

2022

Barbara Grier's Enumerative Bibliographies: Iterating Communal Lesbian Identities

Julie R. Enszer
University Of Mississippi, julierenszer@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/criticism>



Part of the [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Enszer, Julie R. (2022) "Barbara Grier's Enumerative Bibliographies: Iterating Communal Lesbian Identities," *Criticism*: Vol. 64: Iss. 3, Article 12.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/criticism/vol64/iss3/12>

Barbara Grier's Enumerative Bibliographies: Iterating Communal Lesbian Identities

Cover Page Footnote

Note: I am grateful to Lisa Maruca and Kate Ozment for their incisive comments and editorial feedback on this article, to Donna McBride for her comments and conversation about the era, and to Jaime Harker for her support always of the work.

BARBARA GRIER'S ENUMERATIVE BIBLIOGRAPHIES: ITERATING COMMUNAL LESBIAN IDENTITIES

Julie R. Enszer

Today Barbara Grier is remembered primarily for her work with her partner Donna McBride as the publisher of the Naiad Press. Through Naiad, Grier became a publishing mogul, the lesbian analog to Blanche Knopf, and international tastemaker of lesbian romance, mystery, literary, and general fiction, the Judith Jones of lesbian editing. Before Naiad, Grier was a bibliographer. Working initially under the tutelage of and then in the tradition of Jeanette Howard Foster, the author of the self-published literary study *Sex Variant Women in Literature* (1956), Grier cataloged and categorized work by and about lesbians in the repressive decades of the 1950s and 1960s.

Cait Coker and Kate Ozment demonstrate the vibrancy of contemporary feminist recovery work in the “Women in Book History Bibliography.”¹ Grier’s work recovered lesbian writers and portrayals of lesbians in literature in a similar vein and now with her work out of print, she is the subject of recovery. Both Grier and her mentor, Foster, labored outside academia and made significant contributions to lesbian history and literature, demonstrating the importance of “unauthorized” scholars to LGBTQ studies.² While D. W. Krummel embraces scholarly ecstasy with the assertion that “[c]itations are disseminated and perpetuated—across the world and through history—in hopes of leading to various possible reactions,” he writes primarily about scholarly audiences and assumes that these reactions come from scholars.³ Grier, who never attended college and was not formally trained in bibliography nor librarianship, did not seek to animate scholarly discussions but rather to engage other lesbians in reading. Understanding her work restates bibliography as important outside scholarly attentions and inside communities of enthusiastic readers.

By tracing Grier’s work in three major bibliographic projects—the Lesbiana column in *The Ladder*, *The Lesbian in Literature* (which published in three separate editions), and *Lesbiana* (a book Grier published

from her columns)—Grier’s bibliographic practices, enumerative and annotative, emerge as tools in the era before Judith Butler that distill lesbian identities and forge lesbian communities through iterative practices. An examination of Grier’s bibliographic work between 1957 and 1981 reveals how it functions as a form of identity-making and communal imagining, anticipating Butler’s theories of bodies and beings in *Gender Trouble* (1990). Operating functionally as an outsider of multiple worlds, Grier’s work is a monumental achievement. She synthesized a rich lesbian literary tradition from the work of predecessors and provided a vibrant foundation for future canon-making projects that define lesbian literature and asserted lesbians as cultural citizens.

The Ladder: Bibliography Conjuring Lesbians

Before she came to *The Ladder*, Barbara Grier was an autodidact.⁴ From her own accounts, she began reading lesbian novels with the support of her mother during her preteen years. She knew with great internal clarity that she was a lesbian. Grier never attended college, and until Naiad Press was able to employ her in the early 1980s, she worked at pink-collar office jobs to support herself and her book-buying habits. Once she became involved in *The Ladder*, she favored jobs with free long-distance phone service that she could utilize after hours to call lesbians around the country in search of books. She was not formally trained as a librarian (though both her long-term partners were), nor was she trained as an historian or literary scholar. She listened, learned, and networked with professionals to discover, read, and document literature about lesbians.

In the middle of the twentieth century, this was not a modest ambition. Finding lesbian books outside the racks of pulps was difficult. Libraries restricted access to books about homosexuality, and until 1958, the US Postal Service refused to deliver “obscene” material about homosexuality. Grier read, wrote letters, networked with librarians, and found books slowly through analog media. During this period, sexology, medicine, psychology, political science, and other disciplines analyzed lesbianism, and these disciplines and their practitioners invested in naming, classifying, and enforcing sexual categories with shame, criminality, and illness models.⁵ Grier had to resist these narratives and rewrite them.

