieu, these magazines sold in large numbers. Previous scholarship by historians and literary critics has studied the fictional stories between the covers, and found themes of escapism, social criticism, and masculinity. Similarly, I argue, the cover art and advertisements of the hard-boiled pulps are as important to better understanding the pulp audiences, consumers, and the themes found by previous scholarship, particularly masculinity. I will discuss this importance through a visual analysis of the covert art, drawing on parallels in imagery and the pulp content found by previous historians.

The American pulp magazines lasted from the late nineteenth century to the late 1950s, with Frank A. Munsey establishing the genre. His October 1896 all-fiction issue of *Argosy* is famed as the first pulp. Before Munsey's introduction of pulps, those with money and education read stately magazines such as *Harper's*, *Atlantic*, *The Century*, and *Scribner's*. These titles and others like them were given the nickname "slicks" because of the coated, glossy paper on which they were printed. These magazines sold between 50 cents and a dollar. The price and content lead slicks to become the rival of the pulps, with the slicks being labeled as the leisure material of the educated upper classes.¹ Reading for pleasure was select, but in the 1930s the invention of the steam

¹ Tony Goodstone, ed., *The Pulps: Fifty Years of American Pop Culture* (New York: Chelsea House, 1976), xii.

printing press, the expanding postal services and railways, and a growing literate working class made fiction affordable and accessible to the “common man.”² Pulp magazines were not nearly as formal or sophisticated as slicks. They were printed on inexpensive tree pulp paper to cut down on costs and increase profits. Munsey sold his original pulps at ten cents a copy, less than half the price of a typical slick.³

Driven by popularity, pulp magazines created genres such as science fiction, westerns, pirates, boxing, war, football, aviation, and romance, but detective fiction was the most widely read. By the 1930s, more than 50 detective magazines figured into the roughly 200 pulps in circulation.⁴ Despite the high sales numbers and the numerous titles, writers and illustrators were not wealthy. Pulp writers were paid from one to five cents a word for the prose they generated at astonishing rates – an average of 3,000 to 5,000 words a day.⁵ Pulp magazines were low pay for artists as well. Many used the genre as a stepping stone towards the better cover market in national family weeklies or monthly magazines like *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's*, *Liberty*, and *Ladies' Home Journal*. It was a difficult market to work for as most cover artists had standard art school training.⁶ Most artists were taught and trained in classical representational painting just after the turn of the century, using oil paint on canvas and board, paintbrushes, and palettes as their tools. But like the pulp writers, artists were expected to produce frequent paintings as fast as possible.

² Lee Server, *Danger is My Business: An Illustrated History of the Fabulous Pulp Magazines* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993), 19.

³ Peter Haining, *The Classic Era of American Pulp Magazines* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2001), 13.

⁴ Erin A. Smith, *Hard-Boiled: Working Class Readers and Pulp Magazines* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 27.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶ Walt Reed, “The Pulps and Their Illustrators: A Brief Survey,” in *Pulp Art: Original Cover Paintings for the Great American Pulp Magazines*, by Robert Lesser, (New York: Sterling Publishing, 1997), 51.

Regardless of the competition, cover artists' product was equally as important as the fiction inside, if not more so. Cover art visually sold the magazine before any eyes read what was inside, and given that one's cover was next to several other colorful, action-packed pulp covers, it was up to the artist to perform the trick of teasing the coins from the pockets of potential customers. The original works were twenty by thirty inches in size, and photographed down in size. After the magazine was printed, the original painting was very often destroyed. The artists did not request their return since they had no monetary value, and their attitude then was somewhere between indifference and shame. Because of the quick destruction and publishers later destroying remaining paintings, very few originals remain today. Little more than one percent of the total number produced still exists, primarily in private collections, with some of the more famous artists' renderings in museums and gallery repositories.⁷

Previous study on the hard-boiled detective pulps has been done by both historians and literary critics. The majority of the focus has been on the fiction inside the covers, and a major argument is that the working class audiences read hard-boiled pulps as a form of escape. Erin A. Smith's book, *Hard-Boiled: Working Class Readers and Pulp Magazines*, attempts to create a voice for these audiences. A difficult task because the working classes did not keep records of their leisure time or reading habits. However, using letters to the editor, advertisements, and library surveys as sources, Smith successfully recreates the mindset of a working class pulp reader as seeking an "imaginative escape from the ethnic enclave, an invitation to image oneself as an

