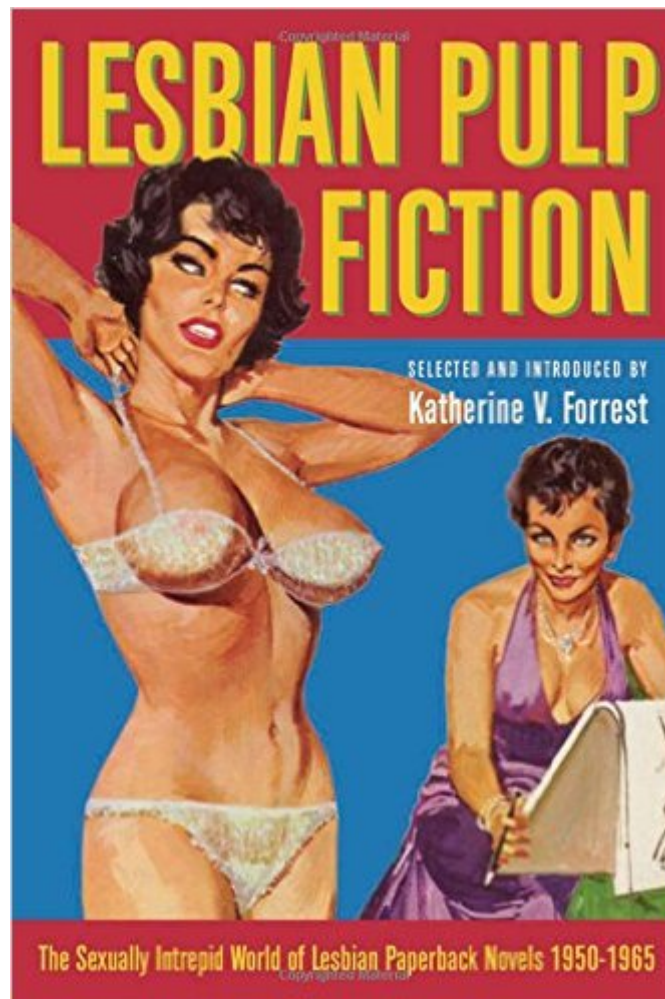


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Lesbian Pulp Fiction: The Sexually Intrepid World Of Lesbian Paperback Novels 1950-1965



Synopsis

Long before the rise of the modern gay movement, an unnoticed literary revolution was occurring between the covers of the cheaply produced lesbian pulp paperbacks of the post-World War II era. In 1950, publisher Fawcett Books founded its Gold Medal imprint, inaugurating the reign of lesbian pulp fiction. These were the books that small-town lesbians and prurient men bought by the millions; cheap, easy to find in drugstores, and immediately recognizable by their lurid covers. For women leading straight lives, here was confirmation that they were not alone and that darkly glamorous, "gay" places like Greenwich Village existed. Some; especially those written by lesbians; offered sympathetic and realistic depictions of "life in the shadows," while others (no less fun to read now) were smutty, sensational tales of innocent girls led astray. In the overheated prose typical of the genre, this collection documents the emergence of a lesbian subculture in postwar America.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Once upon a time, the multitude of lesbians lived closeted, secret lives, isolated from others and often from their own true feelings and aspirations. There was no Internet, no gay radio, no magazine or journal or organization to turn to for affirmation. Until the 1950s, precious few books reflected anything at all about the lesbian experience. This changed in 1950 when Fawcett Publications inaugurated the Gold Medal imprint and kicked off a wave of pulp fiction publishing that included both gay and lesbian novels. For the first time in history, women could find cheap paperbacks featuring lesbians, and the books sold in the millions. Pulp novels constituted one of the first steps

toward lesbians having a written presence in any kind of literature. As Katherine V. Forrest writes in the introduction to *LESBIAN PULP FICTION*: "The importance of all our pulp fiction novels cannot possibly be overstated. Whatever their negative images or messages, they told us we were not alone. Because they told us about each other, they led us to look for and find each other, they led us to the end of the isolation that had divided and conquered us. And once we found each other, once we began to question the judgments made of us, our civil rights movement was born" (p. xviii). In moving style, Forrest also writes of finding in 1957 a copy of Ann Bannon's *ODD GIRL OUT*, "a book as necessary to me as air" (p. ix). How fitting that Forrest should edit this wonderful homage to these early writers when her own works are frequently cited as having the same effect upon other women as Bannon's work had upon her. *CURIOUS WINE* (1983) is frequently cited by lesbians as a book that saved their lives.

I recently went on a lesbian 50's pulp novel binge, reading Ann Bannon's six books and two others that were mentioned in a couple wikipedia articles (*Women's Barracks* and *Spring Fire*). So I was delighted when it was pointed out to me on the Kindle forum that *Lesbian Pulp Fiction* edited by Katherine V. Forrest is available for the Kindle. (I'd heard of this book before, but hadn't ever bothered buying or reading it.) But I was a bit disappointed in the content. Reading the excerpts is fun. I'm doing one or two in between reading other books and it's a good way to decide what other titles I might want to track down for my collection. But information about lesbian pulps in general is what I was most interested in as a lesbian literature history lesson. The introduction gave a decent overview, but it left me wanting a bit more. I also noticed that there were a couple errors in the intro, which I would never have realized had I not already read the pulps I already mentioned. The information about the start of pulps, including lesbian pulps, was good. But most of the info was about specific titles and authors. Why did the pulp trend end? Why was there a lull in publishing lesbian books? Between the end of the pulp period and feminist and lesbian publishers finally getting a solid foothold in the 80's, not much was happening it seems. Or at least I'm not aware of what was going on (other than a couple authors) and I think exploring why and how things changed again would have been really informative and still tied in with the topic. I suppose that's of particular interest to me because I was a teen in the 70's and there weren't any lesbian books on the drugstore racks for me to stumble over!

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