In 1957, Grier discovered the *Daughters of Bilitis* and its publication, *The Ladder*. She became a columnist for *The Ladder* and later an editor. She was a prodigious correspondent with lesbians around the United States. While working on *The Ladder*, Grier met and fell in love Donna McBride,

ending one relationship and beginning a partnership that continued until her death. Together, Grier and McBride read and collected books then founded and ran *Naiad* for twenty-five years. They enjoyed a decade of retirement before Grier died in 2011. This biographical sketch provides a foundation to examine Grier's bibliographic practices—and how they brought lesbian identities and communities into being.

The Ladder covered books from its inception in October 1956 until it stopped publishing in September 1972. The founders of the Daughters of Bilitis recognized books as a way for lesbians to connect with and explore lesbian identity. Book reviews, both enthusiastic and cautionary, populated the pages of *The Ladder*, and bibliographies formed an important part of its book coverage. From nearly the beginning, Grier was central to *The Ladder's* book coverage.

Three modes of bibliography by Grier emerge within *The Ladder*. First, the *Lesbiana* column served an enumerative bibliography of lesbian and lesbian-adjacent books from March 1957 through November 1966. Second, from December 1966 until September 1972, the *Lesbiana* column transformed into a bibliographic column with a strong narrative voice. Third, starting in 1958, Grier compiled annual reviews of lesbian books published in the previous year. As I will show, each of these bibliographies is a structured iterative practice that summons different identity formations. Enumerative bibliographies published from 1957 until 1966 created a lesbian identity defined and performed by lesbians themselves. Bibliographic columns hail lesbian communal formations with shared political, social, and economic interests. The annual reviews invite an imaginary of lesbians in conversation with commercial publishing and the apparatus of culture-making. Collectively, bibliographies in *The Ladder* demonstrate how Grier used bibliography as a mobilizing tool for lesbians in the mid-twentieth century.

Lesbians Defined by Lesbians

Although *The Ladder* was not the first lesbian periodical (that distinction belongs to *Vice Versa*, a periodical published by the pseudonymous Lisa Ben during the 1940s), it was the most influential publication for midcentury lesbians.⁶ The Daughters of Bilitis, initially a group of under two dozen self-identified lesbians, most of them partnered, began their "mimeographed twelve-page newsletter" in the fall of 1956.⁷ Marcia Gallo explains that the name came from the cover image of an actual ladder that "reaches the billowing clouds above it" with "two slender women

dressed in tailored slacks and blouses at the foot.”⁸ In the March 1957 issue, *The Ladder* printed its first Lesbiana column, a “bibliography of Lesbian literature (fiction, non-fiction, drama, poetry).”⁹ Phyllis Lyon initiated the feature and compiled the first column, which enumerated four books. This first installation included *The Collected Works of Pierre Louÿs* (1951), a farcical work about the poet Bilitis, a fictitious contemporary of Sappho and from whom the Daughters derived their name; Radclyffe Hall’s classic, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928); *Wind Woman* (1953) by Carol Hales; and *Claudine at School* (1900) by Colette. The Lesbiana columns continued each month enumerating books of lesbian interest.

From her home in Kansas City, Kansas, in the summer of 1957, Barbara Grier wrote to *The Ladder*. She delighted in the existence of the organization and commended the organization for the newsletter and its Lesbiana feature. Grier also brimmed with suggestions. After a lively correspondence, Phyllis Lyon, the editor of *The Ladder*, asked Grier to be the Lesbiana columnist.¹⁰ Grier agreed. Her first column appeared in September 1957; she penned the column for the next fifteen years under her pseudonym Gene Damon.¹¹

While Grier’s work is indelibly linked with this Lesbiana column, it is significant that she did not initiate or name it. Grier stepped into a project already embraced by the Daughters. The idea of reading to find lesbian identities and life possibilities circulated among a cadre of educated white lesbians in the 1950s.¹² In her dissertation “Paper Lesbians,” Kathryn Adams notes that midcentury lesbians created “an apparatus to record, among other things, the construction of new lesbian and lesbian-feminist cultural identities.”¹³ Grier did not invent the idea of reading to discover lesbian identity, but she amplified, even turbo-charged, it.

