



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Archives Center
Lesbian Pulp Fiction Collection

NMAH.AC.1513

Franklin A. Robinson, Jr. and Sara Kunkemueller

2022

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Archives Center Lesbian Pulp Fiction Collection
Date:	1932-1999
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.1513
Source:	Swann Auction Galleries
Extent:	3.1 Cubic feet (7 boxes)
Language:	English .
Summary:	A collection of pulp fiction titles centering on lesbian characters and lesbianism.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Collection purchased from Swann Auction Galleries, New York, New York in September 2021. Funds for purchase provided by the Jackson Fund, NMAH.

Processing Information

Collection processed by Sara Kunkemueller, intern, supervised by Franklin A. Robinson, Jr., archivist, 2022.

Preferred Citation

Archives Center Lesbian Pulp Fiction Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

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Biographical / Historical

Between 1950 and 1965, over 500 distinct lesbian pulp novels were published in the US. These novels were exceptionally influential on lesbian communities in a time where LGBT media was extremely limited. Sold at the counters of grocery stores and in other common shops, these novels became a tangible way for many women to

interact with a community they would otherwise have been unable to access. Some of the best loved books were the work of lesbian or bisexual women, many of whom—such as the influential Artemis Smith (Dr. Annselm L.N.V. Morpurgo) and Ann Bannon (Ann Weldy)—went on to become vocal activists and scholars in LGBT matters. Authors of this genre generally used pseudonyms for publication, which helped conceal their identity both as writers of explicit content and potentially as lesbians. Pseudonyms frequently crossed or confused the author's gender, such as in the case of Kay Addams (male author Orrie Hitt), Randy Salem (lesbian author Pat Perdue), and March Hastings (lesbian author Sally Singer). Some writers chose to use multiple pseudonyms, such as Gilbert Fox (published under Dallas Mayo and Paul Russo, among others), and some chose to use a separate name for each genre of pulp novel which they produced. This practice had the benefit of concealing some authors' outright connection to lesbian culture but was also a practice of pulp more generally. Because pulp was poor quality literature, due primarily to the constraints of cheap publishing and quick production, writers often intended these novels to be their introduction to large publishing houses. Authors would begin by writing pulp and then, once they had become accustomed to the industry, would move onto more serious works without having trashy pulp as part of their reputation.

The majority of lesbian pulp novels are original stories created for mass production by American writers. A few key exceptions to this rule existed. The first was reproductions of older lesbian literary works, including Radclyffe Hall's influential *The Well of Loneliness* (original 1928), Lillian Hellman's script for the play *The Children's Hour* (original 1934), and Anna Elisabet Weirauch's *The Scorpion* (original 1919, published in German). The other exception is international works, which would be translated and printed in pulp for the US. Tereska Torrès's *Women's Barracks* (1950), the novel which started the lesbian pulp genre, was translated from its original French for its mass production in America. Other translated works include Lucie Marchal's *The Mesh* (original French, published as pulp in 1959), Françoise Mallet's *The Loving and the Daring* (original French, also known in English as *The Illusionist*, published as pulp in 1952), and Torrès's *By Cecile* (1963). Many of these republished works are among the most favorable to lesbians, as they reflect personal experiences of the author or are canonical entries into broader lesbian literature. While many of the best-regarded novels in the genre were written by lesbian or bisexual women, the bulk of what was produced by American publishers was by male authors for a male audience. Considered perverse erotica, lesbian pulps were written and marketed towards male gratification.

