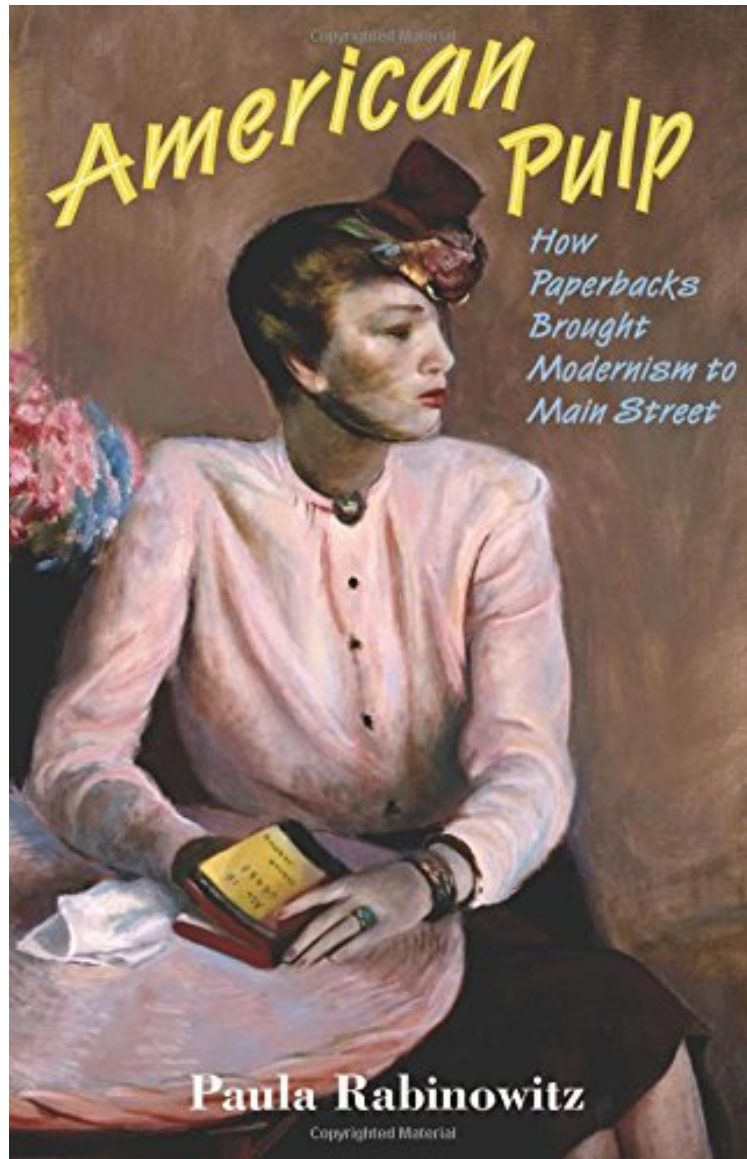


[Download] American Pulp: How Paperbacks Brought Modernism to Main Street

American Pulp: How Paperbacks Brought Modernism to Main Street

Paula Rabinowitz

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Paula Rabinowitz : American Pulp: How Paperbacks Brought Modernism to Main Street before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised American Pulp: How Paperbacks Brought Modernism to Main Street:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. I recommend PULP!By BG-expatEXCELLENT WORK! I grew up

