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Watching Satan's Daughters: A Visual Analysis of Lesbian Pulp Fiction Cover Art, 1950-1969

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WATCHING SATAN'S DAUGHTERS: A VISUAL ANALYSIS OF LESBIAN
PULP FICTION COVER ART, 1950-1969

by

Carrie Shaver

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
School of Communication

Western Michigan University
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June 2008

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2008

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Carrie Shaver

WATCHING SATAN'S DAUGHTERS: A VISUAL ANALYSIS OF LESBIAN PULP FICTION COVER ART, 1950-1969

Carrie Shaver, M. A.

Western Michigan University, 2008

This research analyzes the historical social construction of identity through the visual reiteration of the norms of "woman" and "lesbian" as represented on the cover art of lesbian pulp fiction novels from 1950-1969. A subgenre of pulp paperbacks, lesbian pulps were sensationalistic and best-selling, reflecting the public lesbian image in the popular culture of the 1950s and 1960s (Keller, 2005). Their success in large part was due to popular mainstreaming of the fields of sexology, psychology, and psychiatry. The "normality" of female sexual behavior was a subject of great curiosity, especially after Alfred Kinsey's study of female sexuality was released in 1953 (D'Emilio, 1989). In addition, the ubiquity of such material tailored to prurient interests developed due to the advances of wood pulp paper technology and new distribution systems. As most texts designed for public audiences do, the pulps adopted "visually informative strategies" (Bernhardt, 1986); the cover art an essential element in the marketing of the novels. The visual and verbal elements of the covers were designed to arouse the interest of the viewer, moving the book from the rack into the hand.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

[I] kept them [lesbian pulps] hidden in a drawer so visitors would never spy me out. Afraid the sublet might find them, I burned them . . . Really I was ashamed of them as writing, the treacle of their fantasy, the cliché of their predicament, heartbroken butch murders her dog, etc. The only blooms in the desert, they were also books about grotesques (Millett, 1974, p. 202).

A lesbian pulp fiction paperback first appeared before my disbelieving eyes in Detroit, Michigan, in 1957. I did not need to look at the title for clues; the cover leaped out at me from the drugstore rack: a young woman with sensuous intent on her face seated on a bed, leaning over a prone woman, her hands on the other woman's shoulders. Overwhelming need led me to walk a gauntlet of fear up to the cash register. Fear so intense that I remember nothing more, only that I stumbled out of the store in possession of what I knew I must have, a book as necessary to me as air (Forrest, 2002, p. ix).

The term “lesbian pulp” refers to inexpensive, mass market novels published in the 1950s and 1960s whose narratives focused upon one or more lesbian relationships. These novels have enjoyed an enduring popularity, both during the time of their initial production and in the present day. Over the last half-century, many readers of lesbian pulp, especially lesbians themselves, have had fraught, contradictory relationships with these novels which exploit lesbianism, yet also provide increased visibility for it. I introduced *Beebo Brinker*, a well-known pro-lesbian pulp novel about a young lesbian's introduction to gay life in New York City to the book club I belonged to in 2003. A small group of lesbian women, we met monthly to discuss novels chosen by the members. I had expected them to adore this

Ann Bannon classic, to delight in the campy appeal of the Greenwich Village butch as I had. Not quite: I was apparently alone in my unabashed enjoyment of this novel. The others were embarrassed by its pandering to the heterosexual majority, critical of its contrived dialogue and clichéd ending, and angry over its sometimes callous treatment of lesbians. I was, however, engaged, by this novel and many others, drawn by lesbian pulp's salacious language and tawdry covers. I began to collect lesbian pulp fiction cover art in the early 2000s, drawn by my visceral reaction to titillating yet invigorating imagery that objectified lesbian women—but also called my attention to queer heritage before the 1969 Stonewall riots, a turning point in the struggle for gay liberation when gays and lesbians in New York City joined forces to resist police harassment of their community.

A bona fide cultural phenomenon, lesbian pulp fiction provides insight into America's perception of female homosexuality in the 1950s and 1960s (Stryker, 2001), a period when lesbianism was either suppressed or pathologized by social authorities. The cover art images and text beckoned potential purchasers, both gay and straight, in line at the drugstore or passing a newsstand. Popular at release, the cover art still maintains its appeal, perhaps because of its complex negotiation of lesbian identity. During a recent visit to a gay-friendly bookstore, for example, I found images of lesbian pulp art on magnets, t-shirts and postcards. Surfing at www.strangesisters.com, a collector's online homage to the covers, one can find over 900 novels meticulously catalogued. In addition, pulp e-cards can be sent from another collector's website, www.pulpcards.com. According to Foote, "Pulps are

now beloved texts about which readers maintain a sense of irony and affection . . .

There are lesbian pulp address books and day planners, there are coffee table collections of lesbian pulp cover art, and there is an extensive, often visited web site of pulp cover art maintained by Duke University” (2005, p. 169).

According to Carolyn Kitch, mass visual and verbal media in the twentieth century created a “visual vocabulary” of womanhood that became “natural” (2001, p. 3). From the 1930s through the 1960s, a dichotomy of good women and bad women was created through media imagery (2001, p. 185). The visual helps to generate subjectivity, mapping the female body and illustrating ideals of femininity (Smith, 1999). Modleski argues that “our ways of thinking and feeling about mass culture are so intricately bound up with notions of the feminine that the need for a feminist critique becomes obvious at every level of the debate” (2005, p. 48). Lesbian pulp narratives and covers reinforce but also interrogate traditional notions of femininity, offering constructions of a wide range of “butch” and “femme” characters. To date, the relatively modest number of scholarly studies on lesbian pulp fiction have focused upon the historical context of its production or the literary content of the novels, with particular emphasis on the pro-lesbian writing of author Ann Bannon. The purpose of this thesis is to analyze lesbian pulp fiction cover art, examining its components (image content, aesthetics, titles, and subtext) and the function(s) of those components (social construction of identity through the reiteration of the norms of “woman” and “lesbian”) through visual rhetorical methods.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF LESBIAN PULP FICTION

Origins of Pulp Fiction

Lesbian pulp fiction has roots in the publication of cheap fiction, a practice that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. In the 1840s, the American “penny press” began to add fictional pieces, including serialized stories, to news accounts. However, the rags used for papermaking were in short supply and the price of paper steadily increased. By the end of the Civil War, production costs were at their peak (Smith, 2000). Expensive rag paper and a change in the Post Office shipping rates led to the end of the “story-paper.” Reproduction of low-cost fiction resumed with the invention of cheap groundwood paper, which could be had for half the cost of paper made from rags.

Groundwood paper was produced by mechanically or chemically reducing logs to wood fibers which were refined, treated, mixed with water and then drained and pressed into finished rolls of paper. Between 1919 and 1940, the total capacity for papermaking more than doubled with machine capacity rising from 4,182 tons to 10,550 tons (Cohen, 1984). The technological advances in papermaking facilitated the development of mass production methods for paperback fiction.

Utilizing this new technology, dime novels - small booklets averaging 100 pages - were produced; they featured stories about the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the American west and colonists' wars with American Indians (LeBlanc, 1996;

Elliot, 1999). In the 1870s, public interest in English and French novels and a lack of copyright protection for international writers resulted in a booming market for dime novels, with 5 million purchased between 1860-1865¹ (Elliot, 1999). This ended when, in 1891, in addition to high levels of competition and fewer available reprints, copyright protection was extended internationally.

The publication of paperback fiction then continued in the form of pulp magazines, named such for their high wood pulp content (Davis, 1984). Ten million regular readers purchased this “escape literature” which was designed to be thrown away once read (Smith, 2000, p. 204). For a nickel, dime or quarter, the reader could expect 130 pages of original stories. Known for genre fiction such as mysteries, westerns, science fiction, romance and horror, the magazines did not publish stories with overtly homosexual themes. Pulp magazines targeted “adolescents, the poorly educated, immigrants and laborers. . . . most readers were office or factory girls (romance pulps), soldiers, sailors, miners, dockworkers, ranchers, rangers, and others who worked with their hands” (p. 205). A steady rise in paper costs during World War II due to rationing prompted the development of pulp fiction novels, whose reduced size required less raw material, subsequently leading to the decline of the more costly pulp magazines.

Able to succeed when magazines did not, pulp paperback fiction publishers limited production costs and, through innovative distribution practices, were able to sell paperbacks in the mass quantities necessary to establish a profitable enterprise.

¹ Total population of the US, including slaves, in 1860 was 31,443,321 according to *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (1969) by Randall, J.G. & Donald, D.H.

Pocket Books was the first mainstream success in the United States, minimizing costs by increasing print runs to ten times the size of a typical hardcover run, convincing publishers and authors to accept lower royalties, and decreasing discounts to dealers and booksellers. Production costs were regulated by using the original publisher's plates, reducing the size of the books, and using a glued binding instead of a stitched one (Davis, 1984). The initial novels were reprints of hardcover classics: *A Tale of Two Cities* and *A Christmas Carol* (Charles Dickens), *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Victor Hugo), *The House of the Seven Gables* (Nathaniel Hawthorne) and *Pride and Prejudice* (Jane Austen). Other popular novels of the time were also released, including *Show Boat* (Edna Ferber), *Green Mansions* (William Henry Hudson), and *Appointment in Samarra* (John O'Hara).

Publisher confidence in the profitability and sustainability of paperback novels was bolstered when, during World War II, paperback novels were distributed to soldiers overseas. According to the Army's Library Service historian, John Jamieson,

The Library Section began to make large purchases of paperbound books as soon as the troops began to go overseas Perhaps three million were sent overseas between 1941 and the end of 1943, not to mention several million more purchased by the Red Cross or by unit officers or mailed by civilians to friends overseas. (1950, p. 144).

While publishers faced challenges to distribution including paper rationing, currency controls, shipments destroyed in bombings, and warehouses requisitioned by the military, the high demand for the novels demonstrated a continuing market for cheap reading materials.

After the war, in order to sell at the quantity required for cheap production, distribution was expanded through independent wholesalers, including drugstores, variety stores, newsstands, general merchandise chains, book stores, and half a million food stores so that paperbacks could be found on “every street corner and every drugstore in America,” changing the accessibility and affordability of fiction (Davis, 1984, p. 79). According to Foote (2005), “Paperbacking broadened the number as well as the kinds of readers who might buy fiction and in turn recalibrated the ways that presses imagined the relationships among ‘literary quality,’ readership, and profitability” (p. 170). Selections included reprinted classics, contemporary best sellers, and bestselling original paperback narratives featuring gangsters, criminals, juvenile delinquents and, most notable for this study, lesbians. Best selling writer Mickey Spillane wrote seven “Mike Hammer” thrillers featuring a private detective who was a “two-fisted, craggy-faced . . . private dick with a crew cut [whose] voluptuous secretary, Velda, [was] always trying to get Mike to tie the knot” (Davis, 1984, p. 181). The famous first novel of Evan Hunter (Ed McBain), *The Blackboard Jungle*, featured juvenile delinquency. According to Davis, this paperback was “well thumbed” for two reasons: the assault of a teacher and the word “fuck” appearing in its text (p.186). Up until this time, it had been deleted or written as “f--k.”

A subgenre of pulp paperbacks, lesbian pulps were sensationalistic and best-selling, reflecting the public lesbian image in popular culture 1950s and 1960s (Keller, 2005). Their success in large part was due to popular mainstreaming of the fields of sexology, psychology, and psychiatry. The “normality” of female sexual

behavior was a subject of great curiosity, especially after Alfred Kinsey's study of female sexuality was released in 1953. In addition, the ubiquity of such material tailored to prurient interests was a consequence of the development of wood pulp paper and the new distribution systems. As most texts designed for public audiences do, the pulps adopted "visually informative strategies" (Bernhardt, 1986); the cover art was an essential element in the marketing of the novels. The visual and the verbal elements of the covers were designed to arouse the interest of the viewer, moving the book from the rack into the hand. Pulps were often bought impulsively and the images marketing the books needed to be "larger than life" and to affirm heteronormative ideals of lesbianism. Writing for the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Knox Burger, the editor of pulp publishing company Gold Medal, said, "More often than not, paperback book covers feature pretty girls in an attitude of anguish, wantonness, undress or all three: publishers, like purveyors of other forms of entertainment, have found that more people buy the product if there is a pretty girl and a promise of excitement in the package" (1961, p. E2).

Potential readers were engaged visually, actively participating in the decoding of linguistic and visual signs. A quick survey of covers reveals various states of undress – torn, unbuttoned, and sheer blouses, and longing and knowing gazes between women. Lesbian pulp fiction can be identified quickly by a solitary woman on the cover, provocatively un/dressed or two women in proximity, sometimes with a lone man in the foreground or background (Zimet, 1999). From 1950-1965, lesbian pulp fiction flourished. The curiosity of the public fueled sales of this novelty item.

Voyeurism and surveillance on the covers reflect the mentality of the Cold War era, which called for citizens to watch for the enemy within their communities (Keller, 2005). Lurid stories of “strange sisters,” “twilight love,” and “Satan’s daughters,” often in all-female environments, captivated readers.

The first lesbian pulp novels, *Women’s Barracks* (Torres, 1950; see figure 1) and *Spring Fire* (Packer, 1952; see figure 2), released by Gold Medal publishers in 1950 and 1952 respectively, created the lesbian pulp subgenre (Server, 1994). The editor of this newly established line of paperback originals, Dick Carroll, experimented with new material in his search for fiction that had not been published elsewhere. *Women’s Barracks*, Tereska Torres’s semi-biographical account of women in wartime, included frank depictions of lesbian relationships based on her service in the De Gaulles Free French Forces during World War II (Forrest, 2005). Two years after release, this paperback was the center of attention in the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Current Pornographic Material due to its lesbian content. The attention paid to the book surprised the author:

Nobody said “lesbian” to me, nobody mentioned it. All I knew is that they all said it was terribly shocking, and I didn't know why they said that. I thought I had written a very innocent book. I thought, these Americans, they are easily shocked. . . . I suppose in America at the time the people were not used to the description of women's sexual life (Smallwood, 2005, p. 1-2).

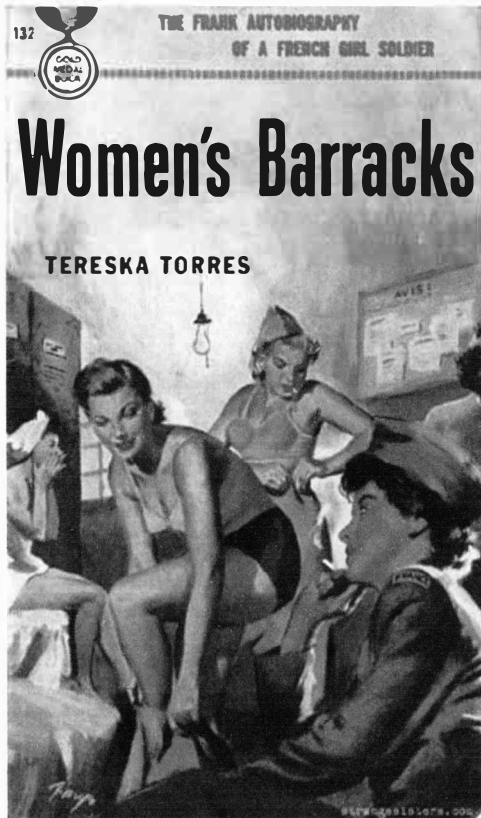


Figure 1

Author Tereska Torres: "I was . . . surprised . . . in 1951 when the book came out and I went to see the American publisher and said, 'You print 200,000 copies now, but will you print more?' And he said, 'We'll always print this book! We'll publish it for always, like the Bible'" (Smallwood, 2005, p. 2).

Torres, T. (1950).

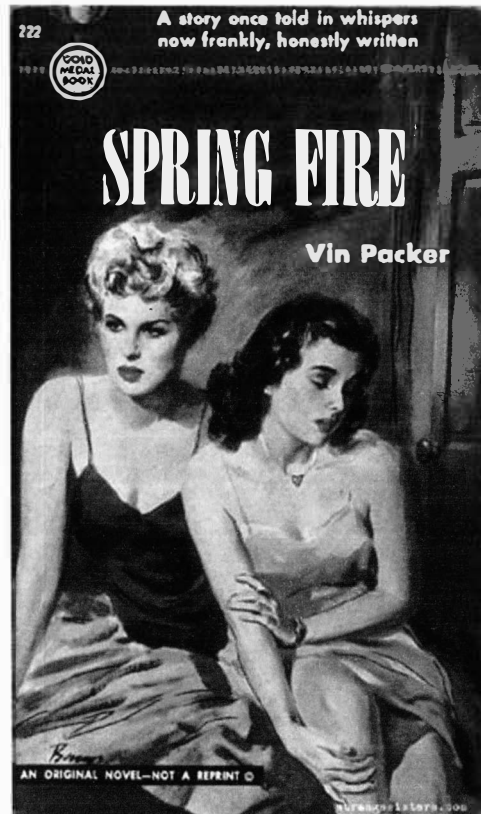


Figure 2

The second lesbian pulp fiction novel published was the first to focus exclusively on lesbian relationships.

Packer, V. (1952).

Dick Carroll also asked one of his secretaries, Marijane Meaker, if she would like to try writing a novel. She wrote *Spring Fire* (1952) under the pseudonym Vin Packer, describing a love affair between two sorority sisters. After its success, Meaker continued to write lesbian pulp fiction novels, transitioning to young adult literature in the 1970s. According to *Publishers Weekly*, by 1975, *Women's Barracks* (Torres, 1950) had sold 2.5 million copies in the United States while *Spring Fever* had sold over 1.5 million (Keller, 2005). The success of these two novels resulted in a plethora of pulps with lesbian content. Even mainstream publishers produced lesbian pulp,

contributing over five hundred titles, and selling millions of copies to the curious, primarily to white heterosexual men (Keller, 2005).