⁷ Jim Steranko, "The Lure of the Pulps: An Artist's Perspective," in *Pulp Art: Original Cover Paintings for the Great American Pulp Magazines*, by Robert Lesser, (New York: Sterling Publishing, 1997), 56.

individual, an unhyphenated American individual.”⁸ Agreeing that the reader was seeking relief from their monotonous and unacknowledged work, Tony Goodstone argues that the pulps offered “inexpensive reading, escape from social oppression and hope for the future for the tens of millions of Americans” that read them.⁹ However, he argues that the hard-boiled crime genre added more social commentary to the escapist qualities.

Peter Haining disagrees with Smith and Goodstone, claiming that pulp readers wanted entertainment and escapist fare that was simple, fast, and graphically illustrated.¹⁰ However, Haining’s book, *The Classic Era of American Pulps*, is a narrative history with a large focus on the covers of hard-boiled stories. This is not to say that his argument is invalid, but he appears nostalgic for his own past with pulps in the forward of his book. In *Danger is My Business*, Lee Sever agrees that pulps held the “promise of escape from mundane reality.”¹¹ Resembling Smith and also using the letters to the editor as a source, Christopher Breu’s study has a focus on gender and the masculine fantasy found in hard-boiled pulps. He argues that the detective character and their readers were longing for a less complex rural ideal, away from their industrial urban dwellings.

Other studies, such as those of Scott McCracken and Sean McCann, show a second major theme found in hard-boiled pulp fiction was a message of social critique. Historians and literary critics alike have found that the genre offered a critique on

⁸ Erin A. Smith, *Hard-Boiled: Working Class Readers and Pulp Magazines* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 80.

⁹ Tony Goodstone, ed., *The Pulps: Fifty Years of American Pop Culture* (New York: Chelsea House, 1976), ix.

¹⁰ Peter Haining, *The Classic Era of American Pulp Magazines* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2001), 13.

¹¹ Lee Sever, *Danger is My Business: An Illustrated History of the Fabulous Pulp Magazines* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993), 9.

contemporary society and the class conflict of industrialization. Through examination of the fictional content and some responses to readers' letters, previous scholarship has found that it was the hard-boiled pulp authors' intention to write social criticism, trying to provoke a feeling of dissatisfaction with their contemporary readers, perhaps hoping to incite a revolution. In his book, *Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction*, Scott McCracken argues that popular fiction "acts as a medium between reader and world through which social contradictions of modernity can be played out" and that the reader acts as a critical agent.¹² Hard-boiled writers were working during wartime, both international and inter-class. Both the producers and consumers of pulp magazines likely had shared views on these issues. As an example, *Black Mask* was one of the most popular hard-boiled titles, and William F. Nolan has found that its authors captured the cynicism, bitterness, disillusionment, and anger of a country fighting to survive.¹³

Sean McCann is the strongest supporter of the theory that pulp authors were attempting to convey a social critique to their readers. Authors were aware of the political, economic, and social messages they were including in the fiction. Opposed to Breu's theory of a hard-boiled pulp collective fantasy, McCann claims that pulps were real life, antipathy to a genteel fantasy, and a popular critique of decadent society, and the audiences found these truths in the literature, becoming eager for fiction that acknowledged the realities of the industrial metropolis.¹⁴ Smith's study agrees with McCann slightly, but her findings suggest that the working class audiences acted as participants in and creators of modern consumer culture because the producers of

¹² Scott McCracken, *Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 6.

¹³ William F. Nolan, *The Black Mask Boys: Masters in the Hard-Boiled School of Detective Fiction* (New York: W. Morrow, 1985), 13.

¹⁴ Sean McCann, *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 39-40.

these magazines had to appeal to the popular needs and desires of their audiences to remain profitable. These arguments propose that popular texts were not a manipulation of the masses but rather a symbiotic relationship existed between the writers and readers.