These pulp novels occupy a conflicted space in lesbian culture. Because they were published and distributed en masse, these books became a way for closeted lesbian and bisexual women in areas where there were no strong LGBT communities to find self-recognition and connection with others. Some found the books changing how they thought of their sexuality, particularly if they had only experienced straight relationships. However, buying and keeping these books could be taboo, despite their general popularity. Purchasers often tried to buy lesbian pulps as covertly as possible, and many took advantage of the disposable quality of pulp and abandoned or destroyed the books when they had finished reading them. Publishers were willing to produce lesbian novels because they were an extremely profitable genre, but the US Post Office refused to deliver "explicit" materials, including any promotion of lesbian relationships—regardless of the actual sexual content within. Authors circumvented this issue by creating narratives which appeared to condemn lesbianism. Characters would frequently be killed, go insane, convert back to heterosexuality, or be otherwise fatally punished in the conclusion of the book. In others, the entire novel's plot would include a pervasive element of shame or corruption when a young woman would be manipulated into a lesbian relationship. Compounding these issues is the trite or formulaic nature of the plots, which were often a product of the hastened publishing schedule and low budget for production. These factors create difficulty for many in the current lesbian community to relate to the condemning nature of the genre, particularly as many works of far better quality in both writing and representation have appeared in recent decades.

The cover artwork of these novels is another important aspect. Although there were some strong communities of LGBT women, particularly in urban areas, many had difficulty finding or accessing them. Particularly for those who lived in rural areas or with deep homophobia, the covers of pulp novels would be the first time they saw themselves reflected in popular culture. Lesbian pulp covers usually contained a depiction of two or more women, at least one of whom was exhibiting an identifiable lesbian desire. Common themes included women undressing in private or in communal rooms, women ignoring men in favor of gazing at another woman's body, or women in the midst of a romantic encounter. These covers generally teased at the sexual content within the books, which was typical of all pulp romances. Every identified artist for this collection's covers is a man. Although some women did paint for pulp novels and magazines, they would be frequently relegated to less controversial subjects, such as demure

heterosexual romances, and in the rare case horrors, mysteries, and thrillers. Many of the artists for the lesbian novels also produced for many other pulp publications. Artists would receive the covers as an assignment from their publishing company, often without any contact with the author. Because of the tight production schedule, they would often be working off skimming the book's contents, its (publisher-generated) title, or in the lucky case a plot synopsis. Due to this, although some covers hint at community subgroups such as butch and femme aesthetics, they are generally inaccurate to the fashion of real lesbian communities.

Some cover artists of the novels remain unidentified, which can be for a multitude of reasons. First, in the early 1950s many pulp publishers did not allow artists to keep the rights to their work, and so the paintings were considered the sole property of the company. Some publishers would even reuse covers, as is the case for Kay Addams's *Warped Desire* (1960) and Richard Villanova's *Her Woman* (1962). Although artists were eventually given more rights, many were unable to claim important works as their intellectual property. Second, because of the controversial nature of the genre, many artists chose not to include specific covers in their portfolio. Like the authors, pulp was sometimes considered a way to launch a more extensive fine arts career, although successful artists often committed to long-term work in the industry. It was far more acceptable to use works from other pulp genres like mystery and horror as promotional and professional material. Paul Rader is one of the few artists who was able and willing to sign his covers. Many pulp illustrators were fresh graduates of New York art schools, but Rader entered the industry later in life. Rader's work was exceptionally suited to the demands of romance and lesbian pulps, because he was notably better at depicting "sexy" bodies than painting for other genres, like sci-fi. When Midwood Books was founded in 1957, he was one of the first to paint for them and quickly became a favorite of the publisher. Six of the novels in this collection have covers that can be attributed to Rader.

Lesbian pulps were the backdrop to an extensive fight over the right to produce and sell explicit content. The publication of *Women's Barracks* is famous as the event which precipitated the formation of the House Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials from 1952-1953. The Committee ultimately accomplished little in restricting pulp novels, but it did cause editorial changes to the book (the addition of a disapproving narrator) and demonstrated political attitudes towards the genre. In 1956, a bookseller was punished with 30 days of imprisonment for selling copies of Mark Tryon's *Sweeter than Life*, republished after the lawsuit as *The Twisted Loves of Nym O'Sullivan*. This case was eventually appealed to the Supreme Court, resulting in the *Smith v. California* (1959) decision, which voided the California law preventing the sale of "obscene" content on the grounds that it violated the First Amendment right to free speech. Over the course of the 1960s, lawsuits continued to erode the restrictions on explicit content. Rather than boost the lesbian pulp genre, however, this caused its collapse.