Lesbian pulp fiction falls into two categories, as defined by Yvonne Keller (1999): pro-lesbian pulps and virile adventures. Pro-lesbian pulps were “relatively pro-lesbian, more romantic, often lesbian-authored” while the more popular sex-focused paperbacks, virile adventures, were written primarily by men under female pseudonyms for a presumed heterosexual male audience (p. 2). Roughly fifteen lesbian authors wrote a little over 100 “pro-lesbian pulps” while “virile adventures” accounted for over 90% of lesbian pulps. Virile adventures “re-establish[ed] the ‘proper’ sexual order” through “narrative retribution”; lesbian characters became alcoholics, went crazy, died or were “set straight” by the “*right* man” (Smith, 2006, p. 139). Story lines also often linked lesbians with other depraved behavior including sadism and masochism, bondage and discipline, orgies, voyeurism, murder, witchcraft and Satanism (Zimet, 1999, p. 24). While providing greater visibility for lesbianism, these covers arguably served to naturalize the notion that it was a debauched, corrupt practice.

Cultural Context

In the United States [after World War II] hope was entertained for improvement in human relations and mental health with the gradual emancipation of women. The result has been increasing masculinization of women and effeminacy of men. Two World Wars have destroyed large numbers of masculine men and have preserved the homosexuals. Men are being displaced by women in many occupations; women masculine in appearance and manners are becoming commonplace; few men can now maintain large families in accordance with present standards of physical comfort, and women are

less inclined to look upon motherhood as a career . . . Only a small proportion of well-adjusted adults practice the art of love-making and are fully satisfied by approved heterosexual relations (Henry, as cited in Caprio, 1955, p. xii).

The period after World War II was a time in which social authorities tightened their control over the lives of Americans, attempting to reconstitute the institutionalized gender and race inequity that had diminished appreciably during the war (e.g., women had become “Rosie the Riveter” to win the war, but were urged to return to the domestic sphere when the conflict was over). In general, the public had a desire for a return to “normalcy,” perhaps as a reaction to the tumultuousness and uncertainty of the previous decade; people turned to their leaders to re-establish order, happy to cede responsibility to more knowledgeable “higher-ups.” In the mid 1950s, for example, a Purdue University Panel poll of high school students found that half believed people were unable to decide what was best for them. Forty-one percent thought that the freedom of the press should be eliminated, while thirty-four percent thought free speech should not be extended to certain people. In addition, many of the students believed that the police should be responsible for the censorship of books, movies, radio and television (“Purdue University,” 1957).

National security fears pervaded the Cold War era and government-mandated conformity purged lesbians and gay men from armed and civil service. The Truman administration’s national security policy was discredited by Republican leaders who used the dismissal of several dozen state department employees accused of homosexuality to create a “homosexual scare.” Lesbians and gay men were presumed to be security risks because they could be easily blackmailed with information on their

private lives. Rivalled only by the hunt for communists, mass firings and military discharges of other presumed homosexuals ensued. Military discharges doubled from the rates of the 1940s to over two thousand per year in the 1950s. For those accused of lesbianism, the “rate of detection” in the Navy in 1957 was much higher than for gay men even though female homosexuality was presumed to be difficult to detect (Bérubé & D’Emilio, 1984). Those accused were without recourse. Civilian courts could not interfere with military proceedings and even if they could, the American Civil Liberties Union refused to assist, asserting, “It is not within the province of the Union to evaluate the social validity of the laws aimed at the suppression or elimination of homosexuals” (Faderman, 1991, p. 144). According to historian John D’Emilio (1989), the number of “lives affected by arrests, indictments, and firings of suspected homosexuals far [exceeded] those touched by anticommunism” (p. 440-441).

In the 1950s and 1960s homosexuality was regarded as “congenital – and at the same time . . . willfully vicious” (Caprio, 1955, p. xvii). Based on the individual case studies of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and the work of Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud, the fields of psychology, psychiatry and sexology defined the parameters of “normal” sexual variations as distinguished from “pathological deviations” (p. xvii). Latent homosexual tendencies were thought to be shared by all with the only difference being in the management of sexual urges (p. xxviii). Homosexuality could also be caused by rape, trauma or dysfunctional or sexually abusive parents. Lesbian pulps, especially the virile adventures, embraced these

principles. In the lesbian pulp fiction novel, *Another Kind of Love*, for instance, an experienced lesbian says to a young woman thinking of “the life,”

So many varying kinds of psychotics, it’s beyond our comprehension. But don’t kid yourself – being a homosexual is just as sick, just as psychotic. Maybe more so. Some people get that way in an effort to punish themselves; others, to avoid the responsibility of marriage and parenthood. Sometimes they’re looking for a parental substitute . . . or any and all of those things combined (Christian, 1961 [reprint 2003], p. 98).

Lesbianism was considered to be a growing problem, encouraged by feminism and the increasing liberty of women. In 1955, Dr. Frank Caprio, a sexologist, wrote a non-fiction book, manufactured and distributed as a paperback, to warn the nation of “the prevalence of female homosexuality” and its threat to “the stability of our social structure” (1955, p. 160-161). Case studies included prurient descriptions of particular lesbian sex acts that bore a remarkable similarity to the kind of writing found in lesbian pulp fiction novels. For instance, in “A Case of Severe Anxiety-Neurosis in a Young Girl Seduced by an Experienced Lesbian,” Caprio wrote,

The hostess rolled on top of Alice, and began performing cunnilingus and at the same time she placed herself in the position of ‘soixante-neuf,’ burying her sex parts against Alice’s face. By that time, Alice stated, she herself became so passionate she couldn’t resist and found herself driven by some irresistible force to perform cunnilingus on her hostess. They experienced a simultaneous orgasm (p. 169).

These “detailed accounts” were given so that “the reader [had] a more realistic picture of the various sexual deviations practiced today” (p. xvii).

Sexual deviants had much to fear from discovery. The potential of a loss of livelihood, the rejection of family and friends, including other lesbians afraid of guilt by association, and the possibility of institutionalization caused many lesbians and

gay men to have “front marriages.” In order to pass as heterosexual at work and with family, many married each other (Faderman, 1991). This environment led lesbians to believe that they could not trust even close acquaintances.

Everyone was very cagey. We pretended to ourselves that we didn't talk about it because it shouldn't matter in a friendship, just as being a Democrat or Republican shouldn't matter between friends. But the real reason we never talked about it was that if we weren't 100 percent sure the other person was gay too, it would be awful to be wrong. We'd be revealing ourselves to someone who probably couldn't understand and that could bring all sorts of trouble (Faderman, 1991, p. 148).

It is within this climate of paranoia, fear, surveillance, and retribution that the first homophile (gay and lesbian) political groups formed.

Founded in 1951 in Los Angeles, the Mattachine Society aimed to unify homosexuals as a group and with the heterosexual majority in order to create social and political change. According to Martin Meeker, it used “respectability,” the presentation of its public image as nonthreatening, as a political tactic to disarm homophobic heterosexuals (2001). Members were encouraged to follow generally accepted social rules “in conduct, attire, and speech” (p. 90). Alliances were also formed with psychiatric professionals and sexologists in order to facilitate change in cultural attitudes toward homosexuals. The first homophile magazine, *ONE*, published by the Society began in 1953, was followed in 1955 by the *Mattachine Review*. As awareness of the organization grew through distribution of its magazine and other newly founded homophile publications, local news coverage, and mass media publicity, thousands of requests for assistance effectively turned the Society into a social service organization (p. 91). The needs of the petitioners included “legal,

psychiatric, religious and employment assistance” (p. 93). The organization also supported gay bars with legal problems. However, its primarily male leadership and membership defined gayness to the exclusion of lesbians (D’Emilio, 1983).

In 1955, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon formed the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) as a private social group, an alternative to the gay bars. The group transitioned to political organizing after becoming familiar with the Mattachine Society. By end of the 1950s there were several small DOB chapters nationwide. The first issue of the *Ladder* was published in 1956. The magazine avoided overtly political messages, focusing instead on giving voice to the lesbian experience through poetry, fiction, history, and biographies. Under the pseudonym Gene Damon, Barbara Grier wrote the column “Lesbiana” in which she reviewed literature with lesbian content, including lesbian pulp fiction. Throughout the 1950s, the two groups worked together, presenting homosexuality as “dignified, nonthreatening, and assimilable to the mainstream” (Meyer, 2006, p. 450), calling for education of the public and developing relationships with medical professionals. However, the Mattachine Society leadership was often condescending and patronizing toward the lesbian organization, thinking of it as their ladies’ auxiliary (D’Emilio, 1983, p. 105).

Attacks on the homophile movement, the Mattachine Society, and the DOB included surveillance by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). According to the *Ladder*, “Our landlord was questioned by the police, and members of the newly formed [FBI] ‘Homosexual Detail’ took in our first national convention” (1960). In addition, gay bars were targeted by city and state authorities and newsstands

nationwide were cited for carrying “smut,” “the censors being particularly concerned with pocketbooks including references to lesbians or homosexuality” (1960).

Within this climate of surveillance, the dangers faced by publishers of lesbian pulp fiction included post office seizure, fines, and possible imprisonment. Small news dealers were often the first to be boycotted by local civic and religious groups in addition to facing indictment by law officials. In 1950, titles deemed “indecent, obscene or impure, or manifestly [tending] to corrupt the morals of youth” in Fall River, Massachusetts² led to the arrest of two dealers and two chain store managers (Davis, 1984, p. 219). Publishers Sanford Aday and his partner Wallace de Ortega Maxey were arrested on federal felony charges for shipping obscene material, the paperback *Sex Life of a Cop*, through the U.S. postal service. In 1963 they were convicted and sentenced to twenty-five years in prison and fined \$25,000 (Stryker, 2001, p. 19-22). As a result, the narratives of the paperbacks were tightly controlled by the publishers. In order to escape censorship, the pulps were generally cautionary tales with “redeeming social value.” According to the author of *Spring Fire*, Vin Packer, the editor of Gold Medal books told her,

Your main character can't decide she's not strong enough to live that life [homosexuality], she has to reject it knowing that it's wrong. You see, our books go through the mails. They have to pass inspection. If one book is considered censurable the whole shipment is sent back to the publisher. If your book appears to proselytize for homosexuality, all the books sent with it to distributors are returned (Packer, 2004, p. vi).

² *The Chinese Room* (Bantam), *The Dim View* (NAL), *The Girl on the Via Falmina* (Pocket Books), *Duke* (Popular Library), *The Gilded Hearse* (NAL), *A Hell of a Good Time* (Avon), *The First Lady Chatterley* (Avon), and *Carnival of Love* (Lion Books)

Even with heavily controlled authorship, there was incredible pressure to eliminate paperbacks that fell outside of mainstream values. In 1952 the United States House of Representatives became involved in the debate when pulp fiction novels were the focus of the *Committee on Current Pornographic Materials*. The Committee linked sexual expression to communism and other societal ills; damning *Women's Barracks* as “a prime example of ‘the so-called pocket-sized books, which originally started out as cheap reprints of standard works’ but have ‘largely degenerated into media for the dissemination of artful appeals to sensuality, immorality, filth, perversion and degeneracy’” (Adams, 1999, p. 258). The report released by the committee in 1953 advocated for government censorship. However, the increased attention only served to strengthen the sales of paperbacks.

The lesbian pulp fiction audience was broad and diverse. When asked about her readers, author Valerie Taylor replied,

But there were a lot of people. There were lonely lesbians who thought they were the only ones, and they used to write They'd say, “I'm 45 years old, and I know I'm a lesbian, but I've never had a lover. How do you find anybody?” Or young girls who'd ask, “How do I know whether I'm a lesbian or not?” But a lot of men bought these books as pure wish-fulfillment stuff I think that just about everybody bought gay books in the late '50s and early '60s because a lot had been written about them and people were curious. And a lot of women – housewives, nice housewives – would think, “Well what is this? What do they have, anyway, that makes them throw away marriage and motherhood and the right to wash the dishes and do the laundry forever?” And they would buy them and hide them. I know a lot of married women who bought them (1998, p. 168-169).

Initially both publishers and authors assumed the only market for the pulps was heterosexual men looking for “one-handed” readers. According to Taylor, “In the late

'50s and early '60s publishers sold these novels to, as they put it, [the] 'truck driver mentality.' Men who purportedly wanted to know 'what we did in bed' were the principal buyers of these books" (1989, p. 5). The pulps were designed to fulfill straight male fantasies, while assuring white heterosexual male dominance.

The first indication that there was a lesbian market for the paperbacks was the deluge of reader mail from women in response to *Women's Barracks* (Torres, 1950) and *Spring Fire* (Packer, 2004, p. ix). Lesbians unaccustomed to public representation avidly consumed the pulps and were able to attend to the material selectively. "They were so accustomed to reading diatribes against homosexuality that intermittently positive or at least neutral statements and concrete information stood out" (Meeker, 2001, p. 92). This was very important to individual, isolated lesbians, who may not have known that there were others like them. While walking in Greenwich Village, author March Hastings was approached by a woman unfamiliar with the area. She "inquired of me – did I know the location of a certain gay bar? That bar was a fictional creation from one of my novels. What did I reply? I directed her to an existent bar almost as interesting" (1989, p. 8). Thus, these novels influenced the self-image and actions of lesbian readers, while the texts' interaction with mainstream publishers and a broad, general audience offered narratives of possible realities.

Despite their historical significance and recent interest in queer theory and gay and lesbian studies, few researchers have examined lesbian pulp novels. Part of our pre-Stonewall queer heritage, these paperbacks serve as a bridge between the homosexual past and the queer present (Nealon, 2000). Certainly not "high art," the

pulps may suffer neglect from their positioning as “low culture.” Lesbian pulp catered to a heterosexual male audience that wanted its lesbians “kinky,” not threatening, thereby reinforcing stereotypes that may have angered or embarrassed potential lesbian readers. Yet lesbian pulp narratives and their accompanying cover illustrations were the most accessible representation of female homosexuality of the 1950s and 1960s, and as such they constitute important historical evidence worthy of careful analysis (Keller, 2005). The present study will investigate and identify the codes, conventions, and clichés of lesbian cover art.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ideology is not simply about domination through webs of representation, it is about the active construction of our 'selves' as social beings through historically-specific subject positions made available through the images we actively consume (and derive pleasure [from]) (Cole, 1993, p. 83).

The cover art of lesbian pulp fiction paperbacks echoes long-held cultural sentiments and offers artifacts of mainstream ideological systems that position homosexuals as marginal or exotic. Visual images, "propositional arguments in which the propositions and their argumentative function and roles are expressed visually" (Blair, 1996, p. 38) are pervasive and influential, and provide access to a "range of human experience" (Foss, 2005, p. 142-143). It is the intent of this research to examine the historical, textual and cultural discourses in which these images are situated, in addition to deconstructing the images' popular visual conceptualization of "woman" and "lesbian."

Feminist and Queer Theory

The research perspectives for the evaluation of lesbian pulp have primarily taken a feminist or queer theoretical approach and have often employed both. Feminist theory is used to expose the structure of patriarchy and examine the functions and mechanisms of power through gender (Rakow & Wackwitz, 2004). It is polyvocal, political in nature, and transformative, working towards greater gender

justice. According to Cynthia Orozco (1993), “Feminism is a recognition of the domination of men over women and attempts by women to end male privilege. It also seeks to redefine female-to-female relations. Feminism is all-encompassing since it is a theory, a method, and a practice which seeks to transform human relations” (p. 14).

I view this research as political, the unveiling of the modes and means of the construction of lesbianism in popular culture is a vital part of creating changed discourse. Historically, First Wave feminism in late nineteenth and early twentieth America focused upon emancipating women from their status as “property;” Second Wave feminism in the 1960s called upon women to recognize that the restrictions they faced in their personal lives were the result of an oppressive, patriarchal political structure; and Third Wave feminism deconstructed the “essentialism” of the Second Wave, which had tended to view all female experiences through the lens of middle-class, heterosexual white women. In the field of communication, feminist rhetorical study has provided “insight into how gender and symbol use constitute, challenge and constrain our identities and possibilities as political actors” (Dow & Condit, 2005).

Like feminism, queer theory has worked to denaturalize oppressive political practices—but has focused upon dismantling destructive ideologies that constitute homosexuals as marginalized subjects in order to support a homophobic culture. “Queer theory is therefore a response to the more typical forms of sexual authorization – heteronormative and homophobic discourses – in which straight sexual subjects are called into being or, to use Althusser’s (1971) term, ‘interpellated’ at the expense of queer subjects (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p. 503). Queer theory, as

defined by Yep and his colleagues, Lovaas and Elia (2003), disproves the stability of identity categories by focusing on the historical, social and cultural constructions of desire and sexuality as it intersects with other identity markers such as race and gender. Queer theory has reshaped identity politics, political organizing, and community activism, offering “ways to imagine different social realities, gender/sexual systems, and participation in cultural politics” (p. 2). Sexual identities are approached as “multiple, unstable, and fluid social constructions intersecting with race, class, and gender, among others, as opposed to singular, stable and essentialized social positionings” (p. 4).

The relationship between GLBT theory and feminism has been both ambiguous and contentious. For example, male privilege is often overlooked in much work on gay representation and gay male visibility in popular culture that “replicates traditional patterns of gender dominance” (Dow & Condit, 2005). Yet, lesbian pulp fiction scholarship has been heavily influenced by both feminism and queer theory, which critique the operation of social and cultural power, calling attention to dominant ideologies of either gender or sexuality. Thus their deconstruction of power is a fundamental connection between them.