For nine years, enumerative bibliography was the primary mode of the Lesbiana column. Grier presented books in list format with sequential numbering, a two-line bibliography, and a short description of the book. For example, in the November 1957 column, Grier included books by Valerie Taylor and Radclyffe Hall. She introduced these two books as follows:

33. WHISPER THEIR LOVE by Valerie Taylor, Crest Books, Fawcett Publishing Co., 1957.

A paperback set in a girls school detailing the love affair between an 18-year-old student and the dean of women. The writing is not too bad, the characters come to life and the story moves at a fast pace.

34. THE UNLIT LAMP by Radclyffe Hall (1924).
Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith.

An early work by the author of "The Well of Loneliness" concerning the sacrifice of a girl's entire life to the designs of selfish parents. A profound and tragic study, it well exemplifies the lines of Browning:

"And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost
Is the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin."¹⁴

This style—a bibliographic entry for the book followed by a sentence or two describing the book—is representative of the first nine years of *Lesbiana* columns. Over nearly a decade, this spare presentation and repetitive style highlights the continued presence of lesbians in books. Bibliographies in *The Ladder* are iterative; through this iteration, the presence of lesbians defined by themselves, undeniable.

Although the style is repetitive, the content is broad, deep, and capacious as the example intimates.¹⁵ Grier did not hesitate to include mass-market paperbacks like Taylor's; this format saw a flowering of lesbian content during the 1950s, always with an "appropriate" suicide or other condemnation of the lesbian characters.¹⁶ Grier also consciously commingled highbrow and lowbrow, here juxtaposing Taylor's popular novel with the literary novel by Hall. Early *Lesbiana* columns also included D. H. Lawrence, Honoré de Balzac, Simone de Beauvoir, and Gertrude Stein. The range of books where lesbians, or sex-variant women, appeared as characters and where lesbian themes and subplots could be detected demonstrated to Grier, and to her readers, the persistence of lesbianism within human experience.¹⁷

Over time, the sheer volume of books that Grier documented (she enumerated 302 books by November 1966) cemented her argument about lesbianism as an ordinary element of human experience countering other prevailing ideas. She also invited women to identify as lesbians. Grier understood, perhaps only intuitively, that lesbian emerges as "a variable boundary" and a "signifying practice within a cultural field."¹⁸ She recognized prior to Butler's 1990 insight that signification, naming oneself lesbian, is "a regulated process of repetition."¹⁹ Enumerative bibliography provided Grier a repetitive tool to inscribe lesbian identity and invite women to join her in this signifying practice. Through repetition of lesbian books, she "reenacts" the identity of lesbian and enables readers to "re-experience" lesbian, accreting lesbian as an identity formation.²⁰

Hailing Lesbian Communities

Once lesbian identity coalesced, Grier intuitively turned to a second project in bibliography: framing lesbian as a communal category. This argument emerged from a new iteration of the Lesbiana column. In December 1966, Grier announced that “the Lesbiana Column adopts this new form, becoming, hopefully, less formal and more readable.”²¹ The announcement was perfunctory; the tone and style of the column heralded a new era. Grier was not simply enumerating books; she was speaking, often quite intimately, with a community of lesbians, a community her earlier column enabled her to conjure. Grier, the Daughters of Bilitis, and the enumerative bibliographies of Lesbiana called lesbians into new shared identity formations. Now Grier turned to conversations with these lesbians and to imagining communities.

The new Lesbiana column dispensed with the sequential numbering of books and adopted a strong narrative voice, summoning lesbian readers into an intimate conversation with Grier about books. The column began, “Those of you who have read, or will be reading Maureen Duffy’s tremendous novel, *THE MICROCOSM*, reviewed in last month’s *LADDER*, will also want to read her first novel, *THAT’S HOW IT WAS*, London, Hutchison (New Author’s LTD.), 1962 and paperback edition, London, Panther, 1966.”²² Grier embedded bibliographic information into the new format but focused on the direct address of the reader. Grier continued, “There is a long section showing Paddy’s development into Lesbianism and her first real love affair, with an older, understanding teacher. Unlike many such loves recounted in literature (and, alas, experienced in life), the teacher returns the affection fully.”²³ Grier highlights what elements of the book will interest readers then inserts the wonderful, chatty aside in the parenthesis intimating shared lesbian experiences. As Grier developed this new narrative format, the columns became informal, casual, and unfettered, conversations among friends. Changing the format from a list of books that some women somewhere might want to read to a narrative bibliography of readerly impressions and thoughtful recommendations demonstrates that a community of readers exists and thrives on the other side of the pages of *The Ladder*.

