

WOMEN WITH WINGS: GENDER AND REPRODUCTIVE POLITICS IN AMERICAN PULP SCIENCE FICTION BY WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines a selection of short stories by women writers that were published in American pulp science fiction magazines between 1926 and 1950. Pulp magazines have been described as the literary ephemera of the early twentieth century, as they were printed on inexpensive wood pulp paper prone to rapid degeneration, and intended for consumption by a popular audience. Long denigrated by the academic establishment for its ostensible lack of literary value and its lurid excesses, the pulp magazines have recently been revived in the domain of SF scholarship for their formative role in the development of science fiction as a genre.

My thesis probes the commonly held perception that the pulp magazines were exclusively male preserves, inhospitable to female participation. I build on the scholarship of Jane Donawerth and Eric Leif Davin to highlight how women not only claimed their space in the pulp SF landscape shortly after its inception but also contributed to the development of the genre in ways that anticipate the feminist science fiction of the late twentieth century. I focus particularly on how women writers exploited the imaginative freedom of SF as a medium to defamiliarise conventional gender roles and reproductive arrangements, and conceptualise alternative models of radical otherness. My detailed textual readings also demonstrate how women writers of the pulp era actively engaged with and frequently challenged the gendered assumptions of contemporary scientific, socio-political, and cultural discourses.