Power, as defined by Michel Foucault, is exerted through the production of discourse and the formation of “truth” (Foucault, 1982, p. 220). In the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that “power is generated through particular kinds of symbol use, while at the same time the power spread throughout a discursive formation has an impact on the nature of the discursive practices in a discursive

formation” (Foss & Gill, 1987, p. 390). Through placement in discourse, constructions of gender and sexuality are modified, not to suppress “deviance” but to sustain and perpetuate it. According to Foucault, “the extraordinary effort that went into the task that was bound to fail leads one to suspect that what was demanded of it was to persevere . . . This new persecution of the peripheral sexualities entailed an *incorporation of perversions* and a new *specification of individuals*” (p. 42-43). Perversions are encouraged to exist in order to prove the “normality” of the mainstream. From the Victorian “explosion of discourse” surrounding the prohibition of sexual behavior, culturally constructed identities centered on gender and sexuality emerged, produced and sustained through discourse, rather than constrained and repressed. The modern regime of power depends upon discourses on gender and sexuality and is exercised upon and enacted through the body.

The complexity and plurality of meaning inherent in lesbian pulp fiction cover art lends itself to the use of a feminist/queer theoretical framework for analysis. In such a framework, three concepts are of particular importance: discipline, hailing, and performativity. The first considers principles and mechanisms of control; the second attempts to explain how and why mechanisms of control address and constitute subjects; and the third examines the enactment of power and control by bodies disciplined and hailed without explicit understanding or consent.

Key Concepts

There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against,

himself. A superb formula: power exercised continuously (Foucault, 1977, p. 155).

Discipline

According to Foucault (1977, p. 215), discipline “may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise it is a ‘physics’ or an ‘anatomy’ of power, a technology.” Directed against the body, discipline is a mechanism of power “[exerting] control that is continuous, subtle, automatic, generalized, taken for granted, and present in all aspects of the discursive formation” (Foss & Gill, 1987, p. 389) with its own “instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, [and] targets” (Foucault, 1977, p. 215). Using Jeremy Bentham’s nineteenth century prison design, the panopticon, as a representative model, Foucault identified vision and the gaze as modern mechanisms of discipline. A ring-shaped building with all cells open toward a tower in the center, the panopticon facilitated an automatic functioning of power. Through backlighting, permanent visibility within cells is compounded by surveillance from within the tower that cannot be seen. The power is not embodied in the “watcher”; rather it is derived from the panoptic mechanisms which suggest constant surveillance. “The inmate must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so” (p. 201). Panopticism spread through the social body, becoming a generalized function (p. 207) through the internalization of the panoptic tower. Networks of relationships allow “absolute discretion and constant surveillance,” while normalizing influences act as unending, invisible surveillance that sustains itself by its own mechanism (p. 176-

177). Individuals collectively engage in self-regulation, the result of which is that “we are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism” (p. 217).

As articulated by Foucault, feminist scholars have used the gaze as an “explanatory paradigm for women’s acquiescence to, and collusion with, patriarchal standards of femininity” (Deveaux, 1994, p. 225), arguing that the absence of formal institutional structures of power lends credence to the production of femininity as completely natural or voluntary (Bartky, 1988, p. 103). However, Foucault treats the bodily experience of women and men as if it were one, overlooking “the forms of subjection that engender the feminine body [perpetuating] the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom these disciplines have been imposed” (Bartky, 1988, p. 95).

The importance of gender in the operation of discipline has been explored by feminist scholars such as film theorist Laura Mulvey, who extended gaze theory through the appropriation of psychoanalysis, arguing that a determining male gaze projects fantasy onto female figures, placing the viewer into a masculine subject position of taking other people as objects and subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze (1975). Voyeurism’s pleasure, in its associations with sadism, is through ascertaining guilt, asserting control, and subjugating through punishment or forgiveness (1975, p. 65). The woman as image and man as bearer of the look plays to and signifies male desire, making women objects, not subjects, of the gaze, their

bodies eroticized and often fragmented. “Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker of meaning” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 7). Events are seen through the look of the central male character. The hero’s ability to control events coincides with his “active power of the erotic look” and the two together provide for the male spectator “a satisfying sense of omnipotence” (Thornham, 1999). While the psychoanalytic model has limitations, it is a valuable way to approach meaning that seems inaccessible through other analytical constructs (Citron, M., Lesage, J., Mayne, J., Ruby Rich B. & Taylor A. M., 1978). Teresa de Lauretis’ *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (1984) builds on Mulvey’s theoretical framework, arguing that women are persistently “seduced into femininity” by narratives that reinforce their positioning as passive/object. Brent (2004), in studying silent Hitchcock films, uses Mulvey but also argues that there may be “the possibility that the feminine image might produce its own visual pleasure beyond the gaze” (p. 81). That is, there may be pleasure in exhibitionism as well as the spectator’s pleasure in passive absorption and identification rather than objectification.

The disciplining and objectifying power of the gaze is reflected in the interaction between the lesbian pulp fiction covers and the viewer. Lesbian pulp readers have recounted tales of hiding their books from roommates and/or destroying covers or entire novels to avoid the suspicions of family and friends (Millet, 1974).

Often within the artwork, the gaze was explicitly portrayed, a tortured male lingering in the foreground or background. To extend the concepts of discipline and the gaze through the visual images of the cover art, we can draw on Althusser's work on interpellation or "hailing."

Hailing

By being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence, initiated into a temporal life of language that exceeds the prior purposes that animate that call (Butler, 1997, p. 2).

Ideology, as conceptualized by Louis Althusser (1971), is an illusion, a "representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" that serves to reproduce the existing social order (p. 162). It is concrete, having a material existence through the formation of identities, consciousnesses, and subjectivities.

Ideology "acts" or functions in such a way that it "recruits" subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all) or "transforms" the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which [is] called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace police (or other) hailing: "Hey, you there!" (p. 172).

Ideology hails an individual as a subject, calling the subject into being, into existence through a dependence on the address of the Other. "One 'exists' not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being *recognizable*" (Butler, 1997, p. 5).

Interpellation is "inaugurative," introducing a reality through citation of existing convention rather than describing a reality (Butler, 1997, 33). Its "reiterative operation" sediments subjectivities over time (p. 33), naturalizing ideology so that it

becomes “obvious” (Althusser, 1971, p. 171). In visual images the unconscious process of naturalization can be teased out through the elements of and relationships among images: the framing of subjects, the arrangement of bodies in relationship to the viewer, the shapes, lines and colors used, and the like (Harbord, 2007). Lesbian pulp cover art sought to define lesbianism and differentiate the novels’ content from other pulps. The interpellation of desire was generated through the promise of pleasure within the covers. Female (homo)sexuality came into view because it satisfied post-war needs of reestablishing proper social order through regulation of representations of sexuality which normalized patriarchy and interpellated “lesbian” as an identity.

Performativity

Performativity grants social agents a conceptual lens for meaningful critique, subversive . . . politics, and a transformative social project (Warren, 2003, p. 34).

Butler’s (1993b) theory of performativity conceptualizes the cultural and social construction of fundamental identity categories, demonstrating the ways in which the body enacts power and discipline. The body’s physicality is repositioned as “the effect of a discourse of power that has regulated, shaped, and made the materiality of our bodies” (Warren, 2003, 32). Performativity is an obligatory practice, socially constructing identity:

[It is] a matter of repeating the norms by which one is constituted: it is not a radical fabrication of a gendered self. It is a compulsory repetition of prior and subjectivating norms, ones which cannot be thrown off at will but which work, animate and constrain the gendered subject, and which are also the resources from which resistance, subversion, displacement are forged (p. 22).

Gender and sexuality are created through one's acts and behind the expressions there is no identity (Butler, 1999, p. 33). It is through the repetition of historically dictated practices that identities become normalized, "the repeated enactments of identity [becoming] sedimented and seemingly fixed. . . . The process of sedimentation – of normalization over time – loses its historical nature. This normalization of the repeated acts . . . serves to hide or obfuscate its construction" (Warren, 2003, p. 30). The reiterative power of discourse produces that which it regulates and controls (Butler, 1993a, p. 2).

Sexual subjectivity is created through the reiteration of sexual norms. However, these acts of repetition do not precisely meet the expectations set and the "addressee never quite inhabits the ideal s/he is compelled to approximate" (Butler, 1993a, 231). It is within this space that resistance is possible. As "sites of necessary trouble," identity categories are challenged or redefined through subversion of accepted social constructions of identity (i.e., lesbianism) (Butler, 1993c, p. 307). However, there is risk in acting against social construction as it also serves to extend homophobic discourse through the reification of a false binary difference of sexuality (1993c). Performativity can serve as useful perspective from which to assess the lesbian pulp fiction covers, from the reproduction of visual and textual codes that signaled lesbian content to the subversion of these images via lesbians using paperbacks for their own ends.

Relevant Research

Much of the scholarly work on lesbian pulp fiction has been framed by a feminist and/or queer theoretical perspective, even if such a perspective is not explicitly acknowledged. Generally, the pulps reified white heterosexual male dominance. As Yvonne Keller argues, voyeurism and surveillance were omnipresent in U.S. Cold War culture and these strategies, employed frequently in pulp fiction, operated in support of the existing power structure (2005). Adams (1999), Foote (2005), Hamer (1999), Keller (1999, 2005), and Nealon (2000, 2001) have examined lesbian pulps' historical context and the implications of the production and consumption of these texts.

Adams (1999) provides a rich description of the conceptualization of lesbianism in the 1950s, exploring the psychoanalytic "sickness-theory" model of homosexual behavior through a comparative analysis of two novels of the time, the lesbian pulp fiction paperback *Women's Barracks* (Torres, 1950) and the hardbound *The Price of Salt* (Morgan, 1953). Adams concludes that "figuratively or literally, then, in fiction and in 'science,' psychoanalysis became the lesbian's chaperone whenever she came out into the mainstream of popular culture" (p. 269). The lesbian was either represented as pathological or rendered invisible.

Also focusing on the texts' historical contextual placement, Foote (2005) explored pulps as "a foundational text for the culture's sense of itself" (p. 170), seeking to understand how their appearance in the market incorporated signs of a lesbian readership. Offering a critique of Ann Bannon novels, Foote argues that the

pulps were crucial for the construction of a lesbian print tradition in which abstract readers became lesbian readers, “able to recognize and historicize ‘lesbian texts’ and ‘lesbian authors’ and able to participate in a historical lesbian community in the very act of buying a book and reading a text ‘as’ a lesbian” (p. 171).

Additional research on Ann Bannon’s six-novel series *The Beebo Brinker Chronicles* includes Hamer’s (1999) analysis of the series’ representation of 1950s lesbian identity, focusing on binary concepts of the masculine/“butch” and feminine/“femme”. She found that the pro-lesbian pulp author’s depictions fall “somewhere between the powerful nineteenth-century biological and pathological definitions of lesbianism and the modern women’s movement’s challenge to these” (p. 70).

Keller’s work (1999) is informed by feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey. It applies gaze theory to examine the representation of voyeurism in pro-lesbian pulps in addition to the subversion of and resistance to publisher and reader expectations of how voyeurism should be treated in the genre. In 2005, this work was extended, assessing the links between sight and cultural power in lesbian pulps, finding that “despite emphasizing a harshly pro-hegemonic voyeurism and surveillance, the text also demonstrates the mutability of, and so the potential for subversion of, these powerful visual structures” (p. 177).

Finally, Nealon (2000) has explored the often used U.S. queer theoretical perspectives regarding historical affect of lesbian pulp fiction – “a feeling about history and a feeling generated by it,” explaining, “One reading assumes that the McCarthy era is a kind of cul-de-sac off the road to liberation; the other sees it as an

on-ramp. One reading focuses on the anguish of the break-up scenes, or the alcoholism of the characters; the other focuses on the sex scenes” (p. 745). He argues that “the activity of reception is a kind of organic historiography,” (p. 747) that affect is both historical and historiographical, and that “historiographical-theoretical” research will extend research further than the evaluation of homosexual “identity.” Nealon (2001) extends his research with an analysis of the ambivalence with which modern-day readers consume lesbian pulp fiction.

While such perspectives have provided much needed scholarship, additional evaluation can contribute to a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the historical significance and function(s) of these paperbacks. Lesbian pulp fiction’s cover art contains images that “function to shape a society’s socialized knowledge and collective memory of the past” (Dunleavy, 2005, p. 259). The theoretical foundations for exploring the cover art of lesbian pulp fiction novels demonstrate how constructions of gender and sexuality are created and modified through placement within discourse. The concepts of “the gaze” and “hailing” facilitate an exploration of the interaction between discourse and the individual, providing the framework for assessing how the lesbian pulp covers enabled the discipline of bodies, the placement of the viewer into a masculine subject position, and the interpellation of readers, calling “lesbian” into being. The notion of “performativity” provides the basis for exploring performance *in* the cover (elements of the images and the relationships between and among images) and the performance *of* the cover (visual reiteration of the disciplinary norms of “woman” and “lesbian”). By uncovering the ways that

straight publishers and artists and straight and queer lesbian pulp consumers either identified with or disavowed lesbianism, the production of sexual identities is revealed.

CHAPTER IV

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

The focus of this study will be on the class of lesbian pulp fiction novels known as virile adventures, which are “the most popular, more sex-focused, homophobic, and heterosexual white male-oriented pulps, distinct from the second-largest type, ‘pro-lesbian pulps,’ the relatively pro-lesbian, more romantic, often lesbian-authored interventions most discussed by scholars” (Keller, 2005, p. 178). The popularity of these representations of lesbianism provides evidence for what authors and publishers presumed was preoccupying the white heterosexual male imagination, arguably a hegemonic component of mainstream popular culture during the 1950s and 1960s. According to pro-lesbian pulp author Ann Bannon, “Male writers were more interested in cranking out a series of sexual climaxes between women, followed by the ‘rescue’ of one or both girls by a man. It was voyeurism at its lowest, with next to nothing in the way of plot, character development, or attention to the language” (William, 2002, para. 7). The high demand for “trashy” pulps drove the entire lesbian pulp subgenre, allowing for the production of pro-lesbian novels in addition to the dominant virile adventure format. It is within this discourse that “lesbian” was collectively authored in popular culture. Constructed through visual and textual reiterations, images of lesbianism in virile adventure pulps naturalized what the public came to know as “lesbian.” An analysis of the elements of virile

adventure cover images is important scholarship because the reiteration of norms is continuous, drawing upon citations of previous performances, resulting in the sedimentation of subjectivities. Yesterday's construction of female homosexuality continues to inform today's discursive formation of "lesbian."

As detailed in the literature review, this study will approach the covers from a feminist/queer theoretical framework. Visual rhetoric will be used as a specific method of analysis as it considers both the denotative and connotative meaning of the elements of lesbian pulp fiction covers. According to Foss (2005), visual rhetoric may either be a product of rhetors or a perspective scholars use in the analysis of the communicative dimensions of images. The latter is a foundation for dissecting, "the actual image(s) rhetors [creators] generate when they use visual symbols for the purpose of communicating" (p. 143). This visual rhetoric has three essential characteristics: symbolic action, human intervention, and the presence of an audience. It is not enough for an image to serve simply as a sign; it must be symbolic, using arbitrary symbols to communicate. An image must also be created or interpreted through human action for the consumption of an audience (self or others).

The use of rhetoric as a perspective from which to critique visual imagery assumes that a critic is needed to reveal the "ideological underpinnings of imagery" (Barnhurst, Vari, & Rodriguez, 2004, p. 629). Traditionally rhetoricians have limited analysis to discursive communication, studying language and speech, while focusing primarily on political discourse, ceremonial discourse and verbal constructions (Brummett, 1991). Expansion of the field to include non-discursive forms is largely a

result of the prevalence and influence of the visual image in contemporary culture (Foss, 2005). Rhetorical criticism then “may be applied to any human act, process, product or artifact” that “may formulate, sustain, or modify attention, perceptions, attitudes, or behavior” (Sloan, Gregg, Nilsen, Rein, Simons, Stelzner, & Zacharias, 1971, p. 220). Drawing on its rhetorical roots, visual analysis has largely been preoccupied with the persuasive ability of images. “Visual texts [are] seen as designed to influence belief and action, as having objectives, and as having creators with motives and intentions who made design choices relevant to particular audiences” (Peterson, 2001, p. 20). According to Barnhurst, Vari, and Rodriguez, the rhetorical perspective on visual imagery “dominates research on mass media and popular culture, including most feminist studies” (2004, p. 629).

Deductive and inductive approaches toward visual rhetorical analysis have much to offer. A deductive approach assumes that images share the same characteristics as discursive symbols (Foss, 2005). Beginning with rhetorical constructs and theories, scholars critique visual images as language, contributing to rhetorical theory focused on verbal discourse. Research that considers the visual as text analyzes the internal structures within an image to identify the “grammar, syntax, or logic that organizes meaning,” emphasizing that meaning “resides in the order of things” (Barnhurst, Vari & Rodriguez, 2004, p. 630). This rhetorical approach is used to assess “the speaker (artist and/or creators), speech (visual artifact), audiences for the artifact, and the audiences’ receptions of the artifact” (Peterson, 2001, p. 20).