The expansion of publishers' rights meant that the Postal Service could no longer deny delivering lesbian-friendly or pornographic novels on content alone. However, mass publishers were not willing to print works which portrayed lesbianism positively or which increased the amount of graphic content. Smaller presses and collectives began to emerge, which were able to siphon the market for pulps with novels that were better written and more satisfying for their audiences. Unable and unwilling to meet this new competition, publishers like Midwood and Beacon-Signal turned towards the other genres of pulp fiction. The year 1965 marks the end of the lesbian pulp era. Though lesbian fiction had improved in quality, smaller presses were unable to reach the same closeted and isolated women that pulps appealed to as they were considerably limited in their geographic distribution by the size of their operations and the cost of shipping. For many lesbians who had relied on pulps in lieu of community, their access to LGBT content became incredibly restricted in the coming decades. However, lesbian pulp fiction incentivized a new generation of writers to produce better literature through the 1970s and 80s. Publishing houses like Naiad Press were established, which were able to support the ambition of these new authors. Although genuine pulp manufacture had ceased, these presses would continue to reprint the most influential lesbian pulps for the next generation to enjoy. (Written by Sara Kunkemueller.)

Sources

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Many cover artists for this collection identified through: "Pulp Covers: The Best of the Worst," n.d. Accessed through pulpcovers.com.

Saunders, David. "Alphabetical Index of Pulp Artists," *Wild American Field Guide to Pulp Artists*, n.d. Accessed through <https://www.pulpartists.com/index.html>.

Content Description

A collection of eighty-five pulp fiction titles dealing with lesbian characters and lesbianism. Parts of this collection are extremely fragile and should be handled with care. The collection is arranged chronologically by date of publication.

Arrangement

Collection arranged by date of publication into one series.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Lesbianism
- Paperbacks
- Pulp literature

Names:

- Swann Auction Galleries

Container Listing

Series 1: Lesbian Pulp Fiction, 1932-1999

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Box 1, Folder 1 | <p>Anna Elisabet Weirauch. <i>The Scorpion</i>, 1932</p> <p>Notes: An Avon Red-and-Gold book. Copyright for revised edition, 1948 Willey Book Company. Published originally in German as the first of a trilogy, <i>Der Skorpion</i> (1919) was one of the first German novels to show lesbianism in a positive light and is frequently compared to Radclyffe Hall's <i>The Well of Loneliness</i> (1928). The English version has also been published under the title <i>Of Love Forbidden</i>, beginning in 1957.</p> <p>Book in very fragile condition.</p> |
| Box 1, Folder 2 | <p>Lucie Marchal. <i>The Mesh</i>, 1949</p> <p>Notes: Translated from French by Virgilia Peterson. New Bantam edition printed 1959. Cover art not signed but most likely done by American illustrator and Realism painter Stanley Zuckerberg (1919-1995).</p> <p>Book is in very fragile condition.</p> |
| Box 1, Folder 3 | <p>D.H. Lawrence. <i>The Fox</i>, 1951</p> <p>Notes: "[...] <i>The Fox</i> is D.H. Lawrence's brilliant novel of two manless women and the intruder who threatens their love -- truly a hidden masterpiece of sensuality and desire."</p> |
| Box 1, Folder 4 | <p>Barry Devlin. <i>Make Sure I Win</i>, 1952</p> <p>Notes: Cover art not signed but is attributed to Robert Maguire (1921-2005), pulp illustrator and Member Emeritus of The Society of Illustrators (New York City). Art originally used for Orrie Hitt's <i>Sexurbia Country</i>.</p> |
| Box 1, Folder 5 | <p>Sara Harris. <i>The Wayward Ones</i>, 1952</p> <p>Notes: Minor abridgements. First printing 1954. Contains notes on author.</p> |
| Box 1, Folder 6 | <p>Francoise Mallet. <i>The Loving and the Daring</i>, 1952</p> <p>Notes: French edition published <i>Le Rempart des Beguines</i>, Rene Julliard, 1951. Original English title <i>The Illusionist</i>.</p> |
| Box 1, Folder 7 | <p>J.C. Priest. <i>Forbidden</i>, 1952</p> <p>Notes: "The gripping story of Hilda, whose twisted desires led her to the brink of degradation..."</p> |
| Box 1, Folder 8 | <p>Michael Norday. <i>Warped</i>, 1955</p> <p>Notes: Cover art signed "Micarelli" for American painter Clement Micarelli (1929-2008).</p> |
| Box 2, Folder 1 | <p>Anonymous. <i>Adam and Two Eves</i>, 1956</p> |