Since the hard-boiled detective was male for the majority of the fiction's popularity, some studies have recognized the gender issues found in the fiction. Readers of these magazines were mostly white, working-class males occupied with keeping a job, earning a family wage, and asserting their manliness through physical strength, autonomous work, and the subordination of women. These concerns have been found to be addressed in the stories and advertisements of hard-boiled pulps, and can also be seen in the cover illustrations. Haining agrees that the target audience was almost solely the American male, concentrating on "his aspirations to be 'red-blooded' and a 'he-man' and to have a life of action and adventure in which beautiful women fell easily into his arms and even his bed."¹⁵ He even places himself among that target audience, retelling his personal experience with pulps as a young boy in the United Kingdom in the early 1950s: "The brilliant red and yellow covers, with their illustrations of violent action and beautiful girls in stages of disarray, immediately caught my fervent schoolboy imagination."¹⁶ Haining calls attention to the artistic styles, the colors, action, and women, used to create the fantasy of masculinity. All appealed to his own desire for his masculinity or as he puts it, his "fervent schoolboy imagination." Smith's study of pulp advertisements found they offered suggestions and options for manlier dress and ways to obtain physical strength. However, Breu argues that this was the way of the

¹⁵ Peter Haining, *The Classic Era of American Pulp Magazines* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2001), 9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

time period. Society expected physical attributes of manhood, as the Victorian ideal of a moral quality of manhood was over.

Finally, Leonard Cassuto argues that at the center of these pulp magazines is the hard-boiled sentimental. In his book, *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality*, he argues that hard-boiled fiction continues further past class and gender social critiques, including a public discussion on family values. Cassuto points out that the central character, the hard-boiled detective, has a profound lack of trust, commitment, and connection. This genre was the polar opposite of sentimentalism, but because writers were unable to replace sentimentalism once renounced by their characters, writers were left only to “mourn the absence or human connection in their worlds, and gesture back to a place where such ties are possible.”¹⁷ This agrees with Breu’s idea that the detective and his readers were longing for a less complex rural ideal. Likely, one many of the working class audience once had.

Still, previous scholarship on hard-boiled crime pulp fiction has ignored cover images. Since the pulp audience largely was the uneducated working classes, the covers and advertisements likely had more importance to some. Also, because of growing competition, publishers had to increase their variety and find a way to grab the attention of readers. This led to more titles and increasingly vibrant covers on the racks of pulp and news stands. Before publishers could worry about competing stories, pulp cover had to fight pulp cover “and those with the most fright, excitement, and sense-pounding colors per square inch won...one thin dime.”¹⁸ In the photos of stands and stores that

¹⁷ Leonard Cassuto, *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality: The Secret History of American Crime Stories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 3.

¹⁸ Robert Lesser, *Pulp Art: Original Cover Paintings for the Great American Pulp Magazines* (New York: Sterling Publishing, 1997), 6.

sold pulp magazines, one can see how the vibrant colors and action-packed images would attempt to stand out in a passer-by's peripheral vision. Harry Steeger, president of Public Publications, built and installed a replica newsstand in his offices, purchase rival magazines, and place them on the stand with his own titles. Trying to determine whether his magazines or his competition caught his eye first, Steeger felt the buyer had about three to five seconds to have his eye attracted to a cover and spend his dime.¹⁹ Despite the majority of covers featuring stylized, brightly colored paintings of scantily clad women and violent men, the magazines' interior pages were quite bare. Pulp magazines were written in columns of densely packed print with the occasional pen-and-ink line drawings. Any advertisements were generally shoved to the front or back few pages of the magazines.

A study of the material culture of the working class is a benefit to learning more about their perspective and the relationship between consumers and producers of popular culture. As stated earlier, the images were likely more important to some as the audience of pulps were largely uneducated. By looking at the very images they saw on the racks and purchased "we encounter the past first hand; we have direct sensory experience of surviving historical events, not necessarily important events, but authentic events nonetheless," according to art scholar, Jules David Prown.²⁰ It is important to study the products of popular culture, especially these pulp images, because "we can engage the other culture in the first instance not with our minds, the seat of our cultural

¹⁹ Fred Cook, "The Cover Artists and Their Publishers," in *Pulp Art: Original Cover Paintings for the Great American Pulp Magazines*, by Robert Lesser, (New York: Sterling Publishing, 1997), 12.