For many years, scholars interested in studying visual culture avoided the use of rhetorical theory developed from discursive studies because of the perceived differences between images and language. According to Bernhardt, “texts which are highly informative visually share features not characteristic of texts which do not ...” (1986, p. 67). Such differences include the absence of an explicit thesis or proposition in imagery and the lack of denotative vocabulary. The abstractness of language also differs greatly from the necessary specificity and concreteness required in order to evaluate images (Foss, 2005). Therefore, it is through an inductive approach that visual rhetorical analysis is best conducted. Foss’s “message formulation from images” and “evaluation of images,” focuses on “the qualities and functions of images to develop explanations of how visual symbols operate” (2005, p. 149). From this perspective, viewers engage in a “prospective process of constructing claims for images” (Chrysee, Foss & Ranney, 1996, p. 9). This schema assumes an “audience-centered perspective on the creation of meaning in images,” focusing on image function(s) (1996, p. 9). “Function ... directs attention away from creators’ intentions and artistic concerns and toward the role played by the visual image itself in the persuasive process” (Peterson, 2001, p. 21). The data of the image are the foundation for the development of argumentative claims; however, these physical characteristics do not predetermine audience perceptivity. It is the responsibility of the audience to determine the claim that results from the viewing of an image. The critic, when using “message formulation from images” and “evaluation of images,” must examine, infer, and then develop the claim, paying attention to the nature,

function and evaluation of images. The four elements of an image used to develop a claim include presented facts, which are the features of an image including form, style and medium; emotions or attitudes evoked in the viewer; relevant cultural knowledge that may affect interpretation; and the function or use of the image outside of its form as an image (Mullen & Fisher, 2004).

A critical-analytical approach toward the analysis of visual data, the rhetorical perspective is often used in mass media and popular culture research. Finnegan compares a speech by Roosevelt with archival photographs of sharecroppers (2004), while Lancioni uses rhetorical visual analysis to argue that mobile framing and reframing in the archival photographs employed in *The Civil War* forms a visual argument (1996), and the impact advertising has on self-image has been explored by Shields and Heinecken (2002). Foss examines the process audiences use to interpret ambiguous art (1987) and memory, while authenticity and identity are investigated by Pfitzer (2002). Critiquing twentieth century magazine illustrations, Kitch (2001) found that the images created vocabularies of gender, race and class. Rhetorical methods used for visual analysis, “message formulation from images” and “evaluation of images,” have been employed to assess multiple kinds of images including body art, an Eames shell chair, a police headquarters building, a photograph of a dead German soldier from World War I, a Memphis Design consortium chair, and the AIDS quilt (Foss, 1987; Chrystee, Foss & Ranney, 1996; Foss, 1995).

Recently, scholars have modified Foss’s rhetorical schema for evaluation, refining and consolidating her methods of analysis of visual messages (Peterson,

2001; Mullen & Fisher, 2004). According to Peterson, Foss's foregrounding of image components (e.g., "woman with torn blouse," "tall tree," "bed," "prison bars," etc.), does not accord adequate analytical weight to complex stylistic details. It introduces a false dichotomy between aesthetics and the function(s) of constituent elements of the image, resulting in a "distinction [that] misses the overlap of the two realms and the usefulness of the vocabularies of fine and graphic arts for the purposes of rhetorical analysis" (2001, p. 22). Peterson argues that the "modernist assumptions" of Foss's schema do not fit well with "visuals that are fragmented, multiple, mass-produced, polymorphous, ... highly stylized ... without explicit or identifiable authors or purposes, and visuals with multiple authors or purposes" (2001, p. 23). In modified approaches to visual rhetorical analysis, aesthetic concepts of line and color, perspective, lighting, texture, and positioning within the frame are foregrounded, rather than focusing the critical process primarily upon the identification of subjects and/or objects present in the image, as in Foss's schema. Scholars consider the relationships between the image components and the aesthetic choices that affect our reading of them. Taking into account the historical context surrounding the production and consumption of the images, the ways in which the presented elements and stylistic details influencing one another are assessed, thereby revealing denotative and connotative meanings and potential effects on readers and/or viewers (Mullen & Fisher, 2004).

The rhetorical schema that will be used for the evaluation of the visual imagery on lesbian pulp fiction covers is based on the elaborated Foss methodologies

proposed by Peterson (2001) and Mullen and Fisher (2004). These methods will be informed by principles of feminist and queer theory discussed in the literature review. The production and reception of lesbian pulp images was heavily influenced by political and cultural forces; therefore, the application of historical context is central to this work. It was within white heterosexual male hegemony of the 1950s that lesbian identity was articulated, mass marketed, and consumed.

CHAPTER V

SURVEY OF COVER ART

The cover art used in this study was accessed via www.strangesisters.com, the website of lesbian pulp aficionado Ryan Richardson, whose personal aesthetic preferences have limited his collection to illustrated pulp fiction covers that suggest lesbian content. His website is the largest and most readily available source of lesbian pulp fiction cover art. As of December 2007, 921 covers had been posted. I have examined each of these covers. First, I simply logged basic information about each one, including the title of the novel, author, illustrator (if known), year of publication, and publisher. Then I recorded dominant image components (subjects and/or objects present in the frame) and narrative themes, such the number of human figures on each cover; their apparent gender(s); positioning, orientation, and behavior; and the location presented, if any (e.g., bedroom, beach, hospital). Like covers were grouped together. For example, I found many covers that link “depraved” behavior such as sadomasochism, pagan rituals, and incest with lesbianism; I have dubbed this category “Girls Gone Wild.” Another large group of covers, which I have named “I Prefer Girls,” presents two women in close physical proximity with few other details about location or context. After I had tentatively identified five major categories, I briefly re-evaluated each cover, considering both the appropriateness of the groups and the placement of covers within each group. Categories are not mutually

exclusive; those covers with multiple placements have been cross-referenced within the database I created.

The five categories generated from this process include I Prefer Girls, Where the Girls Are, Girls Gone Wild, Odd Man Out, and Actual-Factual Stories. As I noted in the previous paragraph, a simple and exclusive focus on female figures is characteristic of the covers in the popular I Prefer Girls category, which accounts for 20.4%, or 188, of 921 covers. The largest category by far is Where the Girls Are (39.4%, 363 of 921 covers), which contains covers that contextualize lesbianism, placing it in the home, the workplace, and other locations. Straightforward girl-on-girl action, with or without a location, is simply not enough for the Girls Gone Wild covers. The second largest category, it includes lesbianism accompanied by outlandish behavior such as sadomasochism, witchcraft, incest or murder (29.5%, 272 of 921 covers). In the smaller yet significant Odd Man Out category, the male gaze is explicitly presented; men are portrayed as spectators or active participants in female same-sex relationships (8.5%, 78 of 921 covers). Finally, a small subset of covers masquerade as scientific exploration of female homosexuality (Actual-Factual Stories, 2.1%, 20 of 921 covers).

What follows is a detailed discussion of each of these categories; a consideration of the three dominant categories, I Prefer Girls, Where the Girls Are, and Girls Gone Wild is followed by an examination of the final two, more minor, categories, Odd Man Out and Actual-Factual Stories. Within each category, I chose one cover for in-depth analysis. Arguably, a single cover can represent others in its

category: as Warren reminds us, performativity is “the process of repetition by which norms are constituted; however, a performance is one reiteration (one single enactment) within that process . . . the singular performance ‘is precisely the site in which concealed or dissimulated conventions might be investigated’” (Warren, 2003, p. 34). Final selections were compared with the 1967 comprehensive bibliography of published books relevant to lesbian literature compiled by Gene Damon and lesbian pulp fiction author Marion Zimmer Bradley to ensure that the titles were virile adventures. The 1967 bibliography is not annotated, but uses a rating system. Books were rated “T” for trashy in order to warn potential lesbian readers of offensive content. When possible, I read the novels whose cover illustrations form the basis of the analyses that follow. The cover art’s relationship to the novels is often skewed and, in general, may not be in close accord with the text as the artists often did not read the narrative for which they were providing an illustration. An analysis of the disparities between the texts and their cover art may be a good subject for future research, however.

I employed a specific strategy for each cover analysis. My analyses of selected covers began with a detailed cataloguing of image components (subjects and/or objects present), followed by a mapping of stylistic elements (sensory visual stimuli including line, color, perspective, lighting, proportion, scale, postures and gestures of figures, etc.), and then an assessment of the interrelationships between them. This analysis examined the denotative and connotative meanings of the presented elements and the images as a whole. The presented elements were related

to the “function”/message of the illustration, which was assessed next via a series of questions: What norms are reiterated? What does this image mean? Who is the intended audience for this message? In the final step of the elaborated Foss method, I considered the function(s) of the illustration: What is this image doing to viewers? What is this image’s role in the larger historical context? How does this image communicate identity? Did this image offer social constructions that “rang true” to readers’ experience/reality in the 1950s and 1960s?

I Prefer Girls

The first dominant category that I identified, I Prefer Girls, is comprised of covers featuring a single female figure or two figures in close proximity without additional clues as to context. The figures are the most prominent feature of the cover art and the lack of physical context foregrounds them. For instance, in the covers below, the figures are presented to the viewer for explicit consumption, without placement into a scene which is typical of the other cover categories. There is no pretense of accidental, covert observation. On occasion, an item such as a chair or mirror may anchor the figures, as on the cover of *Her Private Hell* (Hastings, 1963; see figure 3). A singular female, naked from the hips up, is pressed against a large rectangular mirror and the image occupies most of the frame without additional environmental cues. More often, the visuals seem to float within the frame. Lilyan Brock’s *Queer Patterns* (1951; see figure 4) portrays two female figures standing back-to-back with flames surrounding them, and on the cover of *Amanda* (Christian, 1965; see figure 5) two female figures are enveloped in an impressionistic fog. Covers

featuring female homosexuals without a physical environment suggest that the prospect of lesbianism in and of itself was enough to attract curious readers. The depiction of women independent of context also serves to highlight the positioning of lesbianism as unnatural and odd in popular discourse.

The covers often feature a low-key, high contrast lighting style, a matte finish, and large, prominent text. At times, figures are presented from close range, intimate views, as on the cover of *Lend-A-Lover* (Mallen, 1966; see figure 6), which features the profiles of two women kissing. In the same close-up range, other covers present the head and shoulders of a figure paired with a single figure in the foreground or, paradoxically, sharing the same space. An example of this strange configuration is the artwork for *Perfume Affair* (Hill, 1962; see figure 7): a nude female with a wide stance, hips cocked to one side, arms up, and her back to the viewer seems to be touching the cheek of a large, disembodied head. The covers of *I Prefer Girls* (Dumont, 1963; see figure 8), *Amanda* (Christian, 1965; see figure 5), *Queer Patterns* (Brock, 1951; see figure 4), and *Her Private Hell* (Hastings, 1963; see figure 3) utilize a medium to medium-long range view that is employed frequently in this category.



Figure 3
Hastings, M. (1963).



Figure 4
Brock, L. (1951).

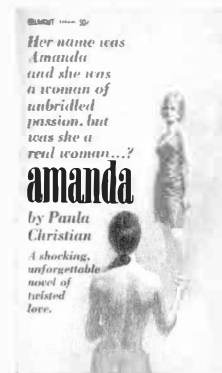


Figure 5
Christian, P. (1965)



Figure 6
Mallen, O. (1966).



Figure 7
Hill, W. I. (1963).

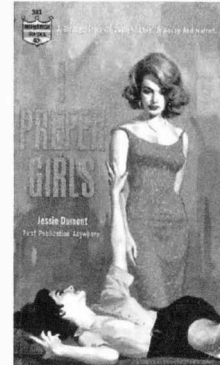


Figure 8
Dumont, J. (1963).

First Person 3rd Sex (Britain, 1959; see figures 9 and 10) has a cover that is representative of the I Prefer Girls category, as it features an intimate focus on female figures in the absence of details of environment; low-key lighting; and desaturated colors. It is the story of a young, naïve schoolteacher who falls in love with her female roommate. The two begin an affair that is ruined that is ruined by the roommate's inability to control her bisexual tendencies; after being introduced to lesbian sex, she pursues both men and women indiscriminately. Recommended by Barbara Grier (as Gene Damon) in the *Ladder*'s publication of a list of lesbian literature, it was rated "A**" for its relatively sensitive treatment of lesbianism (1975, p. 18). This mindfulness, however, did not protect the novel from being treated as a virile adventure by the United States Postal Service (USPS). They found it and seventeen other Newsstand Library titles to be obscene and, hence, nonmailable in 1960. The decision of the Hearing Examiner referred specifically to the publisher's presentation of the material; it claimed that *First Person 3rd Sex* and other novels identified as obscene

[deal] with sexual intercourse of a nature and in a manner well calculated to arouse considerable prurient interest; [lack] literary merit or other socially redeeming qualities so as to offset significantly the strong appeal to prurient interest; and, of most importance to this research, [contain] pictures on the front cover and excerpts on the rear cover well-designed to heighten, and commercially exploit, the appeal to prurient interest (Messitte, 1960).

First printed by Newsstand Library in 1959, the title was later changed to *Strumpet's Jungle* and re-released by the Dollar Book company in 1962 (Grier, 1975, p. 18), probably due to the legal difficulties faced by Newsstand.

In addition to the 1960 decision by the USPS to cease mail deliveries of Newsstand books, the company was targeted by the Chicago police; the editor was arrested and subsequently fined under a newly enacted city ordinance regarding obscene publications. The judge found the books to violate the standards set, stating,

It is replete with acts of perversion, incest, and sexual orgies. Its total impact is an appeal to a prurient, lewd and lascivious mind. It definitely violates community standards and is outside the area of the federal and state Constitutional provisions for protection of free speech and press ("Book Obscene," 1960).

Newsstand Library stopped publishing the line of thirty-five books found to be obscene and transitioned to comic and joke books.

The relationship between the author of *First Person 3rd Sex*, Elaine Williams (as Sloane Britain), and Newsstand Library publishing is unclear. Williams was the first editor at Midwood-Tower, one of the top pulp fiction publishers, and wrote several titles for their booklines including *That Other Hunger* (1961), *These Curious Pleasures* (1961), *Ladder of Flesh* (1962), and *Insatiable* (1963). It seems unlikely that there was a formal arrangement between the publishers as Newsstand Library was

not a subsidiary. Furthermore, Williams' treatment of lesbianism in her novels was not consistent. In *These Curious Pleasures* (1962), the novel's main lesbian character asks her female love interest to see if a reservation is available on her flight to the coast, which was the equivalent of proposing marriage (Forrest, 2005, xv). However, *That Other Hunger*'s narrative closely adheres to the norms for "virile adventure" lesbian pulps, focusing on rampant drug use, forced prostitution and vivid descriptions of sexual acts among the characters. Williams died under mysterious circumstances in 1964; Midtown-Tower pulp writer Gilbert Fox, in a 2008 interview with collector Lynn Munroe, claimed that Williams' family refused to accept the fact that she was a lesbian, and, as a result, she committed suicide. Outside of a list of novels written by Williams, details about her professional or personal life are mostly inaccessible. However, more is known about the prolific illustrator of the cover, Robert Bonfils.

According to the artist's website, Bonfils (2004) started illustrating commercially in Chicago in the mid-1950s. When creating cover art for pulps, he worked primarily for Hamlin, which published Nightstand Books, Leisure Books, Adult Books, and Candid Readers, and also for other Chicagoland publishers such as Merit Books and Newsstand Library. Bonfil's colleague, Greenleaf editor Earl Kemp, said of the artist, "At our peak, we were producing 50 paperback novels every month and one skin magazine every day. It is hard to imagine that today...producing 50 novels a month, painting 50 cover paintings a month" (Kemp, 2004). Bonfils is responsible for over a thousand pulp cover illustrations and his work can be found in

all five categories. for its finely wrought, yet impressionistic representation of its subjects.

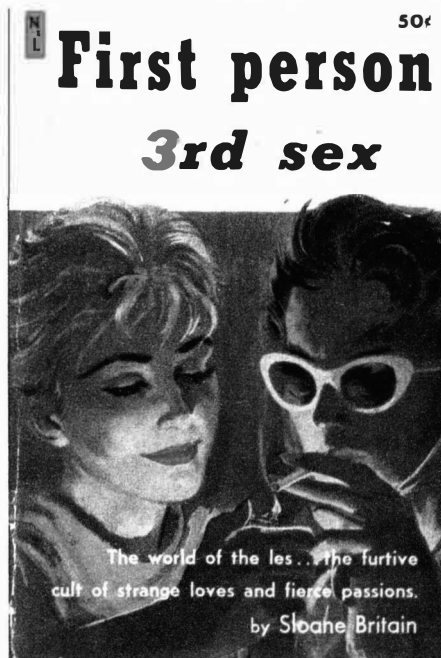


Figure 9

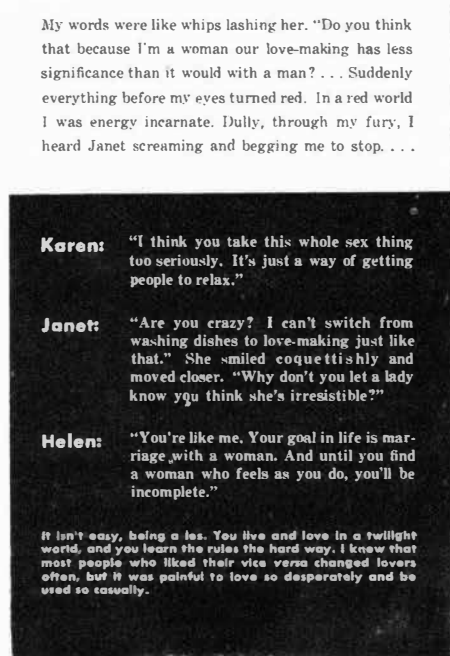


Figure 10

The most predatory of all the sexes, the lesbian competes for her mate against men, against women, and against social convention. Karen, a sumptuous young schoolteacher, charts her own course towards happiness through a dangerous no-man's-land of illicit love in this shocking account of sensuous, Sapphic passion. Who knows which beautiful women in our midst secretly may be lesbians? Can any unsuspecting young girl remain safe from their unwholesome advances? (Britain, 1959, inside cover)

On the cover of *First Person: 3rd Sex* (Britain, 1959), readers are presented with an intimate view of two women as one leans toward the other to light her cigarette. The illumination in the frame appears to come the flame of the cigarette lighter, a single below-eye-level source held close to the faces of the figures, creating high-contrast, fast falloff that emphasizes their otherworldliness. A background of

ashy grays and black envelopes the two figures pressed close in the night framed in a medium close-up. The depth of the shadows and cover of darkness veils the subjects, implying their invisibility and an intimate yet insular relationship between them. The use of light in this manner intensifies the images and the figures appear suspicious, secretive, and preternatural. Dark and grainy, the shadows cast seem to predict the bad end of one or both of the figures in the narrative that follows.