Notes: The cover was originally published as the cover for Theophile Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1953), painted by pulp artist Walter Popp (1920-2002).

Box 2, Folder 2	Carol Emery. <i>Queer Affair</i>, 1957 Notes: Cover art not signed but is attributed to painter Frank Uppwall.
Box 2, Folder 3	March Hastings. <i>Three Women</i> , 1958 Notes: March Hastings is one of the pseudonyms used by openly lesbian writer Sally Singer (1930-).
Box 2, Folder 4	Orrie Hitt. <i>Girls' Dormitory</i> , 1958 Notes: Cover art signed "Micarelli" for American painter Clement Micarelli (1929-2008).
Box 2, Folder 5	Kay Addams. <i>Queer Patterns</i> , 1959 Notes: Second printing 1963. Cover art not signed, but first printing of this novel's art may be attributed to illustrator Robert C. Stanley (1918-1996). Kay Addams is one of several pseudonyms used by male author Orrie Hitt.
Box 2, Folder 6	Sloane Britain. <i>First Person 3rd Sex</i> , 1959 Notes: "Sloane Britain" may be a misspelling, parody, or early iteration of writer Elaine Williams' (1932-1963) pseudonym Sloan Britton.
Box 2, Folder 7	Paula Christian. <i>This Side of Love & Edge of Twilight</i>, 1959, 1963 Notes: A collection of two books in the same volume.
Box 2, Folder 8	Marjorie Lee. <i>Two Women</i>, 1959 Notes: Reprint 1978. Originally printed as <i>The Lion House</i> , by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., and by Crest Books.
Box 3, Folder 1	Randy Salem. <i>Chris</i> , 1959 Notes: Randy Salem is the pseudonym for lesbian writer Pat Perdue.
Box 3, Folder 2	Artemis Smith. <i>Odd Girl</i> , 1959 Notes: Artemis Smith is the pseudonym of writer and professor Annselm L.N.V. Morpurgo (1934-).
Box 3, Folder 3	Artemis Smith. <i>The Third Sex</i> , 1959 Notes: Artemis Smith is the pseudonym of writer and professor Annselm L.N.V. Morpurgo (1934-).
Box 3, Folder 4	Manning Stokes. <i>Triangle of Sin</i>, 1959 Notes: "...About three lovely girls who shared in forbidden ecstasies... and a man who meant to show them that his kind of love was best!"
Box 3, Folder 5	Florence Stonebreaker. <i>Sinful Desires</i> , 1959 Notes: "Strange passions... tore the young, eager mind and body of Kay Slater between the forces of decency and immorality. She learned the

facts of life the hardest way any woman could possibly learn them. But there was also Kenny, the only man who could free her from her desire for... Forbidden Lusts!"