²⁰ Jules David Prown, *Art as Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 64.

biases, but with our senses.”²¹ Finally, this study of material culture and pulp images is the quest for discerning “cultural belief systems, the patterns of belief of a particular group (in this case, the uneducated working-class, male pulp readers) in a certain time and place.”²²

Erin A. Smith, Christopher Breu, and Leonard Cassuto mostly use the fiction of hard-boiled pulps as source material for their studies, but their arguments can be applied to the pulp images, especially the covers. Using the fiction and advertisements to show the pulps’ and readers’ concerns with work, manliness, and embodiment of class and social position and progression, her book agrees with the theory that producers and consumers of popular culture have an interrelationship, reading hard-boiled pulps as social processes – “economic, political, and psychic transactions among writers, editors, publishers, distributors, and the readers who encounter printed materials, either individually or as part of reading communities.”²³ However, the artists behind the cover illustrations should be added to this web of relationships, but they are neglected by Smith. Agreeing with her idea of interrelationship between consumers and producers, the cover artists likely had a hand in the construction masculine fantasy because they were often instructed to depict a scene or moment from the story inside by their directors.²⁴

Breu argues that a fantasy of masculinity is formed by a combination of advertisement and story as well as fictional hard-boiled detectives and real-life

²¹ Jules David Prown, *Art as Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 75.

²² *Ibid.*, 76.

²³ Erin A. Smith, *Hard-Boiled: Working Class Readers and Pulp Magazines* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 5.

²⁴ Charles G. Martignette, “Where Have All the Paintings Gone?,” in *Pulp Art: Original Cover Paintings for the Great American Pulp Magazines*, by Robert Lesser, (New York: Sterling Publishing, 1997), 138.

masculine ideals. Following Smith's thesis that the pulps and their audience had a strong concern with manliness and the social progression, Breu finds that the fictional "he-men" and their idealized embodiments in the adjacent advertisements created a fantasy of masculinity that every reader had, stating the hard-boiled pulps were one of the dominant ways in which masculinity was fantasized in the interwar years.²⁵ Along with the imagery given by the fiction, the audience subscribing to Breu's fantasy of masculinity had its mascot right on the cover. The idealized embodiment can be seen in both the cover art and advertisements as Breu suggests. In the ad for his book, Liederman has the large, broad shoulders seen on the typical he-man depiction in the *Ace G-Men Stories* cover. Readers had the painted ideal and the idealized reality in the same magazine, only a few pages from each other.

Cassuto, however, interprets the he-man as sentimental. Although, one will not find much sentimentality in the detective's actions in the cover art, the sentimental detective has a profound lack of trust, commitment, and connection is evident. All of the images found in this paper will show the detective either alone in combat or protecting the damsel in distress, supporting Cassuto's theory of the sentimental detective. His hard-boiled detective is mourning the absence of human connection and gesturing back to a place where such ties were possible.²⁶ The femme fatale often stands opposite the he-man, both as a fictional enemy and as an allegory to "all the forms of connection – economic, national, sexual, or racial – that the hard-boiled male disavows."²⁷ Cassuto is nearly alone in his examination of this character. This is surprising as she appears in an

²⁵ Christopher Breu, *Hard-Boiled Masculinities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 1.

²⁶ Leonard Cassuto, *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality: The Secret History of American Crime Stories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 70.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

abundance of pulp art. For Cassuto, the pulp writing style is “sentimentalism in ruins: a world of self-interested individuals cut loose from family ties and obligations, who have abandoned sympathy to chase the dollar.”²⁸ These arguments can also be found in the images. Money is often a source of conflict inside the fiction, and one can see it as a cause of the action and violence on the covers.

