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Robert Lesser. *Pulp Art: Original Cover Paintings for the Great American Pulp Magazines.* New York: Gramercy Books, 1997. viii + 182 pp. $19.99 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-517-20058-2.

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Finally, fans of pulp magazines have another attractive collection of cover images to drool over. Unlike *The Pulps*, edited by Tony Goodstone in 1970, and *Danger Is My Business* by Lee Server from 1993, Robert Lesser's book is neither an anthology of stories nor a general history. Instead, Lesser emphasized reproduction of paintings photographed for the pulp covers, after which many were discarded, but some paintings survive in collections today. Lesser wrote the main text describing and interpreting the cover art, and he invited some collectors, artists' relatives, and other pulp specialists to contribute short essays. Unfortunately, he did not include pictures of pulps mentioned in the essays, leaving the various descriptions disconnected from an image. If the cover of *All Detective* January 1935 had been shown along with James Van Hise's essay, readers would see that Van Hise misinterpreted his own example by calling the hybrid monster threatening the girl hawk-like instead of cobra-like. (The cover painting illustrated a story titled "The Sign of the Serpent".) The colorful painting reproductions are generally stunning, with many at full page size, representing genres such as science fiction, fantasy, detective, hero, aviation, western, weird menace, and "spicy," or "women in peril." Lesser also added a bibliography of books and magazines, readers' letters to pulp editors, some artist biographies, and a guide to collecting pulp cover art.

I have several problems with the book, however. First, Lesser's text does not contain footnotes, which makes settling conflicting historical accounts difficult. For example, he stated that John Newton Howitt burned his *Horror Stories and Terror Tales* paintings because he was ashamed of them. On the other hand, essayist Fred Cook said that Howitt's wife burned them after he died, because she did not consider them "art." I question Lesser's creative application of philosopher Benedetto Croce's *Guide to Aesthetics*, specifically his claim that his interpretation of a *Spicy Mystery* cover is "Crocian." I could not find the reference to the triple painting method of art interpretation in Croce's book, so a footnote here would have been helpful.

Finally, Lesser tries too hard to link the cover paintings to "high art," after printing letters from pulp editors to the *New York Times* defending them on their own terms. Juxtaposing a copy of *Horror Stories* with a painting of the crucifixion of Christ and calling them similar in violent content has the same argumentative force as calling a pornographic novel and the *Holy Bible* similar because both contain sex scenes. Why not acknowledge the marginal status of pulp cover paintings, since their lurid colors and dramatic narratives served mainly to grab the attention of newsstand passerby, and celebrate them for what they are?

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