



Lesson 3

The resource is being field-tested and is subject to revision.

Women and Gender Roles in the Pulp

Synopsis

Women are most likely to be portrayed in Canadian pulp magazines of the 1940s as either 'bad girls' or victims. Four English stories along with a male-voice monologue, and five French stories will provide an opportunity for students to examine variations on gender stereotyping in pulp stories.

Specific Expectations

Students will:

- Conduct an inductive study of women characters in four stories and observe gender stereotyping in Canadian pulp stories of the 1940s.
- Analyze an issue of a contemporary pop 'romance' magazine such as *True Confessions* or an equivalent in French or English in order to detect the presence or absence of gender stereotyping.
- Manipulate the narrative point of view of a pulp story in order to counterbalance gender stereotyping.

Preparation

1. Make available the following stories from the *Tales From the Vault* Website at <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/pulp/027019-1900-e.html>:

"I Was the Moll of a Hot Car Mob" – *Sensational Crime Confessions*, January 1946, p. 32
<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/pulp/027019-1906.32-e.html>

"I Was a Gambling Girl" – *Sensational Crime Confessions*, January 1946, p. 4
<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/pulp/027019-1906.05-e.html>

"Murder in the Graveyard" – *Uncanny Tales*, November 1940, p. 1
<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/pulp/027019-1904.02-e.html>

"Dead Men Do Talk" - *Yarns*, July 1941, p.23
<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/pulp/027019-1905.23-e.html>

"Dear Clara" – *Stag*, Fall 1941, p.30.
<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/pulp/027019-1903.27-e.html>

"Combats sanglants" – *Histoires de cow-boys*, p. 3*
<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/pulp/027019-1902.04-e.html>

"Santa-Claus et ses pareils", *Histoires de Cow-Boys*, p. 24*
<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/pulp/027019-1902.25-e.html>

"Le cow-boy au coeur tendre", *Histoires de cow-boys*, p. 28*
<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/pulp/027019-1902.29-e.html>

"Le Perroquet des prairies", *Histoires de cow-boys*, p. 31*
<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/pulp/027019-1902.32-e.html>

"Les aventures amoureuses d'un 'lumberJack'", *Les Drames de l'amour*
<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/pulp/027019-1901-e.html>

*It is interesting to examine the way women were portrayed in *Histoires des cow-boys*. They were mostly mentioned at the end of the story and were shown as being the victim.

2. Have available one or more copies of a contemporary pulp magazine with stories featuring male / female interaction or relationships.

3. Make copies of Handout 3.1 – “A Rubric for writing to alter a narrative point of view”

4. Bookmark these online resources dealing with women and pulp magazines:

Pulp Reality www.news.utoronto.ca/bin5/040426c.asp
Dime Novels and the Pulps www.mutoworld.com/pulps.htm
Spicy Genre Pulps www.mutoworld.com/SpicyGenrePulps.htm
Arts McGill – Montreal’s *press jaune*
<http://www.arts.mcgill.ca/programs/AHCS/cultureofcities/Gallery2/index.html>
Quebec’s *romans en fascicules*
www.arts.mcgill.ca/programs/AHCS/cultureofcities/Gallery3/front.html

5. Additional background resources:

Bad Girls of Pulp Fiction, Campbell, Armstrong and Rekulak, Harper-Collins, 2002

True Crime, True North, Strange and Loo, Raincoast Books, 2004

“Unfaithful to Both’: Romance and the Portrayal of Women in the Pulps” LAC monograph

Culture of Cities: Montreal, Dublin, Toronto, Berlin. McGill Research Team, Straw, Will.
“Culture of Cities: Print Culture and Urban Visuality.”

Time

75-100 minutes

Process

Introduction (20 minutes)

1. Show overheads or projected images of pulp magazine covers from the *Tales From the Vault* “gallery” featuring female characters. Brainstorm with students what these images communicate about female characters in the ‘classic’ pulp magazine genres” detective, romance, western, ghost/supernatural.
2. Broaden the discussion to include what students see as ‘traditional’ male/female roles in popular fiction – make two columns on the board or on an overhead transparency and head one “men” and the other “women”.
3. Explain that students will analyze four Canadian pulp magazine stories written in the 1940s in order to determine the cultural depiction of gender roles and the presence of gender stereotyping.

Body of Lesson (40-60 minutes)

1. In order to get male / female reader responses to the stories, divide the class into groups with both perspectives represented. Assign members of half the groups to read “I Was A Gambling Girl” and “Murder in the Graveyard”, and the other half to read “I Was the Moll of a Hot Car Mob”, “Dead Men Do Talk”, and “Dear Clara”. This way all students will read one pulp ‘confession’ from a female point of view, and another where the narrator is either male - in two cases - or third person narration in the other case.

Note: Why is it that every story is written from a male point of view? What does this suggest about the perceptions of gender roles in this time period? Do these views accurately describe women as individuals? What would women from that era say about these perceptions?

2. Give students time to read their two stories and to keep a reader’s response log while reading. Ask them to record things that they observe concerning gender roles. They should use direct quotes where possible, or summarize plot action or character interaction. As part of their response, ask them to include personal reaction to the depiction of gender roles or to the presence of what they consider gender stereotyping – particularly in regard to the limitations placed on women characters’ behaviour and roles.
3. When students have finished their reading logs, ask them, in their groups, to trade logs with another person in the group. Students will read each other’s logs. Ask students to share with the group something from that person’s reading log that you found interesting, or that was a point of agreement or disagreement for them. Let the discussion continue until all students have had an opportunity to express these views.
4. Give each group an overhead transparency and pen, and ask them to summarize their main observations about gender roles and cultural views of women that emerge from the stories.
5. Each group should present its overhead and comment on the findings of their gender analysis of the stories.
6. Summarize by discussing some tentative conclusions about the roles and depiction of women in Canadian pulp fiction of the 1940s.

Conclusion

Ask students to brainstorm about how women’s roles in Canadian society – and in fiction and the media – have changed since the 1940s. You may wish to touch on the impact of World War II in terms of a major shift in women’s cultural and social roles, contrasting the ‘war years’ with the cultural and social realities of Canada today.

Writing opportunity

Considering these stories in the context of the depiction of women provides an opportunity to work with point of view as a fictional variable – an important aspect of contemporary feminist literary critical practice. Students could be asked to choose a female character from one of the stories and write an interior monologue revealing what this character is really thinking or would like to do as a human being in this situation to throw off the ‘bad girl’ or ‘victim’ persona.

The goal is not to have students rewrite the entire story, but to show how a major female character might make different decisions and gain more control over her life and situation. In other words, in what ways might these women characters have more freedom to make different decisions if they were operating in a more contemporary Canadian social context?

See [Handout 3.1](#) for an evaluation rubric.

Handout 3.1

Writing to Alter a Narrative Point of View

Categories	Level 1 (50-59%)	Level 2 (60-69%)	Level 3 (70-79%)	Level 4 (80-100%)
Creation of an interior monologue point of view	Limited attempt to capture character's thoughts and feelings	Some attempt to capture character's thoughts and feelings	Good attempt to reveal character's inner thoughts and feelings	Excellent character portrait through interior monologue
Understanding of issues relating to women's character roles	Limited understanding demonstrated	Some understanding demonstrated	Considerable understanding demonstrated	Excellent understanding demonstrated
Mechanics of writing	Limited effectiveness	Some effectiveness	Quite well handled	Excellent