The high-contrast, fast falloff area illuminated by the lighter and cigarette does not extend across the full frame. Elsewhere, soft edges differentiate the figures from the background and from each other, the boundaries of the women's bodies often blurring. The lack of distinctive and easily discernible borders amplifies the impression of depth and suggests that the clandestine pair represents a much larger network of "strange loves." Furthermore, the absence of hard boundaries insinuates the unhealthy enmeshment of the two entities. Mirroring the title and subtext of the cover, "The world of the les ... the furtive cult of strange loves and fierce passions," the visuals allude to the secrecy, deviance, and incongruity of the "3rd sex." Together, lighting, edging, and the darkness of the background signify the "otherness" of the figures.

Augmented by soft lines and undifferentiated boundaries, the dichromatic color palette reinforces the sense of an unnatural connection between the figures. Illuminated by the flame that signifies their unnatural connection, the women have a cold, sickly pallor; their desaturated skin tone intensifies the crimson repeated in their hair, lips, clothing, fingernails, the flame of the lighter, and the lit end of a cigarette.

The bright, deep blue-red is muted and resembles the color of blood, both denaturalizing the figures' femininity and heightening their sexuality. In addition, the repetitive use of the colors constructs sameness; both figures are the "3rd sex."

The structuring of the visual elements is largely symmetrical, with balanced color and composition. The figures are depicted as roughly the same size, and their relative "weight" within the frame is similar. Neither figure occupies the dominant "above" or subordinate "below" positions in regard to each other. However, a large light off-white and pinkish rectangle showcasing the title occupies a third of the frame, constraining the figures. Providing no headroom, it fixes the figures for inspection by the viewer. The limited use of color provides consistency between the coloring of the figures' hair, skin and clothing, further implying an unnatural connection and emotional dependence between the two women.

The figures are presented from a close up view of the couple's heads and shoulders. The viewer is near them, close enough to be a participant but peering up from a slightly low angle position. As the darkness invokes invisibility for the figures, so it does for the viewer. It is as if the viewer is shrouded in the darkness, a close observer of the women. Surveillance makes visible what is hidden, thrusting the viewer into a masculine and thereby heterosexual subject position through the citation of existing conventions of the female figure as passive/object. This gawking does more than pander to prurient impulses; the figures, visual prey, interpellate the viewer, calling into being straight sexual subjects. The figures are presented are both

victim and aggressor, a reflection of the popular conceptualization of lesbianism as psychopathological and criminal (Nealon, 2001).

These women, twilight lovers, appear sallow, anemic, vampiric. Stark white sunglasses against dark charcoal gray skin obscure the woman on the right. The facial expression of the figure on the left holding the lighter is one of pleasure; she is seducing the other female figure while intimately attacking her. Her gesture of lighting the other's cigarette acts to encircle and entrap the second woman, who appears passive and zombie-like. According to popular culture scholar Grace Giorgio (2007), for over a century, writers have been relating vampirism to "unhealthy" relationships between women. The vampire "[sucks] the psychic life out of their female friends," gaining power through intimate attachment to the victim (p. 7). Bodily ecstasy is experienced both by the lesbian, described as "a dangerous no-man's-land of illicit love . . . sensuous, Sapphic passion" on the inside cover, and the vampire, whose attacks are sexual in nature, restricted to erogenous zones: the neck, arm and breast (p. 20). Like same-sex desire in popular imagination, vampiric desire is obsessive, unnatural, and ignores cultural boundaries.

While the text of the novel was recognized by the *Ladder* as lesbian-friendly, the cover art functions in a manner consistent with the covers of virile adventures, drawing upon and visually reiterating a form of "lesbianism" familiar to the heterosexual viewer and thereby continuing the naturalization of this discourse.

Where the Girls Are

The second—and largest—category, Where the Girls Are, accounts for nearly 40% of the covers surveyed (363 covers). On these covers lesbianism is contextualized; women are situated in identifiable contexts, in a nebulous “lesbian” realm. The wide range of locations represented suggests that the enterprising and in-the-know voyeur could find himself in the company of lesbians nearly anywhere. Thus, the seeming omnipresence of lesbianism panders to both heterosexual male fantasies of universal access to female bodies, at any time and in any context, and fears that lesbianism had penetrated virtually every area of post-World War II society.

In this category, portrayals of female homosexuality both appropriate and oppose mid-twentieth century constructions of femininity. For instance, institutions men are excluded from, such as all-girl schools, dorms (see figure 11), and sororities are depicted as hot-beds of lesbian activity. Cells of lesbians in these environments prey on “weak women ... bent on seducing the innocent” (Bérubé & D’Emilio, 1984, 760). Bedroom, dining rooms, bathrooms, and decks in the suburban home (the heart of mid-twentieth century domesticity) are also presented as lesbian playgrounds (44%, 161 covers). As discussed earlier, men returned to the civilian jobs women had filled after World War II while women reinhabited the domestic sphere. The covers featuring the suburban home suggest that lesbianism was what women did with the “leisure time” (see figures 12 and 13) afforded to them by labor-saving home appliances while the men were at work.

Lesbians who are not found in feminine domains are often placed on the job (29%, 105 covers) as beauticians, servants, artists, medical staff (especially nurses), office workers, military personnel, and strippers/prostitutes. The artwork for *Nurses Quarters* (Morrell, 1960; see figure 14) presents the occupation as an all-female environment contaminated by the integration of lesbians into the lives of “Young Women Who Live in Close Proximity . . . and Closer Intimacy!” This cover is also an interesting example of the construction of whiteness, the starched white uniform and fair-skinned figures serving as symbols of purity denigrated by female homosexuality. The attribution of lesbianism to gender dysfunction, a popular argument in the 1950s and 1960s, is also apparent on workplace covers: “office lesbians” are often positioned as masculine or “butch” personas contained within nominally female bodies that invade and pervert male space. For instance, in Tony Trelos’s pulp *Lesbian Starlet* (1964, see figure 15), the female boss, her position visually communicated through her orientation in the frame and placement behind a huge, heavy wooden desk, is mannish in appearance with shortly cropped hair and a formal suit jacket and bow tie. She remains fully clothed as a female subordinate undresses before her. In addition, a significant number of covers are situated in the out-of-doors (13.5%, 49 covers), i.e. on the beach; in streams, fields, and meadows (see *I am a Lesbian*, Sela, 1958; figure 16); and at sex resorts. The preoccupation with lesbianism in the outdoors reflects the growing societal concern about the increasing visibility of gays and lesbians and the liberation movement. Again, on the cover of *I*

am a Lesbian (Sela, 1958), one female figure is butch; her orientation in the frame indicates her power over the other, more feminine, female figure.

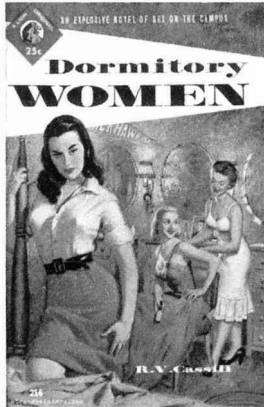


Figure 11
Cassill, R. V. (1954).

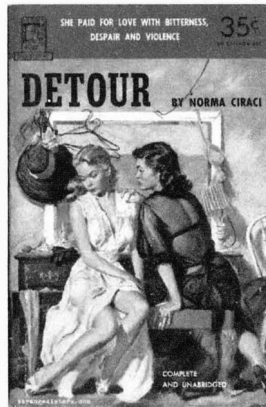


Figure 12
Ciraci, N. (1952).



Figure 13
Russo, P. V. (1963).



Figure 14
Morell, L. (1960).



Figure 15
Trellos, T. (1964).



Figure 16
Sela, L. (1958).

The women who appear on these covers are both fetishized and disciplined for their noncompliance with heteronormative standards, but, perhaps more importantly, Where the Girls Are covers make a visual argument for the ubiquity of lesbian activities; they can, and apparently do, take place anywhere, not merely in isolated “female” spaces. Within each context, however, women’s bodies, whether implicitly or explicitly engaged in same-sex loving, are presented for the scrutiny—and titillation—of the male viewer. Thus, these varied locations do not expand the

freedom and territory of lesbians; rather they suggest, rather paradoxically, both the rapid spread of the lesbian “contagion” and the concomitant increase in the number of potential pleasure zone(s) for voyeuristic heterosexual males.

Queer Beach (Swenson, 1964b; see figure 19) is an apt example of the Where the Girls Are category. The cover art situates lesbianism in the public sphere, at the beach; masculinizes one of the female figures; is covertly voyeuristic; and reiterates the idea of the expansive and corrupting power of lesbian seduction. The novel was published by American Art Enterprises, the parent company of Brandon House publishing, which was founded in the late 1950s by Milton Luros, a graphic artist turned girlie-magazine and pulp entrepreneur. Two separate booklines, Brandon House Library Editions, which offered erotic classics with high production values, and Essex House, which published contemporary erotica and sexual fantasy, were also established. By 1964, the business had grown to include a printing plant, an extensive distribution network, and over fifty different magazine titles. Hundreds of pulp novels were published. In 1976, the company was sold to pornographer Reuben Sturman, who reprinted the novels with new titles and covers under more than a dozen separate booklines. The reprints and a few new texts sold thousands of copies. Popular authors for the Brandon House Library Editions series included Richard E. Geiss, *Queer Beach* (1964), *Man for Hire* (1968); Andrew J. Offutt as “John Cleve,” *Fruit of the Loins* (1970), *The Juice of Love* (1970); Samuel Merwin, Jr. as “Stanley Curson” and “Jerry Crowell,” *Lesbian Sin Song* (1963), *Executive Lesbian* (1965); and others. While information regarding the sales of *Queer Beach* (Swenson, 1964b)

are unavailable, the context of its publication suggests that it was widely distributed, popular, and profitable.

Both the author of the novel and the illustrator of the cover art were prolific producers for and well known within the pulp industry. The author, Richard E. Geis, used the pseudonyms of both Peggy Swanson and Peggy Swenson, probably due to a typo on one of his covers (Zimet, 1999, p. 149). He also wrote novels under the monikers of Robert N. Owen, Frederick Colson, and Richard Elliott. Geis authored over 60 original pulp paperbacks and now writes science fiction, publishing his work in fanzines and amateur magazines such as *The Science Fiction Review* and *Taboo Science Fiction*. The artist of many Brandon House covers, including *Queer Beach*, was only recently identified by Ryan Richardson (of www.strangesisters.com, the database from which the covers for this research were drawn) as Fred Fixler. Despite extensive research by collectors, until 2005 the illustrator of this cover and many others was known simply as “TAWCE,” an acronym for *The Artist We Call Elaine*, based on a few covers by Elaine Duillo which were similar in style and from another publisher. A former editor, Brian Kirby, verified that Duillo did not work at Brandon House and supplied Richardson with the names of those who did. Working through the list, Richardson felt sure the work belonged to Fixler. In his search for the artist, he corresponded with a former student of Fixler’s, recounting their exchange for the online fanzine, *e*l*19* (*e*l*19* was founded by Earl Kemp, pulp editor, as preparation for publishing his memoirs):

“Fred used to tell us stories about these covers he painted for some underground studio. He said the police would raid them often. They

would come through the front door and all the artists would run out the back door avoiding capture. He never told us what covers they were or their subject matter. In fact he never signed them; I think if he did he used an assumed name . . . If I were told Fred did these two covers I would have no doubt in my mind. I have seen at least a hundred of his paintings and am 90% sure he did these . . . I know Fred would be very angry if I asked him about it. I know it doesn't answer the most frequently asked question, but Fred would be the only one to do that. I can guarantee he will not even talk about this" (Richardson, 2005).

His reticence may be due to legal troubles surrounding his involvement with Brandon House. In 1975, Fixler, then the Art Director and in charge of all photo shoots, and photographer Lee Utterback were placed on five years probation and fined \$7,500 and \$1,500 for hiring a 14-year-old girl to pose for magazine photos ("2 Men Given Probation," 1975). In 1976, Fixler and another photographer for American Art Enterprises were convicted of pandering and the judgment upheld on appeal.³ The cover of *Queer Beach* (Swenson, 1964b) is characteristic of Fixler's "distinct gouache [opaque watercolor] style and [specialization] in pretty girls" (Richardson, 2005). Two examples of lesbian cover art by Fixler in this style are below; *Lesbian Gym* (Swenson, 1964a; see figure 17) and *Suzy and Vera* (Swenson, 1964c; see figure 18), both penned by Richard E. Geiss.



Figure 17



Figure 18

³ People v. Fixler, 56 Cal.App.3d 321, 128 Cal.Rptr. 363 (1976)

As with most paperbacks, the cover of *Queer Beach* (Swenson, 1964; see figure 19) is a vertically oriented frame. The title of this novel is announced at the top in a large transitional serif font, black, all in capitals and shadowed in red. The red contrasts boldly with the dark print and the letters stretch across the top quarter of the frame, implying sin or corruption. The author's name is in much smaller sans-serif typeface, suggesting that he/she is incidental to the production of this book or its enjoyment. While "Peggy Swenson" would be known to habitual readers of lesbian pulp fiction, this is not a literary property produced by a well-known personage; it is a book about LESBIANISM.

The top half of the cover is sparingly composed, with only its bland background and the striking text announcing the subject matter of the book. The bland, sepia-toned sand and the open beach space may function in several ways. They may imply the widespread nature of the behavior documented in the novel, or the homogeneity of the larger population and its heterosexual practices—and the vivid transgression that lesbianism represents. The empty sand may also suggest that there is "open" space in the lesbian lifestyle; i.e., it is ready to accommodate new recruits. In addition, it may serve to isolate and privatize the behavior of the two women on the cover. They are presumably at a public beach (the perspective of the cover is as if the viewer is standing on the beach watching and the title suggests a gathering place for lesbian activities), yet others are not visible in the frame and the couple pictured is separated from the rest of the world by a sea of sand.

The segue between the title space and the lower area of the frame occupied by the two women is teaser text in the same serif font style as the title, but not all capitalized and in smaller font size than the author's name. The teaser text declares, "It is like a beautiful spider's web: waiting to lure innocent strangers into the perverted world from which there is no escape!" This text explicitly employs the trope of a spider web to represent the lesbian lifestyle, yet the visual elements of the cover make a very different argument, or at least imply that the fly is a very willing victim of the spider.

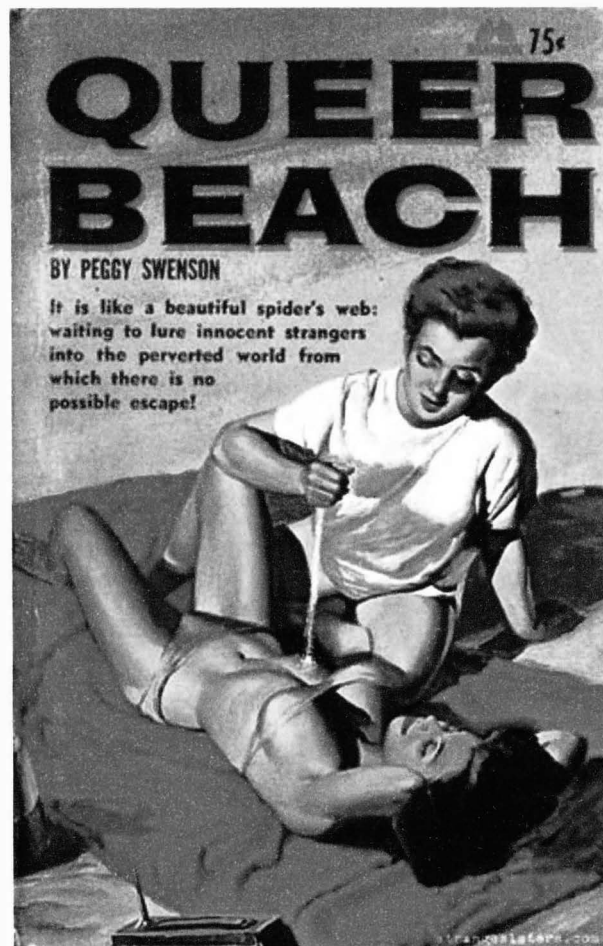


Figure 19
Swenson, P. (1964).

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In the illustration, two young women lounge on the beach. The first woman, is sitting up, trickling sand onto the taut stomach of her companion. She seems "butch," as she is dressed in a man's white tee shirt and sporting short, red hair. She is higher in the frame, and looms over her reclining companion, the "femme." The color of her hair connects her with the "sin" of the red-outlined title and the red of the blanket on which they sit. Neither of the women looks directly at the reader; they are engaged with one another. The butch looks intently at the femme, whose eyes are closed as she revels in the sensation of the sand falling upon her stomach. This is another indication of the butch's dominance in the frame (and in the relationship between the two women).