These new narrative columns of Lesbiana, while still selective, provided a more expansive view of reading for books of lesbian interest. For instance, reviewing a book by a popular sociologist Sara Harris, Grier described *Hellhole: The Shocking Story of the Inmates and Life in the New York City House of Detention for Women* as “a lulu.”²⁴ She continued, “As could be expected, the individuals involved in her study aren’t the sort of

persons most of us are likely to meet. This is definitely not for the sensitive, but if conditions are HALF as bad as described, something needs to be done in a hurry."²⁵ Later Grier commentaries included raves for Kate Chopin, identifying the lesbian poems of Genevieve Taggard, and praise for Toni Cade's anthology *The Black Woman*.²⁶ Grier's range of reading—as well as her dialogue with other lesbians about books—continued in this new format. Grier spoke openly and confidently to a communal lesbian formation that she hailed through this new narrative bibliography.

Lesbians Create Culture

The third form of bibliography Grier practiced in *The Ladder* was an annual report of lesbian literature. In March 1958, *The Ladder* published "Time Has Brought a Change"; in it, Grier recorded nineteen titles of interest to lesbians published in 1957. Postpublication, with additional feedback from *The Ladder* community, this list grew to twenty-four titles.²⁷ From 1958 until 1963, these annual reports compiled a list of titles of interest to lesbians with three columns: author, title, and publisher. In 1964 the annual report transitions to a narrative format, though still includes a complete list of all titles identified in the previous year. In 1969 the volume of publishing of interest to lesbians was so great that Grier "abbreviated" the report "in the interests of space and time."²⁸ Grier continued this annual report through 1971, covering titles published in 1970. These eleven columns map changes in commercial publishing and the launch of a new do-it-yourself publishing ethos in lesbian-feminist communities. Through bibliographies, Grier conjured a new and important mode of thinking: lesbians' creation of their own culture and their contributions to mainstream culture.

In her narrative bibliographies between 1966 and 1972, Grier increasingly thought about the treatment of lesbian themes by commercial publishers and noted how the books' material production mirrored their status. In a May 1967 column, for example, Grier bemoaned that *Paradox Lost* by Marianne Sinclair, a novel she praised, was not available in the United States, a "doubly irritating situation" since Sinclair's husband "is regularly published in this country." Grier's recognition of gender inequality demonstrates how she trained readers to identify sexism, a theme to which she returned. Two months later, Grier reported that Sinclair's book was available in the United States "in a paperback edition only, with the title changed to *Corruption of Innocence*."²⁹ Grier notes the format change, implying a diminishment in the book's status

and highlighting the power of publishers to change books. In fact, in her annual reports, Grier tracked book formats in general: mass markets, trade paperbacks, and cloth editions. She noted in the final annual report, “you have to go back to 1967’s [report] . . . to find a year with a higher count” of clothbound books.³⁰ While she does not make explicit arguments about format, she recognized that publishing hardback books signaled more cultural capital, power, and investment in the author.

Similarly, Grier recognized an end to the era of lesbian pulps in her annual review, noting in December 1966 that “for the first year since 1950 no paperback original is worth special attention.”³¹ Grier continued “that quality Lesbian material is being accepted by hardback publishers.”³² Books about lesbians were finding receptive publishers with more prestige and the era of dime store novels was ending. Grier described it as “the year Lesbian Literature found a balanced slot in the framework of general literature.”³³ While Grier heralded a period of inclusion in publishing lesbians, her pronouncement was not quite accurate. Rather than an embrace by commercial, mainstream publishing, lesbian writers witnessed a boom in lesbian-feminist independent publishers intent on taking control of their own literature through their own publishing houses, although that reality would not accelerate until the early 1970s. Grier’s strenuous arguments in 1966 for seeing women and lesbians as vibrant contributors to literary culture was prescient.