Adding to their importance, pulp images are not simply added to the cover to catch the passer-by’s attention and dime. The lively primary colors, action, and scantily clad women are not the only characteristics at work trying to lead to a purchase. Unlike today’s book covers, the pulps were creating curiosity with the very first page, the cover. The scenes on pulp covers are storytelling in motion. It is like coming into a story halfway through, leaving the audience curious for the beginning and end. Of course, this is the point. It is made to entice the money from one’s pocket. Robert Lesser’s *Pulp Art* is the only work found that specifically studies the pulp covers, and his theory on the way to read pulp covers is helpful to this study. Lesser stresses the importance of reading the images from left-to-right: “You see the center painting, not the one on the left or the one on the right. The left is the beginning of the story, what came before the crisis, on the right is the resolution.”²⁹ This method of reading pulp covers can be applied to any illustration, such as the image from *Detective Short Stories* in July 1938. Starting from the left, we see the visibly masculine he-man. His shirt is torn and exposing his muscular forearms. He is fleeing one attacker as he approaches another who is wrestling the blonde-haired, blue-eyed woman from a red truck. The audience

²⁸ Leonard Cassuto, *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality: The Secret History of American Crime Stories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 52.

²⁹ Robert Lesser, *Pulp Art: Original Cover Paintings for the Great American Pulp Magazines* (New York: Sterling Publishing, 1997), 17-18.

gets a story from just one image. The attackers appear to have the advantage in numbers and strength, but the detective's face seems confident. A story is set up, but a conclusion is not revealed. Also, this cover has the damsel in distress, revealing some skin in her struggle for survival. Another recurring character on hard-boiled pulp covers, the damsel in distress has been in pulps since the turn of the century, "but nearly always the illustrations suggested that a hero was nearby, and his rescue was pending," adding another temptation for the potential customer.³⁰

The artists' classical art training adds another way to read these pulp images. It appears that these artists got their primary influence from Baroque or Caravaggesque painters of the 17th century. This movement is marked by over dramatization and making the natural supernatural through paintings that enticed an emotional response from their viewers. Baroque compositions utilized high contrast with a singular defined light source, an effect known as tenebrism.³¹ Their compositions relied not so much on groupings of characters into formulaic triads as was popular in Renaissance, but rather overtly directed the viewers' eye through harsh diagonals that focused attention on the faces and movements.³² The ultimate goal of the Baroque was commissioned to lure people back into Catholicism through accessibility such as biblical figures dressed in contemporary clothing placed at the same plane as the viewer. Patrons wanted the viewer to have an emotional response with the Bible, similar to the producers of pulp wanting an emotional response (and dime) from the potential customer. Many principles of Baroque art can be found in pulp art. Comparable to Lesser's method of reading left-

³⁰ Adam Parfrey, *It's A Man's World: Men's Adventure Magazines, The Postwar Pulp* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2003), 178.

³¹ Marilyn Stokstad and Michael W. Cothren, *Art History*, Fourth Edition (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2011): 724.

³² George Holmes, *Renaissance* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996): 253.

to-right, the light source in figure 6 emanates from the headlights and is strongly focused on the man, following this light source, the eyes are led to the two central characters of the woman and attacker struggling. These characters are shown at the moment of tension. Muscles are seen at full flex in the woman's left arm as she shoves her attacker's face away. All of these compositional canons create the most important goal of the pulp cover: sell the magazine. In this regard, the covers themselves serve a joint role of informing the viewer's perception of the narrative within as well the primary advertisement for the pulp as a whole.

These recurring visuals found in hard-boiled pulp covers can be labeled as a unique style implemented by the artists. Jules David Prown's book on art history, *Art as Evidence*, argues that one can see style in the decorative arts where the function is simple and constant.³³ Pulp art, decorating the fronts of their magazines, have a clear and simple function: to get the potential customers' attention and money. Hard-boiled pulp art style used bright and vibrant primary colors, the "he-man" detective character, women usually as victims with large amounts of skin revealed, visibly ugly villains, guns, and story and movement in the illustrations.