Compositionally, our eyes are drawn from the femme to the butch. The femme is arranged diagonally in the frame as she reclines on the red blanket, her head near the lower right corner of the frame. As Herbert Zettl (1998) and other media aestheticians have argued, in a culture that reads from left to right, a diagonal from

upper left to lower right pulls our eyes downward and to the right. Further, our eyes tend to linger on the right side of any image; thus, the subject on the right side of the frame tends to be the dominant one. Our eyes slide down the femme's body, taking in her femininity (she is curvaceous and wearing a bikini) and her open, submissive posture (her legs are splayed and her arms are behind her head). We linger on the right side of the image, our eyes pulled toward the bright white shirt and striking red hair of the butch. In general, the lower half of the cover, which is compositionally dense in comparison to the starkly composed upper area, is the center of our attention. The large size of the figures and their closeness to the edge of the frame suggest not only their centrality to the lesbian narrative, but may hint at the fact that they are "trapped" in their lifestyle, the frame edges leaving them no escape route. Even though the top half of the frame is occupied solely by sand and text, the title of the novel, positioned as it is above the two characters, seems to confine them to the "queer" space that they occupy. Their physical attitude suggests that they are in no hurry to escape, but the fact of their compositional confinement may imply that the lesbian lifestyle, once sampled, can never be discarded.

The use of a masculine butch and feminine femme coupling visually reiterates expressions of sexuality that 1950s and 1960s readers were familiar with, further naturalizing the images - the butch as the aggressor lesbian and the femme as a misguided and willing victim. The viewer is placed into a masculine subject position, something Richardson intuited when he doubted the voracity of collectors' claims that Elaine Duillo illustrated the covers: "To me, there was a heavy dose of the 'male

gaze' in the artwork . . . it was hard to believe a woman was responsible” (Richardson, 2005). As the research of Yvonne Keller suggests, surveillance and voyeurism are employed, constructing lesbian selves as deviant, sinful, and outside of the mainstream in order to support the existing heteronormative power structure.

Girls Gone Wild

In the third and final dominant category, Girls Gone Wild, the artwork is characterized by debauched acts and immorality, extending the contextualization of lesbianism in *Where the Girls Are* to an explicit link with predatory behavior that negotiates the tension between disgust and arousal (29.5%, 272 covers) that characterized mainstream attitudes toward lesbianism in the 1950s and 1960s. On these covers, lesbianism is equated with marginal behaviors well outside heterosexual norms of the period, from the mildly scandalous (gambling and motorcycle gangs) to the outlandish (futuristic worlds without men and undersea lesbianism) and the socially transgressive (interracial relationships, paganism/witchcraft/Satanism, BDSM [sexual behaviors involving bondage & discipline, domination & submission, and/or sadism & masochism], incarceration, orgies and nymphomania, incest, and murder). Most commonly, the covers in this category portray swinging/orgies (29.4%, 80 covers) and BDSM (22%, 60 covers). To a considerable extent, the artwork depicts multiple themes (18%, 50 covers). For example, Bud Conway's *Three's a Crowd* (1964; see figure 20), mixes a violent sexual crime against women (three women are in the process of raping a fourth) with the familiar swinging/orgies trope, simultaneously attracting and repelling viewers. On the cover of *Leather* (Shaw,

1968; see figure 21), a leather-clad female figure is standing over a chained female inmate, whip in hand, rendering both a prison and BDSM scene. Interestingly, prior to the time of *Leather's* publication (throughout the 1950s until the 1960s), premarital activity with the exceptions of solitary masturbation and nocturnal emission were contrary to the law, thereby technically illegal, and the incarceration of sexual deviants was common (Pomeroy, 1972, p. 209).

Depictions of incestuous relationships, most often between stepdaughters/stepmothers and between sisters, are common, accounting for ten percent of *Girls Gone Wild* covers (or a total number of 27). The images and text of *Lesbian Twins* (Peters, 1962; see figure 22) projects a dichotomy of revulsion and titillation through the exchange of glances between husband and wife accompanied by the language, "Obedient to Mom's insistence, Hilda started upstairs to join Jane for a nap. Jealously stabbed at Bill's heart as the ugly visions multiplied in his brain" (front cover). In this example, the mother is pushing her daughters toward incest/lesbianism. Lesbians threaten the stability of the nuclear family, challenging the patriarch's access to and control of female bodies. Danger accompanies lesbians in the home, women who refuse to honor or acknowledge familial boundaries.

These tensions are reiterated on the covers of *How Dark My Love* (Michaels, 1965; see figure 23), *sex every witch way* (Worth, 1967; see figure 24), and *Bitter Love* (King, 1959; see figure 25). The interracial romantic relationship between a white and black women is the focus of *How Dark My Love*. Miscegenation was taboo (and illegal in some states) and the combination of it and a sexual relationship

between women doubly so. Witchery and lesbianism coincide with racial overtones in the artwork of *sex every witch way*. While there are real and obvious differences between witchcraft, paganism and Satanism, such a distinction is not made on the covers, where the subjects are treated interchangeably. Though the female figures are white, the walls are decorated with “African” masks, connecting both race and paganism with same-sex attraction. Finally, the passions of lesbianism result in murder in the novel *Bitter Love*. Again, repugnance elicited by culturally immoral and illicit behaviors is juxtaposed with eroticism.

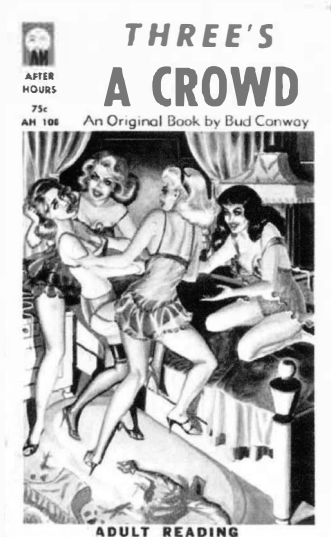


Figure 20
Conway, B. (1964).

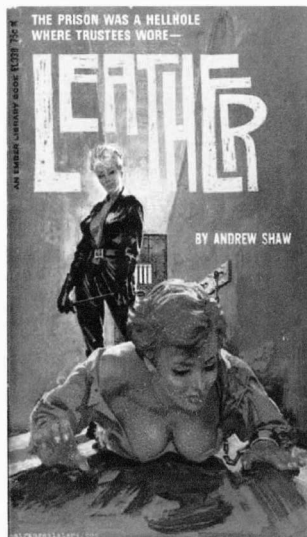


Figure 21
Shaw, A. (1968).

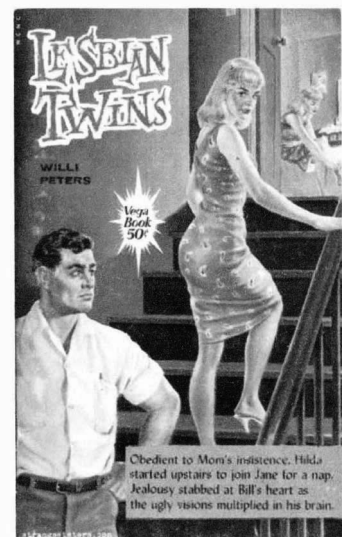


Figure 22
Peters, W. (1962).

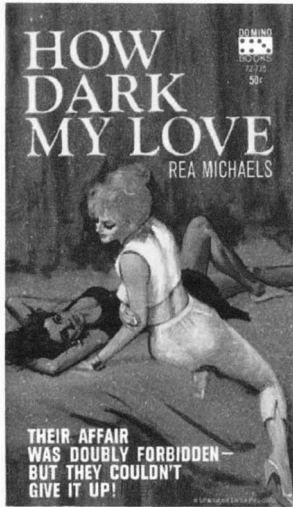


Figure 23
Michaels, R. (1965).

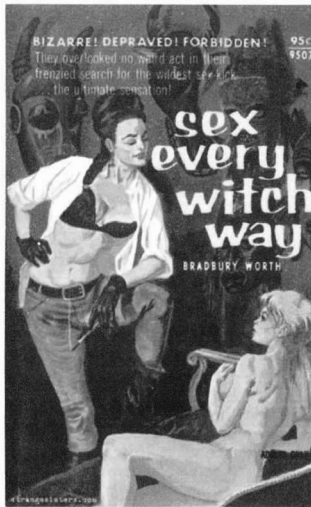


Figure 24
Worth, B. (1967).

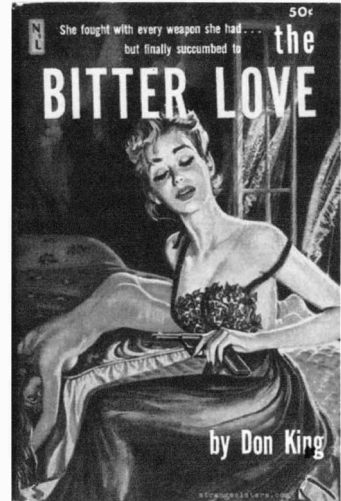


Figure 25
King, D. (1959).

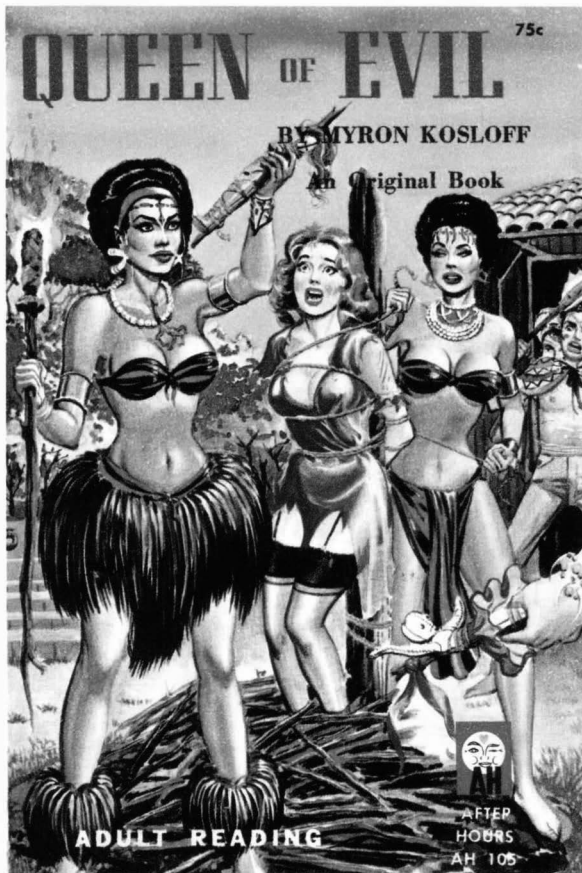


Figure 26
Kosloff, M. (1964).

QUEEN of EVIL by Myron Kosloff

THE PASSION OF VOODOO JUNGLES . . .

. . . In the midst of black magic where love potions, sex rites, fertility dances and a strange DEVIL WORSHIP rules over Haiti, comes beautiful Mitzi Turner, with hopes of finding a mysterious tribe. Instead, she becomes involved with domineering, powerful Laura Dixon, regarded as a Queen of Evil, believed to be the secret Voodoo Queen. In jungles as raw as the passions and perversions of its natives, sadism is a virtue. Forbidden dances with snakes. Lesbian loves on a plantation. Brutality rules supreme. A web of evil.

BLACK MAGIC . . . SEX . . . DEVIL LOVE

ANOTHER ORIGINAL AFTER HOURS BOOK

Figure 27

The cover of the 1964 novel *Queen of Evil* (Kosloff), is representative of this category, as it depicts several themes typical of *Girls Gone Wild*: interracial relationships, witchcraft/ paganism/Satanism, bondage, and violence. This pulp is from the After Hours book series, a bookline that was also published and distributed with First Neters, Wee Hours, and Unique Books, primarily in the eastern United States in mainstream venues such as newsstands and drug stores (After Hours Books, 2008). The novel explores the fictional Haitian island of “Bon Repos” and the relationships between the voodoo-practicing natives and the whites who have colonized the island. The cover art bears little relationship to the narrative, which is complicated, disconnected, and sloppy. Characters include a former German physician with the Third Reich responsible for the deaths of “numerous” Jews during World War II (Kosloff, 1964, p. 14); a Jewish teenager he enslaved in a prison camp who, years later, passes as a white woman on the island and is also “the Queen of Evil, believed to be the secret Voodoo Queen” (back cover); a young native woman who is betrothed to the high priest, valued for her virginity and yet highly promiscuous with each of the white main characters; a young, white woman from the southwestern United States searching for her father who vanished during an expedition; and many others.

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Difficult to follow, the narrative moves from interracial lesbian sex to flagellation to the rape of a man by a woman with little in the way of plot to connect the scenes. The depiction of the “Haitian religion of voodoo” is presented as anthropological research: “There are many gods in the voodoo religion. Like other religions, each god has its special domain. One god rules over the oceans, rivers, travel. Another, Guede Ribo, rules over the dead and the other world” (p. 107). These descriptions are interspersed with language that recalls the rites and rituals of Catholicism, “The difficult requirements for priesthood is [sic] responsible. A

candidate has to be letter perfect in the sequence of the complicated ritual prayers and hymns” (p. 108). A collector describes the writing of Paul Hugo Little (a.k.a Myron Kosloff) as “distinguishable for [its] attention to historical detail and imaginative [Bondage and discipline/Domination and submission/Sadomasochism] BDSM scenarios . . . high caliber of writing and recommended” (Paul Hugo Little, 2008). I found little in this novel that would support such an assertion. It read like an exercise in free association and I suspect that it was typed as quickly as possible with little or no editing.

The work of the cover illustrator, Eric Stanton, is easily recognizable. A cartoonist, his illustrations feature dominant women with pointed, exaggerated breasts often accompanied by a shamed submissive male (see figures 28 and 29). On occasion, the inverse is portrayed (see figure 30). Stanton began by drawing “scantily-clad heroines on his fellow sailors’ handkerchiefs” while serving in the U.S. Navy. In the early 1950s, he pitched his artistic talent to Irving Klaw, a producer and photographer of fetish material, saying, “I can draw much better than most of your artists” (Stanton, 1996, p. 3). Klaw published and distributed Stanton’s first comic book and continued to support him as his signature style developed. From 1958 to 1966, Stanton lived with Steve Ditko, the famed Spiderman illustrator, who often hand-colored his work for erotic magazines and novels. In the late 1960s, Stanton began self publishing, creating fetish art customized for the consumer and available via mail-order (Stanton, 1996).



Figure 28
Illustration used for lesbian pulp novel *No Man's Land* (Sawyer, no year)



Figure 29
Illustration used for lesbian pulp novel *Female Tyrant* (Kosloff, 1967)



Figure 30.
Eric Kroll's (Ed.) *Eric Stanton: For the Man Who Knows His Place*

The author's and illustrator's penchant for BDSM is reflected both in the narrative of the text and in the cover art. While the cover does not present a narrative event—there is no execution of a white woman by a black priestess and voodoo followers in the novel—it does convey the subject matter: lesbianism, (hereto and

homo) interracial sex, BDSM, life-threatening violence, and voodoo. The frame is vertically oriented and is compositionally dense. The text nearly disappears into the illustration, the title relegated to the uppermost seven-eighths of an inch and aligned to the left. "QUEEN OF EVIL" is in all caps and printed in a red-violet color that is not repeated elsewhere on the cover. Against the orange-red-yellow backdrop, the title's bold, saturated hue contrasts well against the light background. The color choices are significant since covers were then produced by a complicated process of color separations and most other covers have a much more limited range of color making this example a more "deluxe" production. The author's name is printed in black below the title, is completely capitalized, and is placed over the illustration. The logo of the publishing company is small, less than half an inch wide and long, and is not easily discerned against the illustration. The placement and design of the text indicate its relative insignificance; the focus is upon the illustration itself. Eric Stanton's illustrations were well-known and popular; his fetish art would have been recognized by readers and would certainly have been a selling point for the novel.

Though the sky indicates evening sunset, the lack of shadows in the illustration implies a high-noon sun. Ordinarily a sunset would represent romanticism and passion; here, however, the atmosphere is perverted by the display of inappropriate gender and racial behaviors. Bright light floods the illustration, appearing to lessen the saturation of the intense colors. The use of high noon sunlight during sunset suggests damnation; there is no relief from the elements and unending exposure to the sun illuminates unnatural, depraved activity. Vibrant reds and deep

purple unify figures in allegiance with the voodoo queen; a pale bluish gray is used for clothing on white figures and the altar in the background, while deep greens represent the jungle and grass. The illustration high level of compositional density, from the headdresses of the female figures to the individual rendering of sticks of kindling and blades of grass. The frame is busy, offering minute details for examination.

Three female figures dominate the cover; they are framed in the cinematic equivalent of a long shot, with their entire bodies present for our inspection. A single hand holding a voodoo doll is in the foreground, while the background features three men standing inside an open shelter, an altar, and the jungle. What strikes the eye first is the tallest female figure on the left, a striking relatively light-skinned black woman. She holds a voodoo doll wrapped in blue fabric and red hair forward and above her head with her left hand, her eyes steadily fixed on it, and in her right is a lit torch. She has a wide-legged masculine stance; both of her feet are planted firmly on the ground and her facial expression is one of complete control. Overtly sexualized, she has red full lips, exaggerated breasts, a narrow waist, and a wide grass skirt which emphasizes the roundness of her hips, thereby implying fertility. This first woman is dressed in “primitive” garb, bright red, deep purple and feathered, a chicken claw attached to her necklace resting between her breasts. This portrayal reiterates the stereotype of the innately promiscuous and sexually aggressive black woman while also reinforcing the belief that superstitious “primitive” peoples are intuitively connected to the spiritual world. On the right side of the frame is a similar but smaller woman who is also

dressed as a “native,” in bright red and deep purple. In an indication of her position as a lower status female, however, she does not wear a large grass skirt but is covered by a loincloth instead.

In the center of the frame, between the two light-complected black female figures and shorter than either, is a white woman, bound to a stake and restrained by the native woman on the right, who holds the rope with which she is tied. The ordinarily civilized, modest, and, presumably, sexually pure white woman is exposed. The periwinkle dress that would have provided her with a modest covering is torn; her breasts, thighs, and garters are on display. She is terrified: her face is tear stained, a patch of her red hair is missing, and her eyes are fixated on her effigy, held by the first woman. She is vulnerable to the power of voodoo, long presented in American popular culture as “black magic” primarily used for placing hexes on others, as a pseudo-religion that sanctions both human torture and sacrifice (Bartkowski, 1998). In the foreground, another white, female hand holds a second voodoo doll also dressed with material torn from the second woman’s dress, seeming to imply that in the 1950s and 1960s the purity and safety of white women was threatened from all fronts, even by her own kind.