Like the enumerative bibliographies that Grier produced from 1957 through 1966, Grier continued her practice of openness to all books of interest to lesbians. She recognized established authors and authors beginning their careers. For example, she praised May Sarton’s fifth poetry collection, *Cloud, Stone, Sun, Vine* (1961), and Mary Oliver’s first collection, *No Voyage and Other Poems* (1965); she noted that the “first wholly Lesbian Anthology,” *Lesbian Love in Literature* (1962), was edited by Stella Fox.³⁴ Popular authors such as John Updike and William Maxwell merited mention as well as popular titles such as *The Group* by Mary McCarthy (1963) and *Valley of the Dolls* (1966) by Jacqueline Susann.

While Grier appreciated all lesbian portrayals, she reserved her most reverential accounts for titles that portray lesbians as vibrant, literate human beings. She praised *The Ladies of Llangollen* (1971) by Elizabeth Mavor as “a marvelous definitive biography,” Monique Wittig’s *Les Guerilleres* (1969) as “a hymn to women . . . a pioneer exultation to the glory of woman as a powerful and free and loving woman-oriented figure” and “very highly recommend[ed]” Rita Mae Brown’s *The Hand that Cradles the Rock* (1971) as “a marvelous collection of intensely personal Lesbian and feminist poetry.”³⁵ By the final installation of the annual

review in 1971, Grier reports “much more material by and about Lesbians is available now than at any time in the past, what with the constant coverage in most women’s liberation media and generally increased public interest.”³⁶ The lesbian–feminist revolution was at hand.

Reading her annual reports over eleven years demonstrates a wave cresting in books about lesbians. The explosion of feminist activity in the United States in the early 1970s, substantial portions of it initiated by lesbians—or women about to discover their lesbianism—became a new focus for lesbians. Sadly, the Daughters of Bilitis never adapted to this dramatically changing world. In her final column, Grier noted that one of the hallmarks of the column was “finding . . . older items of Lesbian interest.”³⁷ She shared two new finds, which came to her from lesbian poet Elsa Gidlow. One poem, “From an Argument on the Equality of the Sexes,” by Clara Reeves was from 1769; the other, “On the Friendship betwixt Two Ladies,” by Edmond Waller was from 1686.³⁸ Grier’s desire to be comprehensive across time continued, but by 1972 new lesbian publications arrived too regularly for her to keep up. Grier mentioned Isabel Miller’s *Patience and Sarah*; Jane Rule’s newest book, *Against the Season*; and Bertha Harris’s *Catching Saradove*, published in 1969, and her forthcoming book *Confessions of Cherubino*. Grier also announced a “Feminist Book Club” starting in Los Angeles, California, as a mail-order bookselling proposition. The world of hunting down lesbian titles and reading coded texts was ending—and so was *The Ladder*. In the fall of 1972, Grier had to find a new outlet for her bibliographic work. Grier’s burgeoning interest in understanding lesbians contributions to cultural fields led her to her next project.

“The Women Who Made All This Possible”: Bibliography as Community-Making

The transition from the enumerative bibliography to a bibliographic column with a strong narrative voice both hailed a community of lesbians and gave rise to Grier’s most ambitious bibliography project, *The Lesbian in Literature: A Bibliography* (1967). This enumerative bibliography not only conjured a community of lesbians but also was made possible by the very lesbians that Grier’s work emboldened. Grier published three editions of *The Lesbian in Literature*. It swaggers as an enumerative bibliography with the assurance of a community of lesbian readers behind it, and the very community Grier conjured contributed to its subsequent iterations.

Grier worked with Lee Stuart to compile *The Lesbian in Literature*. The presence of a collaborator further demonstrates Grier's growing community. It sold through the DOB Book Service for \$2 plus a 25-cent handling charge. This stapled pamphlet was emblematic of the currency of the day: typed pages, copied, and compiled cheaply for distribution to a niche community with a keen interest in the information. Grier described the pamphlet in an advertisement as "an alphabetical listing by author of all known books in the English language, in the general field of literature, concerned with lesbianism, or having lesbian characters."³⁹ DOB printed five thousand copies of the first edition and they sold out within two years.⁴⁰ Grier published the second edition in 1975 under the name of *The Ladder*, though the journal and the Daughters of Bilitis had ended. The third edition, published in 1981 by Naiad Press, was a substantially expanded edition, perfect bound and enhanced with eighty-nine photographs of lesbian authors included in the text.

