

**Gunn, Drewey Wayne and Jaime Harker (eds). *1960s Gay Pulp Fiction: The Misplaced Heritage*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2013. Part of the Studies in Print Culture and the History of the Book series. Pp. 344. US \$29.95 (paperback). ISBN 978-1-62534-045-0.**

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Scholars of gay fiction face difficulty in obtaining primary material from certain historical periods and publication channels (which is an issue that is and will be urgent for popular romance scholars as well, as mentioned in this *JPRS Note* by Jonathan A. Allan). Only some of those primary works are available in libraries scattered around the US and UK, even fewer are digitised, and those that have made it to the market are being sold for exorbitant prices. Publications such as *1960s Gay Pulp Fiction: The Misplaced Heritage* are thus valuable for providing an overview and insights into the content of this otherwise inaccessible part of the genre.

The volume was edited by Drewey Wayne Gunn and Jamie Harker. Gunn, Professor Emeritus at Texas A&M University, was a literary historian, writer and also a collector of LGBTQ books. He authored and edited several volumes on gay fiction, such as *The Gay Male Sleuth in Print and Film* (2005), *The Golden Age of Gay Fiction* (2009), and *Gay American Novels, 1870 – 1970* (2016). Harker, a professor of English at the University of Mississippi, specialises in LGBTQ fiction and gender studies. She authored, among others, *Middlebrow Queer: Christopher Isherwood in America* (2013) and *The Lesbian South: Southern Feminists, the Women in Print Movement, and the Queer Literary Canon* (2018).

Readers find essays of two kinds in the volume: those dealing with gay pulp in historical and cultural contexts in general and those focusing on individual authors. The first kind is beneficial for understanding the milieu in which 1960s gay pulp originated and developed, of its pedigree and successors. The second kind is in-depth studies of individual authors or novels, arranged chronologically by the publication dates of the novels they discuss. Their authors use a wide range of theoretical approaches, from Frazier to Foucault.

In the first four general essays, *1960s Gay Pulp Fiction: The Misplaced Heritage*, contrary to its title, examines not only this particular period but also the periods that preceded and followed it. By situating 1960s gay pulp and its authors in a broader historical

context, the book puts this forgotten literature back to the timeline of gay fiction, disproving the misconception “that the 1960s pulps, since they are pre-Stonewall fiction after all, must have continued the postwar strategy of depicting what miserable lives gays lead” (Gunn and Harker 2).

The “Introduction” by Gunn and Harker lists the historical, cultural and legal changes that had to happen to allow “the pulp explosion” in the second half of the 1960s, provides an overview of publishers and authors, and reviews the post-Stonewall changes and reasons why the 1960s gay pulp, unlike lesbian pulp, ended up being ignored both by readers and researchers for a long time (7). Some of those reasons will be very familiar to popular romance scholars, as when the authors state that “embarrassment and squeamishness about ‘fuck books’ have blinded critics to the actual features of these texts” (21).

The following three essays continue in a similar vein, focusing on queer cultural history and the formation of gay identity. In fact, I found the arguments rather repetitive here, even above the level that might be expected in a collection of essays authored by different scholars. The points of the 1960s gay pulp providing gay men with a sense of community, being a contributing force to Stonewall only to be forgotten afterwards, important as they are to be made, are repeated over and over again. The space could have been instead dedicated to covering the gap between the general overview of the gay pulp phenomenon and the essays focused on individual authors. Although the editors claim that “the wealth of material makes it difficult to generalize about these works,” there are few people more qualified to analyze them and generalize about them than the experts present in this volume (7). This is even more vital given the fact that “from the beginnings the books explored an enormous range of genres, to the point that in many cases a pulp novel represents the first appearance of a genre in the history of gay literature” (7).

The later essays are immersions in individual authors or, in some cases, novels, analyzed by the publication date(s). Given the fact the analyzed works are mostly not readily available for casual perusal, the essays are useful mainly as a demonstration that gay pulp can be analyzed for its literary value, using a wide range of methodologies. As could be expected, some of the studies are focused on the portrayal of gender and masculinity in individual novels, such as the analysis of masculinity in Phil Andros’s *\$tud* (Ann Marie Schott) or of gender presentation in Lou Rand’s nonfiction pulp *The Gay Cookbook* alongside his fiction *The Gay Detective* (Pamela Robertson Wojcik). Author-focused studies adopt either a biographical approach, like Reed Massengill’s chapter on the artist, photographer, and writer George Haimsohn alias Alexander Goodman, or go for literary analysis of an author’s body of work, like Randall Ivey’s essay on prolific author Victor J. Banis.

Nevertheless, there are some interesting methodologies applied as well: Beth M. Bouloukos analyses Richard Amory’s *Song of the Loon* “as a gay American version of famous sixteenth-century Spanish pastoral novels” (213), Harker explores the influence of Hinduism and gay pulp on Christopher Isherwood’s novel *A Meeting by the River*, Nicholas Alexander Hayes applies Foucault’s theory of “the prison world as a microcosm for society” articulated in *Discipline and Punish* to understand Jay Greene’s dark prison novel *Behind These Walls* (250) and Campbell’s monomyth of hero’s journey is used by Gunn to examine the theme of coming out in Dirk Vanden’s *All* trilogy. The volume is closed by the odd-one-out chapter on Australian gay pulp by Jeremy Fisher, the only essay not focusing on the American market.

For popular romance scholars, mentions of romance elements in gay pulp novels will be of special interest. Romance was one of the (sub)genres of gay pulp and the happily ever

after ending was an important and politically charged element in the development of gay fiction in this particular period. Although there had been some individual novels published before the 1960s, “it was the gay paperback writers of the 1960s who first (and not without considerable risk) truly bridged that gap between frustrated love and the possibility of a long-term commitment. No longer did the characters in the novels of these writers have to be separated by the end of the book through tragedy or cure. ‘Happy ever after’ became a possibility they could choose” (Banis qtd. in Gunn and Harker 232). So it is in this period that gay romance novels recognizable under the modern definition of romance (the focus on the MCs’ romantic relationship and the HEA ending) begin to emerge in substantial quantities.

Aside from gay fiction scholars, *1960s Gay Pulp Fiction: The Misplaced Heritage* will be of interest to scholars of queer romance in particular and will provide them with an overview of this historical period and of romance elements in gay pulp novels. By using a wide range of methodologies, the volume also presents proof that scholarly treatment of popular fiction does not have to be limited to cultural history and reader response criticism and that the works themselves have literary merit worthy of serious literary analysis.

## References

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