Box 3, Folder 6	Kay Addams. <i>Warped Desire</i> , 1960 Notes: Uses same cover art as <i>Her Woman</i> by Richard Villanova. Kay Addams is one of several pseudonyms used by male author Orrie Hitt.
Box 3, Folder 7	Sloan Britton. <i>Unnatural</i> , 1960 Notes: Sloan Britton is the pseudonym for writer Elaine Williams (1932-1963).
Box 3, Folder 8	Dorene Clark. <i>Different</i> , 1960 Notes: Cover not signed but is attributed to artist Bruce Minney (1928-2013).
Box 3, Folder 9	March Hastings. <i>The Unashamed</i>, 1960 Notes: Cover art probably signed "Rader" for [Isaac] Paul Rader, American painter (1909-1986). March Hastings is one of the pseudonyms used by openly lesbian writer Sally Singer (1930-).
Box 4, Folder 1	Marlene Longman. <i>Lesbian Love</i> , 1960 Notes: Cover art not signed but most likely done by American illustrator Harold W. McCauley (1913-1977).
Box 4, Folder 2	Sheldon Lord. <i>Of Shame and Joy</i> , 1960 Notes: Cover art probably signed "Rader" for [Isaac] Paul Rader, American painter (1909-1986). Sheldon Lord is one of many pseudonyms used by author Lawrence Block.
Box 4, Folder 3	Randy Salem. <i>The Unfortunate Flesh</i>, 1960 Notes: Randy Salem is the pseudonym for lesbian writer Pat Perdue. Cover art not signed but most likely done by [Isaac] Paul Rader (1909-1986).
Box 4, Folder 4	Mark Tryon. <i>The Twisted Loves of Nym O'Sullivan</i> , 1960 Notes: This book is the reissued version of <i>Sweeter than Life</i> . The original version was the subject of a 1953 lawsuit, resulting in a bookseller being imprisoned for 30 days in 1956 for carrying the "obscene" book. This punishment was appealed, leading to the <i>Smith v. California</i> (1959) Supreme Court decision. This voided the California law prohibiting the sale of obscene content, as the law violated the First Amendment right to free speech.
Box 4, Folder 5	Dave Carson. <i>Sex III</i> , 1961 Notes: "This is the story of the twilight land between two sexes—of the struggle between male and female love for a young girl..."
Box 4, Folder 6	Paula Christian. <i>Love Is Where You Find It</i> , 1961 Notes: "A frank and adult novel about one woman's love for another."
Box 4, Folder 7	Carol Clanton. <i>Gay Interlude</i> , 1961

	Notes:	Cover art is not signed but is attributed to painter [Isaac] Paul Rader (1909-1986).
Box 4, Folder 8	Lillian Hellman. <i>The Children's Hour</i> , 1934, 1961 Notes:	Reproduction of a play script first performed in 1934 about a young boarding school student who lies about her teachers having a lesbian affair. The play was performed on Broadway, but when it later moved to other theaters (particularly in Boston) it faced censorship due to its mention of lesbian relationships. This play has been referred to as the "precursor" to Arthur Miller's <i>The Crucible</i> (1953). Book is in fragile condition: binding has split into two in the middle.
Box 4, Folder 9	Aldo Lucchesi. <i>Strange Breed</i> , 1960 Notes:	Cover art not signed but most likely done by [Isaac] Paul Rader, American painter (1909-1986).
Box 5, Folder 1	Della Martin. <i>Twilight Girl</i> , 1961 Notes:	"The savage story of a pretty teen-ager enticed into forbidden practices by older girls! We sincerely believe this the finest novel ever to treat of the third sex."
Box 5, Folder 2	Dallas Mayo. <i>Silky</i> , 1961 Notes:	Dallas Mayo is one of several pseudonyms used by writer Gilbert Fox (1917-2004). Cover art not signed but is attributed to illustrator and painter Victor Olson (1924-2007).
Box 5, Folder 3	Paul V. Russo. <i>One Flesh</i> , 1961 Notes:	Paul Russo is one of several pseudonyms used by writer Gilbert Fox (1917-2004)
Box 5, Folder 4	Susan Sherman. <i>Give Me Myself</i> , 1961 Notes:	"This is [the] story of a young college girl's bizarre attachment to a beautiful older woman. Nineteen-year-old Nona Greene is the fascinated student of a beautiful middle-aged poet. She builds around her teacher an unreal aura of perfection, for the older woman leads her naive worshiper into evil--introduces her to vicious companions, orgiastic parties... and a shattering, sordid encounter in Florece from which the adolescent emerges an adult, bitterly experienced but with her natural innocence still untouched..."
Box 5, Folder 5	Loren Beauchamp. <i>Strange Delights</i> , 1962 Notes:	Cover art not signed but most likely done by [Isaac] Paul Rader, American painter (1909-1986). Loren Beauchamp is a lesser-known pseudonym of author Robert Silverberg, also known by alternate pseudonym Don Elliot.
Box 5, Folder 6	Randy Salem. <i>The Soft Sin</i> , 1962 Notes:	Randy Salem is the pseudonym for lesbian writer Pat Perdue.
Box 5, Folder 7	Arthur Adlon. <i>Strange Seduction</i> , 1962	