with 35 cent Penguin Paperbacks, Del Rey Sci Fi, and 50 cent ANALOG available at grocery and drug stores in small towns. And, my small town library was able in the 1950's and 1960's to stretch its small budget immensely by buying paperback versions of major novels and reference books! Well written, informative, and a focused point of view! I recommend PULP! Wc4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. This book turned me on to some gems such as ...By RonaldThis book turned me on to some gems such as Vera Caspary's "Laura" that I was previously unfamiliar with. The book does not have much to say about pulp magazines if that is one's primary interest; it deals mainly with pulp literature in paperback book form. Well-written and informative.22 of 28 people found the following review helpful. Paperbacks Were a Stealth Force in Reshaping American CultureBy JohnAh, the lowly paperback. It has had a powerful impact on American culture. Author Paul Rabinowitz delineates the role it has played since first appearing for sale on American newsstands, drugstores, and coffee shops in the 1930s. Her book, *American Pulp: How Paperbacks Brought Modernism to Main Street*, examines the often overlooked influence that the cheap, pocket-sized books had on every phase of American culture. The word pulp usually often connotes prurient, escapist literature featuring unsavory characters who live outside the moral norms ostensibly espoused by the rest of society. Rabinowitz broadens the definition, however. For her, pulp defines the character of the medium; shoddily bound coarse paper volumes that degrade quickly. According to Rabinowitz, pulp has influenced every facet of American culture from civil rights to the feminist revolution. It set the stage for the sexual revolution of the mid-twentieth century. The paperback, more than any other medium, carried Modernist thinking, or Modernism, into cities and villages across the country. As the author writes: "This is a story of paper, or rather of paperback books, produced in massive numbers between the late 1930s and the early 1950s. These throwaway items hold within their covers a rich history of literary tastes; the point to, even reflect, a democratizing literacy and the new forms of identity and community that emerged in mid-twentieth-century America. Curiously, the above passage is very good example of the authors rambling, verbose writing style. If, for example, the story is about paperbacks, it follows that it would also be about paper. If the period of time for the study is from 1930 to 1950, readers know it is the mid-twentieth-century. Either point to or reflect adequately carries the thought, unless the reader is being asked to resolve the author's ambivalence." Rabinowitz writing reflects her passion for her subject. Some passages are truly eloquent and succinct. The highly quotable lines flutter around like canaries lost in a murder of raucous crows. What eventually wears the reader down is a tedium of overwriting. Rabinowitz slings a sentence like a hammock over seven or eight lines of text and then loads it up with subordinate clauses and phrases, modifiers galore, parenthetical observations, personal asides, multiple verbs and allusions to other authors, artists, historians and philosophers. She invariably prefers the less well-known modifiers. The phrase *The demotics of reading* appears no less the 4 times within the first 80 pages of text. (*Demotics*, the plural form, was not recognized by Word or WordPress Spell check.) *Demotic* means ordinary, common or popular. Using the plural, Rabinowitz morphs the term from an adverb into a noun--commonness or popularity. Readers are usually accepting of a coinage when they are clever and easy to recognize. Not so in this case. This is writing to impress rather than inform. *Anomie*, *evanescent*, *quotidian*, and *totemic*, as words, are impressive, but seldom heard in everyday conversation, even among academics and rarely found in paperbacks intended for the general population. Rabinowitz writes around her subjects. Her definition of Modernism is there, of course, but sprinkled here and dribbled there when a straightforward presentation of the meaning in the context the author intends would be greatly appreciated. Modernism, in its most pervasive form, represents a breaking away from the moral, aesthetic, social, political and theological values that prevailed through most of the 19th century and into the first few decades of the 20th. Modernism emphasizes individual autonomy over conformity to established ethical and aesthetic codes. The paperback was an effective stealth medium for tearing down old standards because it was cheap, portable, and widely available. The author strives to make the simple point that slavery is a grave sin of Americas past. Racial discrimination continues today. The paperback put a tool in the hands of writers eager to address this evil as an unrecognized crime that goes on year after year in our communities. Paperbacks, the conveyor of sleazy sex and brutal crime stories, become the medium through which the crime of discrimination is exposed. Thus, a medium that is usually about crime becomes a tool against the ignored crime of racism. Thats what? Ironic? Making this point in writing about African-American author Richard Wright, the author explains: "Crime, as a narrative device, enabled, as had for two of his inspirations, Theodore Dreiser and Fyodor Dostoevsky, his exploration of psychological and economic forces, showing how the two collide in an individual. But it did more for Wright or rather he did more with it and this is the subject of this chapter: how Richard Wrights and Edwin Rosskams phototextual book, *12 Million Black Voices*, supplements the crime narrative, or better, inverts it, to make clear that the crime, that which the American people (or at least white Americans) have been lied to and been lying to themselves about, was the crime of slavery and its attendant Jim Crow laws and culture of racism. This is the true crime story that Wright was exploding/exposing Americas crypt encrypted, thoroughly evident yet utterly unrecognized, its corpse not dead by haunting us still." Rabinowitz strains to make a several points in the above passage but simply overlooks the obvious. Wright and others used the paperback because it was there, an efficient propaganda tool, cheap, and widely distributed. The point is so self-evident. The author is over intellectualizing. The passage is representative of the style in which the book is written. It speaks for itself. Rabinowitz's propensity for leaving the choice of verbs up to the