Marginalized by the frame and perspective of the illustration, the three male figures are relegated to the background on the right edge of the frame. The impotence of the white men on the cover may allude to social changes, such as women’s liberation and civil rights, that they are unable to prevent and that threaten their way of life. The cover presents a fragmentary image of the white man who stands in front

of the other two men. The viewer sees only his bulging pants, his hand holding a torch, and his frenzied face decorated with “native” paint. The two others’ faces are barely visible and their bodies are not. This perspective renders the men insignificant, in the distance and far behind the women, contradicting the “natural order.” The men seem to be under a spell cast by the Haitian women and are unable to control their own behavior and therefore are not responsible for their actions. This visual argument harkens to beliefs held about female African slaves in the United States. The slaves were viewed as sexually aberrant and consumed by lustful passions, and their “seductiveness” provided white men justification for their sexual subjugation, up to and including rape (Simms, 2001). While the “natives” are primitive, the shelter that houses the men suggests modernity with its tiled roof and sheet metal siding, equating civilization with whiteness.

In the mid-twentieth century, Haitian culture and heritage permeated black American consciousness. Journalist Paul Delaney reported that Haiti’s “great history of black heroics . . . fits well with the current wave of black awareness in the United States” asserting that “the American black’s quest for racial identity is leading him to Haiti” (Delaney, 1970, XX1). After the 1791-1804 revolution that freed the slaves and destroyed the plantation system, Haiti created a colony of free blacks “in the midst of slave empires, when such freedom was unthinkable” (Mintz, 1971, E6). The *Queen of Evil* visually reiterates popular American cultural beliefs about black and white women, white men, voodoo and Haiti. Lesbianism, while implied on the cover and central to the narrative, is merely reflective of white beliefs regarding African-

American female sexuality, paralleled here with Haitian sexuality. The images focus instead on a larger white male concern, the deterioration of white primacy and power. White male dominance is called into being at the expense of women of color, through the juxtaposition of subordinate white men against a frightening, powerful female “other.” Black women should not be in control of white men and the dissonance experienced as a result functions to bolster white male supremacy. The active, continuous construction of whiteness and “otherness” naturalizes ideologies of race present in these images.

Odd Man Out

Accounting for 8.5% of the lesbian pulps reviewed (78 covers), *Odd Man Out* is a minor category; the title has been borrowed from a Tony Fletcher novel of the same name (1964; see figure 31) in which the voyeurism implied by all the covers in this category is made explicit. The subjugating gaze is embodied by a male figure on each cover. *Odd Man Out* covers emphasize the position of men in the lesbian dynamic. For instance, the male presented on the cover of *Odd Man Out* (Fletcher, 1964; see figure 31) cowers, sucking his thumb, behind the two female figures. One need not be trained as a psychoanalyst to recognize the reference to Freud’s Oedipus complex, popularized in the 1950s and 1960s by mass media discussions/representations. Freud argued that young children feel sexual desire for the parent of the opposite sex at the same time that they desire the death of the same-sex parent. Gender roles and identities develop after the successful resolution of the Oedipus complex (Budd & Rusbridger, 2005). Due to the psychological stress of

witnessing a lesbian coupling, the male on the *Odd Man Out* (Fletcher, 1964) cover has regressed to his childhood (represented by the thumb sucking, which also provides autoerotic satisfaction) and is unable to fulfill his role as a man. Expressions of male impotence are common throughout the cover art in this category.

The man who is featured on *The Price of Salt* (Morgan, 1953, see figure 32) is relegated to the background – a small, unnoticed, and tortured observer next to the oversized women who dominate the frame. The use of light (he is enshrouded in shadows), his physical positioning (a wide-legged stance, right arm reaching forward with his left behind him, evoking images of Frankenstein’s monster) and environment (while the female figures are either seated or standing by a couch, he is next to the large craggy boulders of a mountain) further demonstrate his insignificance. The facial expression of the seated, feminine woman is one of mild puzzlement;



Figure 31
Fletcher, T. (1964).

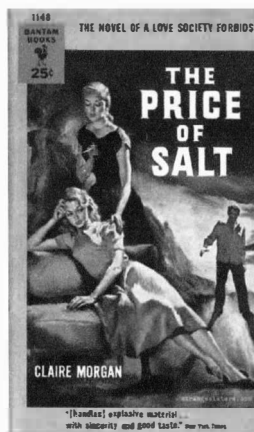


Figure 32
Morgan, C. (1953).



Figure 33
Wilhelm, G. (1953).



Figure 34
Long, M. (1950).

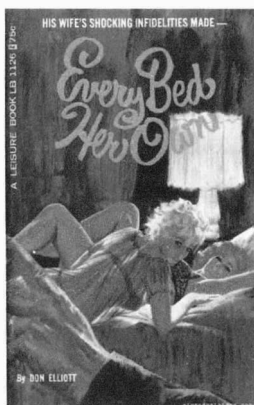


Figure 35
Elliot, D. (1966).



Figure 36
Harris, F. G. (1965).

she is looking over her shoulder as if she has forgotten something she cannot quite remember. Again, when confronted with same-sex attraction between women the male is reduced to child-like dependence and anguish. The same is true of the artwork on the cover of *The Strange Path* (Wilhelm, 1953; see figure 33); the man in the foreground is experiencing severe anguish while the femme blithely ignores him.

Other artwork in this category features men who are not yet tortured because they are not quite sure of the relationship between the women who are proximate to them. On the cover of *Louisville Saturday* (Long, 1950, see figure 34) the uniformed male has an awkward expression of surprise and suspicion, as if he has chanced upon a scene that is “not quite right.” Many of the covers in this category suggest that close bonds of female friendship are sinister and unnatural, serving to reiterate the male right and responsibility to engage in continual surveillance of women and to remind the female viewer that, as a woman, she may be watched at any time.

On *Every Bed Her Own* (Elliot, 1966; see figure 35) and *Frustrations of Judy* (Harris, 1965; see 36), innuendo is replaced by direct male observance of lesbian sexual activities. On these covers, women are accidentally caught by a

husband/boyfriend/male passerby as they have sex with another woman. Often the artwork places the viewer in the first person, such as in *Every Bed Her Own* (Elliot, 1996) where the male hand resting on the door, wedding band prominently displayed, seems to belong to the viewer. *The Frustrations of Judy* (Harris, 1965) renders the male in full, dressed for work and smoking a cigarette that hangs limply from the man's lip like a flaccid penis. The implication is that witnessing a lesbian act robs him of his potency. These covers also reiterate paradoxical attitudes toward the prospect of lesbianism in the home: it was both repugnant and erotic.

The cover art of *The Fear and the Guilt* (Shaw, 1954; see figures 38 and 39) exemplifies the elements of the Odd Man Out category, including the juxtaposition of heterosexuality and homosexuality through a marginalized male figure, the antipathy of a femme, and the use of a prominent phallic symbol. Much of this is presented with selective lighting. The foreground, occupied by two young women in close proximity to one another, and nearly all of the cover, is dominated by shadows, with only a small section of the frame illuminated by natural light. The forest in which the two female figures sit appears dark, and ominous, bereft of the sunlight that bathes the upper area of the frame, which is occupied by a country shack and a lone male figure. The women seem to generate their own "artificial" luminosity, however. This use of light parallels other visual arguments made regarding unnatural (lesbian) and natural (heterosexual) romantic relationships.

The title of the novel is placed within the top quarter of the vertical frame. An antique font is used, at odds with the subject matter, which suggests treatment of the

subject from a literary point of view rather than a prurient one, thereby lending legitimacy to the paperback. Its lime color is the same as the blonde woman's blouse, a device used to portray her as the center of desire in the narrative. The name of the novel refers to the fear and guilt synonymous with lesbian existence in the 1950s and 1960s. The cover text reads, "They stirred the dark waters of desire." The plural pronoun serves to group the three figures together, implying both lesbian and heterosexual themes. The "dark waters" are represented visually, the two female figures in the depth of the forest and the male figure in the sunlight nearer to the horizon and closer to the home, which indicates the normality of male-female sexual relationships and is contrasted with the female-female sexual relationship. Unlike other covers, the author's name is printed at the bottom of the frame and centered, lending literary legitimacy to the novel. The sans-serif font's clean lines convey the presumed honesty and frankness with which the author approaches the taboo topic. While the emphasis is largely on the images of the cover, the prominence of the cover's text establishes the importance of the author. Wilene Shaw, a pseudonym for Virginia M. Harrison, was a prolific author of lesbian pulp fiction novels, including *Heat Lightning* (1954), *See How They Run* (1957), *Tame The Wild Flesh* (1960), and *One Foot In Hell* (1961). A vertical bright red border the length of the book displays the Ace publishing logo, the color indicative of passion and desire. The same color is also on the lips and nails of the blonde woman in the lower left corner of the frame. The lime green of her blouse creates dissonance against the deep, natural green of the

grass and trees, further suggesting the artificiality of the figure and emphasizing her centrality to the text.

The painting is of a southern farm; the figures are the farmer, the farmer's daughter, and the blonde "city gal." Images familiar to readers, including the farmer in overalls carrying a hoe next to a shanty and a dirt path in a country setting, indicate the narrative's placement in and invoke stereotypes about the South: Southerners are simple, naive folk in need of guidance and sympathy; are poor, illiterate, and backward; and are sexually promiscuous and incestuous. In a review in the *Ladder* column *Lesbiana*, Grier calls the novel, "a poignant story of a moral and spiritual degradation on a backwoods farm wherein the main protagonist finds her own father a rival" and "a lesbian version of *Tobacco Road*" (1957, p. 15). *Tobacco Road* is a 1932 novel by Erskine Caldwell about Georgia sharecroppers "set in a fictionalized version of Caldwell's home town, [laying] bare the story of the Lesters, the poorest, whitest, trashiest, horniest family in rural Georgia" (Garner, 2006). The novel was also released in several paperback forms; the cover from the Signet version published in 1953 is below (see figure 37). The artwork of *The Fear and the Guilt* (Shaw, 1954) calls upon the popularity and imagery of this novel, reinforcing its stereotypes in order to cue readers to the graphic sexuality and violence contained within. In addition, the cover art reflects the narrative, an unusual occurrence in the world of lesbian pulp fiction. In this case, the congruence between the two supports the claim that this paperback is in fact literature.

The dense composition of the cover reserves realism for the two female figures in the foreground while the elements surrounding and behind them, the forest and the male figure, are noticeably less detailed. The first figure, the blonde seductress, is placed in the mid to lower left side of the frame and is diagonally oriented. She is semi-reclined on her side on the ground; resting on her right elbow, hands clasped, face and body toward the viewer, and legs extended to the outside of the right edge of the frame. Her posture is closed and teasing; she has not yet decided her preference for either the father or the daughter and her indecision forebodes heartbreak for both. Her physical attitude and facial expression suggest that the viewer has caught the women at the beginning of a sexual relationship, not in an established one. The only figure to be in a state of undress, her bare shoulders, arms, and legs are examples of her extreme femininity, especially within the given context. The second figure, the farmer's daughter, is sitting behind the blonde seductress, facing her, with her back to the audience. She is masculine in comparison, a brunette with sensible clothes and hair, and no makeup. She is dowdy and homely while remaining attractive and feminine enough for the heterosexual male sensibility. The farmer's daughter touches the femme lightly and tenderly, her face intent with desire. She also appears to be removing the first figure's blouse. The trope of the masculine butch and feminine femme in lesbian relationships is alluded to visually, but with a twist – the ordinarily aggressive butch is now the victim of a scheming, seducing femme. The butch is further masculinized through her inability to resist the femininity and charm of the blonde seductress, aligning the daughter with her father and his

desires. In the background, the third figure is a male, presumably the father of the butch figure. He is dressed in overalls and a straw hat, carrying a hoe in one hand that appears to extend from his groin to nearly his shoulders. This blatant phallus serves as a promise of Sapphic sex and nods to the male readers' masturbatory activities. His back also faces the viewer as he peers over his shoulder at the two women, his posture resigned. He is the only figure standing and is near the horizon, surrounded by natural light, indicating the normality and desirability of a heterosexual relationship.

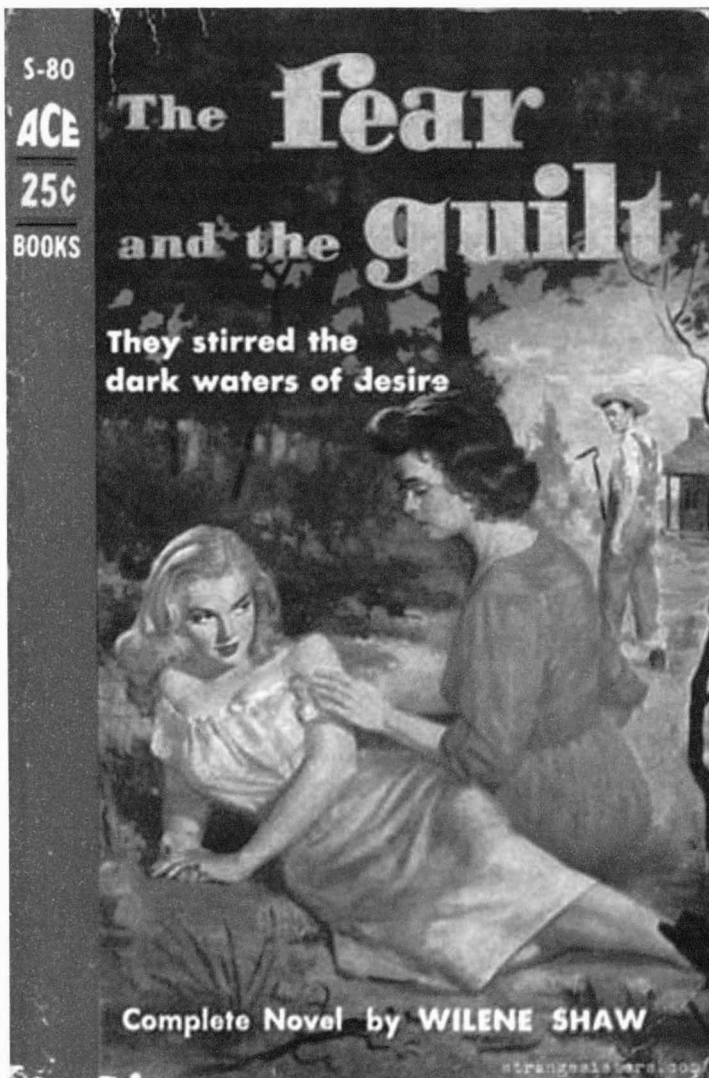


Figure 37
Shaw, W. (1954)

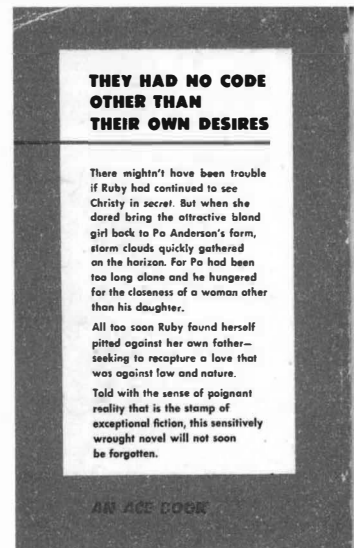


Figure 38
Back cover

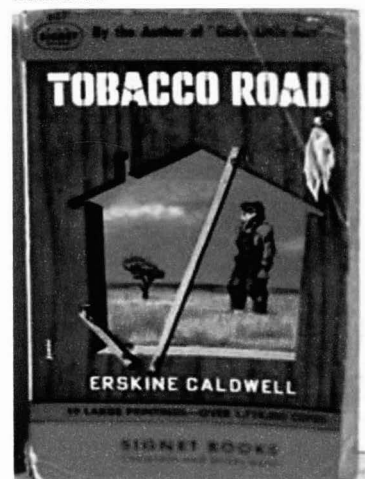


Figure 39
Caldwell, E. (1953).

In this image, and in the other covers in the Odd Man Out category, the inclusion of men in lesbian relationships, though emasculative and anguished, functions to normalize male involvement in same-sex female relationships, sexual or not. These illustrations reproduce hegemony through constant surveillance and its reiteration of gender and sexual identity norms; lesbianism is defined through its relationship to men.

Actual-Factual Stories

A rash of fiction about sex researchers resulted from the media's attention to and popularization of Alfred Kinsey's research into male and female sexual behavior (1948, 1953). Kinsey used taxonomic methods to study individual and group variations in human sexual behavior; the results were controversial because they challenged conventional beliefs about sexuality, specifically the frequency of women having sex with other women, the prevalence of premarital sex, and the insignificance and rarity of vaginal orgasms (Pomeroy, 1972). The final minor category, Actual-Factual Stories (2.2%, 20 covers), includes novels that masquerade as scientific commentary purportedly written by experts, often with advanced degrees (i.e. pulp authors with educated-sounding pseudonyms). According to Kinsey Institute researcher Wardell B. Pomeroy, "Even some scientists assumed that we had authorized these publications and the mistakes in them were forever laid at our doorstep. The inevitable errors we actually made in the Reports were enough without having to bear the burden of what others wrote" (1982, p. 340). The covers' primary function is to legitimize the pseudoscientific text within, which is achieved through

both the visual elements and the accompanying text. The style of the cover art tends to deviate from the other lesbian pulp cover categories and is either modernist in design or reminiscent of Renaissance-era female nudes (55%, 11 covers). For instance, the art of *Lesbian Ward* (Schotz, 1968; see figure 40), *Twilight Women* (Woodward, 1963; see figure 41), and *Female Perversions* (Reissner, 1965; see figure 42) uses bright, graphic colors, and in a move away from realism, the figures are minimalized, reduced to silhouettes or simple line drawings. This style sets the paperbacks apart from other lesbian pulp covers, which tended to employ a more representational/mimetic mode, and signals to the viewer the transgressive quality of the cutting-edge research that the book represents. The use of female nudes in a Renaissance-styled covers, such as the one for *The Lesbian Handbook* (Brittenham, 1966; see figure 43), invokes the authority of long-established artistic and scientific traditions for the explanations contained within the text.