Notes: Cover art not signed but is attributed to illustrator and painter Victor Olson (1924-2007).

Box 5, Folder 8	Richard Villanova. Her Woman, 1962 Notes: Uses same cover as Warped Desire by Michael Norday. Cover art signed "Micarelli" for American painter Clement Micarelli (1929-2008).
Box 5, Folder 9	King Brady. Vegas Vice Queen, 1963 Notes: Cover art not signed but likely done by American fine painter Robert C. Caples (1908-1979).
Box 6, Folder 1	Max Elgun. Lesbo Nurse, 1963 Notes: The cover for this book has been severed close to the binding.
Box 6, Folder 2	Anne Herbert. Summer Camp, 1963 Notes: "An unshamed story of a girl's journey to the well of forbidden knowledge..."
Box 6, Folder 3	Kel Holland. The Strange Young Wife, 1963 Notes: "His new wife was a vibrant, virgin beauty... and a sensual, shrewd, licentious lesbian!"
Box 6, Folder 4	Colin Johns. Rendezvous in Lesbos, 1963 Notes: "The probing novel of three who crossed the shadow-line between love and lust!"
Box 6, Folder 5	Herb Roberts. The Narrow Line, 1963 Notes: Cover art not signed but is attributed to Charles Copeland (1924-1979).
Box 6, Folder 6	Randy Salem. Honeysuckle, 1963 Notes: Randy Salem is the pseudonym for lesbian writer Pat Perdue.
Box 6, Folder 7	Valerie Taylor. Unlike Others, 1963 Notes: "The poignant and absorbing story of a young woman's search for love and fulfillment in a world of shadowed embraces and secret vows."
Box 6, Folder 8	Tereska Torres. "By Cecile", 1963 Notes: "At 22, she was famous, innocent and vulnerable. And then she fell in love with a man whose infidelities she tolerated, and was attracted to a woman she thought she loved almost as well."
Box 6, Folder 9	A.L. Roget . Woman's Darling, 1964 Notes: "She was lovely enough to command any man she wanted-- but what she wanted was another lovely woman!"
Box 7, Folder 1	Paula Christian. The Other Side of Desire, 1965

Notes: "Would beautiful Carrie risk losing all she possessed for a few passionate moments in the arms of another woman?"

Box 7, Folder 2

R.R. Knudson. *You Are the Rain*, 1974

Notes: Original painting for the cover may be attributed to artist Joseph Lombardero (1922-2004).

Box 7, Folder 3

Gail Pass. *Zoe's Book*, 1976

Notes: "The haunting novel about the celebrated Bloomsbury group."

Box 7, Folder 4

Jane Zimet. *Strange Sisters: The Art of Lesbian Pulp Fiction 1949-1969*, 1999

Notes: Anthology of 200 book covers of lesbian pulp fiction stories, including a foreword by Ann Bannon.

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