The ambition of the first edition was, in Grier's word, "completist."⁴¹ Grier and Stuart included every book that they could find within their rubric of literature, which Grier describes as "novels, short stories, short novels, poetry, drama, and fictionalized biography."⁴² They also developed a specialized coding system for their selective bibliography of lesbian literature. The coding scheme included letters and asterisks. In the introduction, Grier explained the coding system. "A" meant "major Lesbian characters and/or action;" "B" signified "minor Lesbian characters and/or action;" "C" indicated "latent, repressed Lesbianism;" and "T" was for "trash," books of poor quality.⁴³ This classification was supplemented with an asterisk system of one, two or three asterisks. Three indicated "very substantial quality of Lesbian material." The asterisks, the authors note, were not about literary quality but about the "quality of the Lesbian material in the work in question. Inevitably some very good literature contains very poorly handled Lesbian material and some pretty poor literature contains some excellent Lesbian material. Happily sometimes the two are combined."⁴⁴ This first edition provides information about all of the identified books with lesbian characters, but as the field of lesbian literature develops, the bibliography became more selective.

Jan Watson and Robin Jordan collaborated with Grier for the second edition. They deleted three thousand entries that had been marked "trash." Grier notes that these entries are now not needed as a result of "the changing consciousness of the world"⁴⁵ and the subsequent explosion of lesbian-feminist books. The only retained titles with the "T" label are the ones where the author's work extends multiple categories. The

appearance of this trash category in all editions reminds readers that lesbian literature and experience were once marginalized and maligned.

Reading *The Lesbian in Literature*, a mode of classification, influenced by sexology and the work of Jeannette Howard Foster, emerges. Elsewhere I have described Foster and Grier as “unauthorized historians,” lesbians working to unearth and explore a lesbian literary history outside of the academy and traditional locations of historical knowledge.⁴⁶ They are also unauthorized bibliographers: unauthorized by scholars, that is, but authorized by a vibrant lesbian community that their work created. Grier’s bibliographies are first and foremost objects for lesbians to read and use. She and her collaborators spoke openly and confidently to their audiences. Over fourteen years from the publication of the first edition (1967) to the third (1981), the audience for these bibliographies and their material conditions changed. In the third edition, photographs of lesbian writers gesture both to the ability of lesbian writers to be visible and also the growth of a community of artists and writers to produce the photographs. This textual evidence provides a further example of how Grier’s bibliographies brought writers and communities into being.

Of all editions of *The Lesbian in Literature*, the third edition manifests community most explicitly, this time folding in collaborators and readers. The first page of acknowledgments, titled “the Women Who Made All This Possible,” thanks all the women who worked on the bibliography over the past nearly two decades, and in the introduction, Grier invited readers to help as volunteers for future editions.⁴⁷ Grier situated herself as a steward of lesbian literature working in partnership with an array of volunteers. Grier aligned herself with an active community of lesbians. By her own description, she worked in partnership with other lesbian readers and in service to real and imagined lesbian communities.

In *The Lesbian in Literature*, Grier operated at the height of her bibliographic powers. She compiled a comprehensive bibliography and invited lesbians into reading practices that recognized lesbian identities and propagated them. She consolidated her authority as a lesbian literary critic and her knowledge of lesbian literature through continued iteration of completeness. In the same ways that Grier’s bibliographies created material analogs, Grier’s authority on lesbian literature came not only through bibliography but also through an assembled archive. In the introduction to the third edition, she notes that she and McBride had a personal lesbian archive with over twenty-four thousand items in it.⁴⁸ Her enumerative bibliographies captured objects and books and then conjure something greater—lesbians and communities.

Lesbiana: Bibliography Heralding a Past and Summoning a Future

In 1976, Grier collected her columns into a book *Lesbiana: Book Reviews from The Ladder, 1966–1972*. Like her early enumerative bibliographies, which iterated lesbian identities, and the annotative bibliographies, which coalesced lesbian communities, *Lesbiana* bound as a book willed another future: Grier as publisher.

Early in the 1970s, Grier and her lover, Donna McBride, discussed book publishing with another couple, Anyda Marchant and Muriel Crawford. This impulse to grasp the means of production in service to lesbian visions was widely shared as women founded book publishers like the Women's Press Collective, Diana Press, and Daughters Publishing, as well as periodicals like *Amazon Quarterly*, *Dyke: A Quarterly*, and *Conditions*. Grier and McBride brought know-how and tenacity to the project. Marchant and Crawford brought capital to invest. Each couple also brought an initial project. Marchant wanted to publish her novel *The Latecomer* using the pen name Sarah Aldridge. Grier had the *Lesbiana* columns. A publishing house began.