reader and telescoping qualifying phrase within qualifying phrase creates a dithering maze that obscures rather than clarifies her thoughts. This is all such a shame. Despite the authors lack of precision, the book has many redeeming features as it includes numerous reproductions of book covers, some in color. The notes about the artists responsible for the cover designs are intriguing. Readers will be surprised by the names of some of the artist contributors. The authors comments about collecting and collectors are some of the best reading in the book. This is a beautifully produced volume on an engaging subject that cries out for an editors hand. This article, somewhat condensed, first appeared in bookpleasures.com John J. Hohn, author of "Breached" and "Deadly Portfolio: A Killing in Hedge Funds"

"There is real hope for a culture that makes it as easy to buy a book as it does a pack of cigarettes." a civic leader quoted in a New American Library ad (1951) American Pulp tells the story of the midcentury golden age of pulp paperbacks and how they brought modernism to Main Street, democratized literature and ideas, spurred social mobility, and helped readers fashion new identities. Drawing on extensive original research, Paula Rabinowitz unearths the far-reaching political, social, and aesthetic impact of the pulps between the late 1930s and early 1960s. Published in vast numbers of titles, available everywhere, and sometimes selling in the millions, pulps were throwaway objects accessible to anyone with a quarter. Conventionally associated with romance, crime, and science fiction, the pulps in fact came in every genre and subject. American Pulp tells how these books ingeniously repackaged highbrow fiction and nonfiction for a mass audience, drawing in readers of every kind with promises of entertainment, enlightenment, and titillation. Focusing on important episodes in pulp history, Rabinowitz looks at the wide-ranging effects of free paperbacks distributed to World War II servicemen and women; how pulps prompted important censorship and First Amendment cases; how some gay women read pulp lesbian novels as how-to-dress manuals; the unlikely appearance in pulp science fiction of early representations of the Holocaust; how writers and artists appropriated pulp as a literary and visual style; and much more. Examining their often-lurid packaging as well as their content, American Pulp is richly illustrated with reproductions of dozens of pulp paperback covers, many in color. A fascinating cultural history, American Pulp will change the way we look at these ephemeral yet enduringly intriguing books.