The first style feature one will recognize when a pulp cover is placed in front of them is the use of bright primary colors. It is possible that there were limitations in printing or colors that were able to be used, but regardless of possible limitations, these colors were chosen for their effectiveness at contrasting one another. The overall effect shows strong contrast. This direct juxtaposition of primary colors adds to the pulp covers goal of capturing one's attention. Several of the covers feature all three primary

³³ Jules David Prown, *Art as Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 54.

colors in the illustration, but red is on nearly every hard-boiled pulp cover. Car frames, women's dresses, and the bricks of buildings are only a few examples of how red is used to fill the illustration. In keeping with the noir setting of hard-boiled pulp stories, the cover illustrations set their characters on dark backgrounds, and the primary colors made them stand out more. Regardless of the color scheme, red was almost always used as the focal center of the picture.³⁴

No character stands out more than the female, in either the role of assaulted or assaulter. Often, she is blonde-haired and blue eyed, and she wears a red dress though artists occasionally exchanged it for a yellow one. Because she is frequently the object of capture or rescue, the female character likely carries all three primary colors to make her more vibrant and desirable against the darker backgrounds of her setting and attackers. Also, the being garbed in all three primary colors gives the woman a glow amongst the noir background, giving her a pure or virginal visual cue. In addition to making the female stand out by dressing her in red, the color also makes her sexier. Red has had a history of symbolizing passion, lust, fertility, female sexuality, and illicit sexuality. In the context of heterosexual interaction, red on a woman's body through vascularization and clothing carries sexual meaning.³⁵ Social conditioning likely has made men associate red with romantic love and sex.³⁶ In Rafael de Soto's cover for the August 1947 issue of *Detective Tales*, the blonde-haired, blue-eyed woman has red on her dress, bracelet, lips, and fingernails. Along with being covered in this sensual color,

³⁴ Robert Lesser, *Pulp Art: Original Cover Paintings for the Great American Pulp Magazines* (New York: Sterling Publishing, 1997), 50.

³⁵ Andrew J. Elliot and Daniela Niesta, "Romantic Red: Red Enhances Men's Attraction to Women," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* Vol. 95 No. 5 (2008): 1151.

³⁶ Nicolas Guéguen, "Color and Women Attractiveness: When Red Clothed Women are Perceived to Have More Intense Sexual Intent," *The Journal of Social Psychology* Vol. 152 No. 3 (2012): 263.

her dress also reveals a lot of skin. She would have caught the eye of a potential customer first before they would have noticed the gun or the man in handcuffs for whom it is for. The visual use of this character adds to the ideas Smith and Breu that the producers and consumers of these magazines had a concern for a depiction of masculinity. The use of red, revealing clothing, and even the faces of these women appeal to the desire for masculinity that other authors have found readers get from the fiction.

However, the pulp cover female is not always the helpless victim waiting for the hard-boiled detective to rescue her. She can be seen aiding her he-man counterpart by firing a gun or handling a dead body. Pulp fiction is famous for popularizing the femme fatale character, best exemplified by Brigid O'Shaughnessy in Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*. The descriptor "hard-boiled" labels the detective as closed-off, thick-skinned, and emotionless, and the femme fatale represents a distrust of women, sentimentality, and the importance of justice. Even a pretty face is not exempt from the law. Although the pulp cover female is usually the damsel in distress, she can also be seen holding him hostage, likely having just lured him into her arms with her sexuality. These two covers of *Black Mask* show the men at the woman's mercy, but she still remains visually appealing. The first image shows only her bare leg, but in the top right hand corner, one can see the red dress once again. The second image shows the femme fatale violently squeezing a man's skull to get him to surrender, but she still has the three primary colors in her hair, eyes, and dress. She catches the audience's eye first.

This desired masculinity is visually captured by the pulp artists' depiction of the hard-boiled detective, or the "he-men" character. The twentieth century saw the end of