The covers also tend to have more text than the novels in the other categories. For example, *Female Perversion* (Reissner, 1965) dedicates nearly half of the cover to a long, rectangular box filled with a bulleted list of statements and questions that are presumably addressed in the novel, such as: “LET’S MEET THE LESBIAN,” “THREE LESBIAN TECHNIQUES,” and “CAN YOU RECOGNIZE A HOMOSEXUAL?” The causes, (psychoanalytical in nature, specifically gender dysfunction); classifications (lesbian wife, butch dyke, doll dyke, bisexual lesbian, and college lesbian); and cures of lesbianism (marriage) are mentioned on the covers of *Female Perversions* (Reissner, 1965), *Twilight Women* (Woodward, 1963), and *Sex*

Behavior of the Lesbian (Steiner, 1964; see figure 44) respectively. A quote from Kinsey is printed on the cover of *Lesbos for Lonnie* (Adlon, 1963, see figure 45) which serves two purposes, authenticating the text and revealing the topic of the book, bisexual females. The text of *Twilight Women* (Woodward, 1963) also advertises “full length case histories” which is code for, as *The Lesbian Handbook* (Brittenham, 1966) describes it, candid descriptions of “lesbian activity in all its deviant forms – from casual bar pickup to elaborately planned orgies” (front cover).

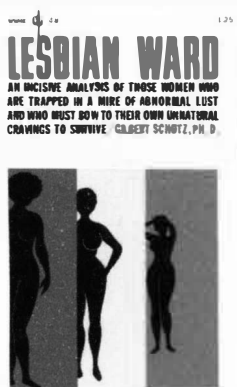


Figure 40
Schatz, G. (1968).

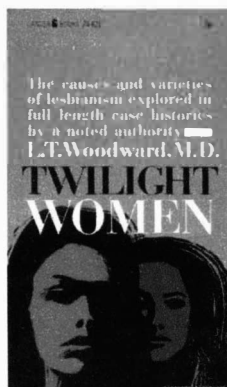


Figure 41
Woodward, L. T. (1963).

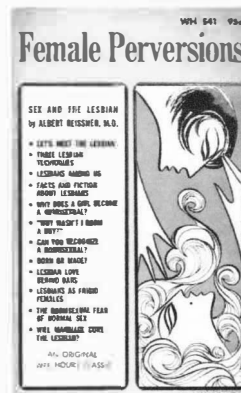


Figure 42
Reissner, A. (1965).



Figure 43
Brittenham, D. (1966).

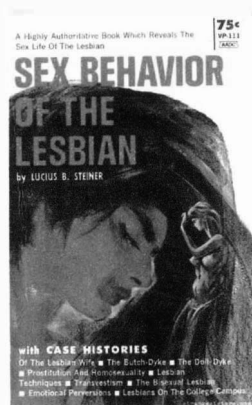


Figure 44
Steiner, L. B. (1964).

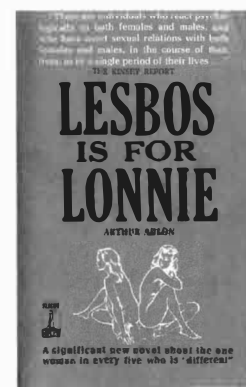


Figure 45
Adlon, A. (1963).

Misrepresented research, misreported data, and the general inaccuracy of the titles presented as summaries of the Kinsey Institute work typify the paperbacks in the

Actual-Factual Stories category. Among the titles on a shelf dedicated solely to these types of paperbacks at the Kinsey Institute library is the *Sex Behavior of the American Housewife*, by “W.D. Sprague, Ph. D., Associate Director of the Psychoanalytical Assistance Foundation,” a.k.a. Bela von Bloch, which carries a dedication to Kinsey even though the book was a “hoax, a compilation of old material gathered from here and there and simply thrown together” (Pomeroy, 1972, p. 341). Bloch was a prolific writer of pseudo-scientific texts including *Sexual Behavior of American Nurses* (1963), whose back cover text read, “In this country, as in almost no other place in the world, nurses are looked upon with a mixture of awe and curiosity. What are they really like beneath those prim white dresses and starched caps?”; *Patterns of Adultery* (1964); *Sex and the Secretary* (1968); *The Sex Cheats. A Physician's Casebook of Psychosexual Aberration Among the Married* (1969), the doctor’s “probing analysis of the aberrations and perversions hidden behind the closed doors of the marital chamber” with “illustrative and detailed case histories taken from the confidential files of the Psychoanalytical Assistance Foundation”; and *Case Histories from the Communes* (1972).

Most of the Bloch titles were published by Lancer Books, a line of paperbacks closely identified with science fiction, heroic fantasy (the *Conan the Barbarian* series), and private-eye adventure (Stamler, 1998, p. CY4). The Bloch paperback of interest for this study is *The Lesbian in our Society* (1962; see figure 46), which was singled out by Barbara Grier in the *Ladder's* feature article “Lesbian Literature in 1962” for “special mention” as an “unusually good nonfiction title which includes a

comprehensive history” (1963, p. 7). Regardless of the reception of the pulp in the lesbian community, it functions as a virile adventure because of the junk science within. The believability of the paperback is a function of both the “academic” writing and its cover art. It opens with quotes regarding the “mental and emotional abnormality” of lesbianism from seemingly reputable sources: “Sir Bryant R. L. Moore-Lacey” of the “Royal Psychiatric Commission of Great Britain” and “Dr. Sylvester J. Guttenplan” from “The Lauren Beatty Foundation” (p. 5). Not surprisingly, I was unable to find evidence of the existence of these individuals or the organizations they supposedly represented. I scoured historical newspaper records, *Harper’s Weekly*, Reader’s Guide Retrospective (an index of the most popular general-interest periodicals published in the United States from 1890 to 1982), and Google Scholar. The author then acknowledges those “who contributed to the success” of the “Psychoanalytical Assistance Foundation’s Survey of the Sexual Habits of American Lesbians” and the editor (none credited) lends credibility to the “case histories” within by citing their origins in “the files of the Psychoanalytical Assistance Foundation” published with the “approval of the Foundation’s Board of Trustees, of which Mr. Harrison F. Treadwell is Chairman” (p. 6). Again, I found no record of such a survey or such a foundation.

Before exploring the “major types” of lesbians, “Latent versus Overt,” “Active versus Passive,” “Dikes and Dolls” and the like, a short survey of lesbianism from the Greeks onward is provided, from Sappho and her “cult of Lesbian love” (p. 10) to medieval man’s understanding of infidelity, through the Renaissance and up until the

twentieth century. According to Bloch, a ninth century “manuscript” entitled “*The Secrets of Women’s Greater Happiness Revealed*” advises wives to “choose their serving-women from among those maidens who have not yet known the touch of a man . . . The lips and thighs of these tender virgins will be the most yielding and responsive to her caresses during those long nights when she is without husband” (p. 13-14). The “translation” is “supplied by the *Musee Conde* in Chantilly, France” (p. 14, footnote 2).

From the “major types” of lesbians, “special and specific” categories are explained, including “The Teen-Age Initiate,” “High Society Types,” “The Office Lesbian,” and “The Lesbian Call Girl” (which should not be confused with “Call Girl for Lesbians”). “Case histories” used to illustrate these types begin with the necessary scientific description of the patient’s physical appearance: “Roberta K. is an exotically beautiful, statuesque showgirl” (p. 105); “Elizabeth T. is a big-boned, sandy-haired woman” (p. 116); a “confirmed” lesbian, “Alexandra is a sultry, raven-haired young woman with a beautiful face and body and a gorgeous complexion” (p. 131); and “Marie,” a “lovely brunette with deep brown eyes” who is a “Canjun from the Louisiana ‘swamp-country’” (p. 139). Details of the women’s familial and sexual history follow. Poor Marie was able to defend herself from the advances of her father and two brothers as “all three of them were trying to get my virginity from the time I was seven or eight,” only to be “raped by an itinerant ‘snake-cultist’ when she was twelve” (p. 139). The good doctor then gives his diagnosis: “This respondent hates men . . . She engages in homosexual affairs because she finds in women the

understanding and at least the semblance of the love and affection that she has sought – without avail – from men” (p. 143).

In the final sections of the text, attention is paid to the “special problems” of lesbians, with chapters dedicated to “Alcoholism,” “Menstruation and Menopause,” “Sadism and Masochism,” and “Other Aberrations” (p. 8). In a further effort to appear credible, the appendix includes tables of “respondent” answers to survey questions including the number of different same-sex partners, drinking habits, living arrangements, educational level, and income.

The cover art extends and reinforces the scientific authority of the novel. Its style is of classic European sensibility, reminiscent of Renaissance art. The invocation of the masters both legitimizes the text and permits gratuitous consumption. The subject matter, a single female figure, is presented with broad, rounded forms and smooth surfaces. Diffused lighting implies softness and femininity while the lines differentiating the head of the figure from the background are drawn with a harshness that belies such femininity, hinting at the possibility of lesbian behavior. According to art historian Lynda Nead (1990), the female nude is “*the* subject, *the* form. It is a paradigm of Western high culture with its network of contingent values: civilization, edification, and aesthetic pleasure” (p. 325). The representation of a female nude on a pulp, itself associated with mass reproducibility, commercialism, and sexual arousal, both invokes and devalues this paradigm (p. 329).

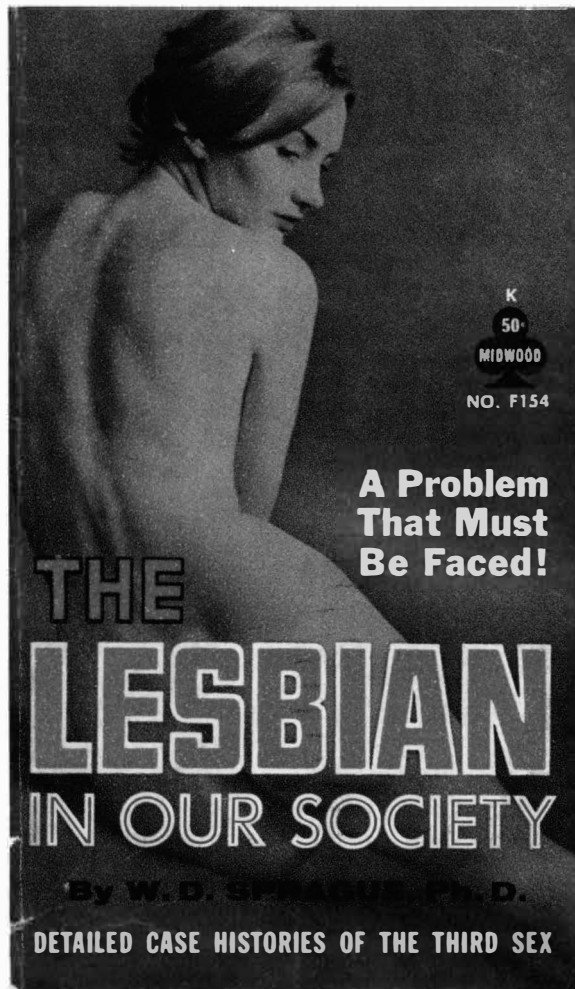


Figure 46
Sprague, W. D. (1962).

The orientation of the female figure is a combination of both modesty and invitation. She presents her back to viewers, concealing her sexual organs; she glances over her shoulder, her eyes downcast, her expression moody, sensual, even defiant. Her body is slender, yet softly rounded, suggesting beauty standards both of the Renaissance period (voluptuousness) and of the early 1960s (incipient waif ideal). Her nude figure is smooth and unblemished, but ironically the cleanliness of her body does not signal morality; rather, its manufactured perfection hints at the forces that

have shaped her appearance—on this cover and in other representations of female nudes in Western culture. “The female nude is also a sign of those other, more hidden properties or patriarchal culture, that is, possession, power, and subordination” (Nead, 1990, p. 326). Here, lesbianism is presented, explained, and managed for the consumption of heterosexual males.

The placement of the pulp’s title is in the lower half of the frame, capitalized in red and covering the buttocks of the female nude, partially obscuring her body from gaze of the viewer. “LESBIAN” is written nearly an inch tall, completely stretching across the cover, and outlined with white. Against the red colors of the letters, the white is a stark contrast between the red’s connotation of the power, danger and passion of lesbianism and the standard purity and naïveté of white heterosexual women. The bright red used for the text grabs attention and acts as a call to action; to ignore the “problem that must be faced” would be to allow social and moral decay, thereby putting true/good women in peril. The language used for the cover reflects the scientific discourse of the day; “third sex” was a term commonly used both in research and in popular culture. This kind of language served to control the sexual desire and practices of the masses, promoting self regulation and adherence to white heterosexual norms.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Mass media create cultural commonalities across all classes and groups and much of our knowledge of the world is derived from these representations (Gross, 1994). As artifacts of the historical and material culture of the 1950s and 1960s, lesbian pulp fiction covers provide a site for the analysis of the social construction of lesbian and heterosexual identities. The response anticipated by the publishers of lesbian pulp fiction (the purchase of the paperback) was contingent upon a shared vocabulary, the ability of consumers to read the images presented on the covers.

As evidenced by the imagery of the novels in the I Prefer Girls category, the suggestion of lesbian content was sufficient to attract curious readers. In the wake of World War II, traditional gender roles were reinforced by the social authorities and deviation from the norms was especially noticeable (Berube and D'Emilio, 1984). Female homosexuality was considered to be a growing problem encouraged by feminism and the increasing liberty of women. In the Where the Girls Are category, the introduction of physical context positioned the lesbian in the public sphere, suggesting that lesbians could be anywhere, thereby strengthening the perceived need for paranoid McCarthy-era surveillance. National security fears and Cold War tensions led to the "homosexual scare" during which there was a Senate investigation of "homosexuals and sex perverts" in the federal government (Bérubé & D'Emilio,

1984, p. 759). The scrutiny of nonconforming women and the regulation of women's sexuality was then defensible through an explicit link between immorality and lesbianism, an argument vividly illustrated on the covers of pulps in the Girls Gone Wild category. Lesbianism is presented as a marginal and depraved activity and as a threat to social institutions such as marriage, the nuclear family, and Christianity. Overt control of women's choices and bodies was therefore "justifiably" exercised and lesbians of the period lived in fear of punishment and lack of acceptance. The covers of paperbacks in the Odd Man Out category suggest that lesbian relationships may render white heterosexual males impotent—but that, at the same time, female-female relationships should be controlled by and provide voyeuristic pleasure for men. The psychoanalytical images of the Odd Man Out category, which frequently invoke the Oedipus complex, are supported by the perceived legitimacy of pseudoscientific research presented in the Actual-Factual Stories category. The covers of these paperbacks explore the causes, classifications, and cures of lesbianism, adhering to the popular conceptualization of homosexuality as a curable disease.

The historical, textual, and cultural discourses on the covers of lesbian pulps served to naturalize the themes of pathology and seduction, "performing" lesbianism more publicly than had previously been possible and underscoring the power of formal institutional structures to explain and contain lesbian activities. "Normal" sexuality was interpellated through the incorporation of sexual deviance into the public discourse and the resulting specification of "lesbian." These images of

lesbianism were recognized by the public even as they constructed lesbian identity through that recognition. The visual reiterations within and between cover art categories served to sediment the identity of “lesbian,” establishing it in opposition to heterosexuality. Through the promise of voyeuristic pleasure, the pulps assuaged white heterosexual male readers, reassuring them of their dominance and the naturalness of patriarchy.

While the cover art hailed and disciplined lesbians, for women who loved women, “the possibility of a life as a lesbian had to be socially constructed in order for women to be able to choose such a life” (Faderman, 1991, p. 9). According to Patricia Juliana Smith, “‘literary’ novels attempted to normalize lesbians, while the pulps confronted – albeit in a sensationalized manner – the ostracism and prejudice most lesbians faced routinely” (xxi). While the limited representation of the pulp covers reinforced and produced hegemonic norms and standards, lesbians subverted the reification of heteronormativity by using the images for their own ends, reading between the “lines” of the visual and textual narrative. Employing every means at their disposal, including pulp fiction representations, lesbian publications like the *Ladder*, and formal and informal social networking, lesbians in the 1950s and 1960s transformed themselves from “odd women out” into unique, public-minded individuals who recognized that their sexual preferences—and their perspectives—were shared and appreciated by many other females *and* were potentially assimilable into the mainstream. “Virile adventure” covers, despite their strong component of heteronormativity, were a significant factor in that liberatory process.

Future research in the area of lesbian pulp fiction could examine the fascinating relationship between texts and covers, which is typically one of substantial disjunction. It would be interesting to determine if that disjunction is predominantly in the direction of a specific bias, involving, perhaps, racism, xenophobia, manufactured narrative events, and so on. The current study should also be replicated using pro-lesbian pulp covers, comparing the categories generated from virile adventures to determine whether and why dissimilarities may be present. Finally, there are hundreds of lesbian pulp fiction covers with photographed art work whose realistic iconography may offer a more explicit construction of lesbian activities—and mid-twentieth century heteronormativity—than the illustrated cover art analyzed here.

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