Winner of the 2015 SHARP DeLong Book History Book Prize, The Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing "[L]ively. . . . Rabinowitz is on to something." --Louis Menand, New Yorker "Rabinowitz's work is a prime example of literary scholarship and essential key to the history of American publishing." --Publishers Weekly "Rabinowitz makes a persuasive case for the role of pulp in widening the landscape of Americans' experience. . . . An ardent collector of pulp fiction, Rabinowitz brings to this scholarly study a passion for the genre and an authoritative analysis of its meaning in American culture." --Kirkus s "[Rabinowitz] writes with briskness and acuity. The historical richness of the material is leavened by a lively, broadminded, and humane sense of her culture. But most important, she writes with affection for the profound effects of her subject." --Ron Slate, On the Seawall "Alluring topics and insightful writing make this a book that should appeal to anyone interested in how reading--and books--change us." --David Keymer, Library Journal "Offers a thoughtful, provocative take on pulp and its influence on American culture, in art, in film--and how the dime-store publications provided new platforms for gay, lesbian, and African American writers, too." --Steven Rea, Philadelphia Inquirer "Paula Rabinowitz has written a fascinating book with much in it to interest anyone curious about aspects of publishing in the 1940s and 1950s. It has a striking cover, ample notes, and some fascinating illustrations." --Jim Burns, Northern of Books "Unfailingly fascinating." --Greil Marcus, Barnes and Noble "Paula Rabinowitz's exquisite and startling new book about the golden age' of U.S. pulp publishing, from the late 1930s to the early 1960s, is rightly confident in the originality of its enterprise. Gorgeously illustrated, American Pulp audaciously sets in motion at least a half-dozen crisscrossing storylines to create a new cartography of pulp performance." --Alan Wald, International Viewpoint "Rabinowitz's snappily titled and alluringly packaged history of the paperback is entertaining. . . . Covering thirty years of pulp history, it places the humble pocketbook in a new light." --Giulia Miller, Times Literary Supplement "Enthusiastic and informative." --Wendy Smith, Daily Beast "This intimate relationship to pulp as object can be traced throughout the book; it seems like a work born of passion, the result of a decade-long love affair with a disposable medium meant to be consumed and thrown away. Yet it is not only the object--and its use by publishing houses, writers, and artists--that she explores, but also the complex and diverse interfaces with the reader, both individual and collective consumers of the pulp book. . . . An overall enjoyable experience." --Vera Benczik, Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies "[Rabinowitz's] impeccably researched and passionately written book is an important contribution to the scholarly work on the histories of modernism and 20th-century publishing, and a demonstration of the political possibilities of popular forms." --Sean Cashbaugh, Science Society "Rabinowitz' scholarship on the subject of pulp is exceptional, often brazenly creative in her ability to conflate cultural events and cultural moods behind what should have been the quickly forgotten history of pulp." --Alex P. Grover, Publishing Research Quarterly "Charismatic. . . . Rabinowitz passionately transforms our understanding of American literary history, opening a more accurate view, by expanding and redefining the empirical grounds and limits of what constitutes meaningful and impactful literature and culture in

the United States. . . . American Pulp is a landmark work of criticism that maps out new territory for scholars to continue exploring and filling out as we attempt to understand our nation, its people, and our cultural past and future possibilities."--Tim Libretti, *Modern Philology*"Very excellent. . . . A real impressive study about the various genres of pulps. . . . I truly suggest to everyone this book."--Anna Maria Polidori, *Al Femminile*From the Back Cover"Paula Rabinowitz's eloquent and persuasive history of mid-twentieth-century pulp paperbacks provides long-overdue recognition of the role these physically humble but culturally powerful books played in our society. The pulps were scorned by literary critics and flayed by clucking Congressional committees, fearful of their effect on the young. But, as Rabinowitz shows, they were carriers of literacy, modernity, and cultural awareness such as America had never seen before. We who wrote pulps never dreamed that a sophisticated and caring critic would one day give our efforts such thoughtful attention."--Ann Bannon, author of *The Beebo Brinker Chronicles* (1957/1962) "American Pulp is a masterful achievement--elegantly written, impressive in scope, keenly attentive to nuance, and essayistic in the best sense of the word. Deftly interweaving published reminiscences, archival material, and personal memories and anecdotes, Rabinowitz provides a cultural history of how the pulps helped fashion new identities in midcentury America. She also chronicles an American love affair with books, reminding us that they are an essential part of cultural experience."--Priscilla Wald, Duke University "American Pulp is a fast-paced, historically rich, and often moving study of the public and private lives of mass-market paperbacks in midcentury America. Rabinowitz traces how the pulps repackaged elite modernist literature for a diverse popular audience that included women, African Americans, sexual minorities, and the working class. And she analyzes the pulps' infamous cover illustrations just as skillfully as she illuminates the texts they surrounded."--William J. Maxwell, Washington University in St. Louis

About the Author Paula Rabinowitz is professor emerita of English at the University of Minnesota. She is the author of *Black White Noir: America's Pulp Modernism*.