the Victorian ideal of masculinity. No longer were men depicted to have an idealized physical restraint and conscious sexual renunciation. The change in the depiction of masculinity can be seen in the pulp covers over only a few years. The cover of *Black Mask* from 1920 still illustrates the Victorian gentleman, dressed in a tuxedo and top hat. His face even appears to show more concern than the he-man on the *Ace G-Man* cover. This new image of masculinity has an upside-down triangle physique (exposed by his tattered shirt), a grimaced face, and he is mid-action with both a gun and knife. Interestingly, the hard-boiled detective is often in a white button up shirt, signifying that he is the pure and heroic knight perhaps. Hard-boiled masculinity, best studied by Breu, has an externalized toughness, investment in moral detachment, a modernist rejection of the Victorian gentleman masculinity, and an adaptation to and rejection of corporate capitalism: "Manhood was no longer a moral quality but a physical attribute; it was to be proven on the playing field, in the bar, in the bedroom, in the streets, and on the factory floor."³⁷ All of these settings can be found on the covers of hard-boiled pulps. Even the use of the term "he-man" is important as Smith points out: First, the need for a modifier suggests that 'man' no longer signified unambiguous masculinity on its own. Second, it implies the existence of a troublesome category of male people – 'she-men' – whose biological sex and performed gender were fundamentally at odds."³⁸ The redundant term appeared in the text on a few hard-boiled pulp covers.

The advertisements of hard-boiled pulps exemplify the magazines' constructions of masculinity as well. Smith devotes a chapter of her book to pulp advertisements,

³⁷ Christopher Breu, *Hard-Boiled Masculinities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 6.

³⁸ Erin A. Smith, *Hard-Boiled: Working Class Readers and Pulp Magazines* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 28.

finding that the ads were engaging a working-class man concerned with getting autonomous, well-paid work, and practical education to enhance his manliness.³⁹ The two advertisements for bodybuilding by Charles Atlas and Earle E. Liederman speak to the reader, offering a chance for “handsome, steel-like muscles.”⁴⁰ Atlas’s ad even includes a comic depicting a scrawny man transforming himself into the upside-down triangle physique he-man seen on the cover of pulp magazines. Liederman’s ad even seems to be addressing the masculinity of the reader scarred by the Depression, offering a chance to be a “real man.”⁴¹ The advertisers and publishers of hard-boiled pulps clearly knew who their audience was, and that they could benefit from their desires to be more overtly masculine and appealing to the opposite sex.

They also knew where best to sell their magazines. Pulps were sold at newsstands or stands devoted to selling only pulps. These were often makeshift and easily taken down. This allowed them to be set up in busy pedestrian areas, such as street corners and train stations. These locations also saw a high number of white working class men, hard-boiled pulps target demographic. Though these pictures of pulps stands are in black and white, one can see how eye-catching the colorful, action packed magazine covers would be set upon racks and shelves. In addition to the ads inside the magazines offering products, lessons, and classes to improve one’s masculinity and climb the social ladder, pulp stands sold products like razors, worker’s gloves, cigarette accessories, leather coats, and pipes. Even the stands were appealing to the desired masculinity.

³⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁰ “Charles Atlas ad,” in *The Classic Era of American Pulp Magazines* by Peter Haining, 23. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2001.

⁴¹ “Earle E. Liederman ad,” in *Hard-Boiled Masculinities* by Christopher Breu, 10. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

It is also important to point out that slicks were being sold right next to the pulps on these stands. Comparing the images of slicks to those of hard-boiled pulps shows how visibly the pulps were trying to catch the eye of the reader and stir up the craving for masculine literature. These two covers from *Collier's* place their male and female characters in very different settings. Instead of the muscular, brutish man attacking the large proportioned women with little clothing, the two are on a camping trip, and he has surprised her with a fish too large for her frying pan. Yet, the woman still has the primary color combination in her portrayal. In the other cover, it appears the worse trouble a woman on slick cover can expect to find herself in is a broken pearl necklace. She fares much better than the typical pulp cover woman. Clearly, the slicks were not seeking the change of the masculinity-seeking working class man.

There may not have been another written medium with such lively and historically important covers as the hard-boiled pulps from the early years of twentieth century. Previous historians and literary critics have found major themes of escapism and social criticism produced by pulp writers and publishers. However, masculinity is overt and significant in the pulp cover art and advertisements. The stylistic characters of the he-man detective, the blonde-haired, blue-eyed damsel in distress offer the perspective of the historically silent working class. Yet, the imagery also offers a study of the relationship between the producers and consumers of popular culture. It is those products of material culture, consumed willingly, that can hold the voices from below, and the art of hard-boiled pulps have much to say about contemporary views on masculinity.

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