Reading and writing about books for more than two decades provided an intellectual foundation for Grier and *Lesbiana*, the collection of annotative bibliographies also provided an intellectual vision for Naiad. In many ways, Naiad's publishing extended Grier's bibliographic passions. At Naiad, Grier published J. R. Roberts's *Black Lesbians: A Bibliography* (1981) and *The Lesbian Periodicals Index*, compiled and edited by Clare Potter (1986), as well as the third edition of *The Lesbian in Literature* (1981). These two new bibliographic projects demonstrate the growth of lesbian communities and their support for and interest in specialty bibliography. The early reading that she did of "lesbian pulps" extended the work of Naiad where Grier published some of the most sensitive lesbian love stories, including novels by Katherine Forrest and Sarah Schulman. Grier also revisited classics publishing a new edition of Foster's *Sex Variant Women in Literature*, Lillian Faderman and Brigitte Eriksson's *Lesbian-Feminism in Turn-of-the-Century Germany*, and Jane Rule's *Desert of the Heart*. As a publisher, Grier surveyed lesbian literature, identified lacunae and filled them. *Lesbiana* documented Grier's reading and became a road map for her publishing.

Lesbiana also promoted a nascent canon of lesbian literature and the idea of lesbians as producers of literary work. As a companion to *The Lesbian in Literature*, *Lesbiana* provided a voice and a vision of

contemporary lesbian literature. Grier does not proscribe lesbian literary canons like Terry Castle in *The Literature of Lesbianism* or Lillian Faderman in *Chloe plus Olivia*; Castle seeks to give the human desire of women for women the “intellectual respect, existential weight, and moral and aesthetic gravitas” she believes it deserves while Faderman assembles “real literature” that grapples with questions of a “lesbian aesthetic.”⁴⁹ Grier, on the other hand, imagined a future where crucial bodies of literature were available to lesbian readers. Her dedication to completist bibliography and her attention to writing prior to the twentieth century made these and other future canon-making projects possible.

Most significantly, *Lesbiana* summoned a new element of lesbian identity: cultural citizenship. Grier’s lesbian bibliographies assert that lesbians possess a notable past worthy of attention. As Grier, McBride, Marchant, and Crawford were starting Naiad, Grier published three books with Diana Press that reprint stories, biographies, and essays from *The Ladder*. These three books, *Lesbian Lives*, *The Lesbian Home Journal*, and *The Lavender Herring*, together with *Lesbiana*, brought renewed visibility to *The Ladder* and the Daughters of Bilitis.⁵⁰ When *The Ladder* was published, its distribution was limited to members of the organization. The Daughters did not promote it to libraries or generally seek attention for it; when the organization ended, its visibility diminished significantly. As lesbian activism crested, Grier and others worried their earlier work would be forgotten. These books cemented the Daughters as crucial activist formation and *The Ladder* as a vital element of lesbian print culture from the middle of the century. A new generation of readers could find *Lesbiana*, and the Daughters of Bilitis could enter a lesbian imaginary. Most importantly, by reprinting materials from *The Ladder* in *Lesbiana* and the three books from Diana Press, Grier heralded future lesbians with missives from the past—a past that was courageous, honorable, and interesting. These future lesbians and lesbian communities that Grier called into being could perform, expand, amplify, and extend the identity and communal formations of lesbian, asserting their cultural citizenship as open lesbians.

Julie R. Enszer, PhD, is a scholar and a poet. Her scholarly book manuscript, “A Fine Bind,” is a history of lesbian-feminist presses from 1969 until 2009. Her scholarly work has appeared or is forthcoming in Southern Cultures, Journal of Lesbian Studies, American Periodicals, WSQ, Feminist Studies, and Frontiers. She edits and publishes Sinister Wisdom, a multi-cultural lesbian literary and art journal.

NOTES

I am grateful to Lisa Maruca and Kate Ozment for their incisive comments and editorial feedback on this article, to Donna McBride for her comments and conversation about the era, and to Jaime Harker for her support always of the work.

1. The open source bibliography is here: <http://www.womensbookhistory.org/>. Cait Coker and Kate Ozment reflect on this work in “Building the Women in Book History Bibliography, or Digital Enumerative Bibliography as Preservation of Feminist Labor,” *DHQ: Digital Humanities Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (2019), <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/13/3/000428/000428.html>.
2. *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 18, no. 4 (2014): 311–92. Despite her large body of work, Grier has not been examined extensively in scholarly work. After her death, the *Journal of Lesbian Studies* published a special issue, “The Influence and Legacy of Barbara Grier.”
3. D. W. Krummel, “The Dialectics of Enumerative Bibliography: Observations on the Historical Study of the Practices of Citation and Compilation,” *Library Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (July 1988): 238–57, quotation on 243.
4. The following sketch of Grier draws from the biography by Joanne Passet, *Indomitable: The Life of Barbara Grier* (Tallahassee, FL: Bella Books, 2016); Marcia Gallo’s *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2006); and Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s–1970s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
5. For more, see Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (University of Chicago Press, 1999); and Margo Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).
6. For an excellent overview of *Vice Versa*, see Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rose of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995), 3–5.
7. Marcia Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2006), 25.
8. Gallo, 25.
9. Gene Damon, *Lesbiana*, *The Ladder* 1, no. 6 (March 1957): 12.
10. Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 36.
11. All the women writing for *The Ladder* used pseudonyms; it was not safe to be open about lesbianism during the 1950s and 1960s. Grier used multiple pseudonyms, though Gene Damon was the most popular and frequent. Joanne Passet discusses her pseudonyms and the climate in *Indomitable*, 28.
12. Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Daring Life and Dangerous Times of Eve Adams* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2021). The descriptor “educated white lesbians” is an easy one, generally accurate, though imprecise. Grier, for example, was not formally educated. Class and education differences existed among midcentury lesbians. Katz’s recent biography of Eve Adams, a Jewish immigrant and political radical, and his recovery of her book *Lesbian Love* invite new imaginaries of lesbian print culture and of more nuanced analyses of lesbian communities through the lens of race, ethnicity, class, and gender expressions.

13. Kathryn Adams, "Paper Lesbians: Alternative Publishing and the Politics of Lesbian Representation in the United States, 1950–1990" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1994), 5.
14. Gene Damon, *Lesbiana*, *The Ladder* 2, no. 2 (November 1957): 14.
15. Jaime Harker, *The Lesbian South: Southern Feminists, the Women in Print Movement, and the Queer Literary Canon* (Raleigh: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 22. Harker characterizes the *Lesbiana* column as "the creation of a lesbian literary tradition" and reads Grier as invested in an "inclusive" lesbian literary tradition that emphasizes and respects readers' reading preferences.
16. For analysis of lesbian pulps, see Yvonne Keller, "'Was It Right to Love Her Brother's Wife So Passionately?': Lesbian Pulp Novels and U.S. Lesbian Identity, 1950–1965," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (June 2005): 385–410, and Stephanie Foote, "Deviant Classics: Pulps and the Making of Lesbian Print Culture," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31, no. 1 (2005): 169–90, <https://doi.org/10.1086/432742>.
17. "Sex variant women" is the term that Foster preferred. Grier uses it within the pages of *The Ladder* and in many of her writings. It has now largely fallen out of use, though I note it operates as an umbrella term for midcentury lesbians thinking about both sexual orientation and gender identity.
18. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 139.
19. Butler, 139.
20. Butler, 140.
21. Gene Damon, *Lesbiana*, *The Ladder* 11, no. 3 (December 1966): 22.
22. Damon, 22.
23. Damon, 22–23.
24. Hugh Ryan, *The Women's House of Detention* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2022). Ryan's recent book provides a robust history of queer, lesbian, and trans women at the House of Detention in New York. While *Ladder* readers may not be likely to meet women at the House of Detention, as Ryan demonstrates they were kindred spirits.
25. Barbara Grier, *Lesbiana: Book Reviews from the Ladder* (Reno, NV: Naiad Press, 1976), 43.
26. Grier, 197, 198, and 218.
27. Gene Damon, "Lesbian Literature in 1959," *The Ladder* 4, no. 5 (February 1960): 14.
28. Gene Damon, "Lesbian Literature in 1969: An Annual Review," *The Ladder* 14, no. 7/8 (April–May 1970): 29.
29. Grier, *Lesbiana*, 21.
30. Gene Damon, "Lesbian Literature in 1971: An Annual Report," *The Ladder* 16, no. 7/8 (April–May 1972): 31.
31. Gene Damon, "Lesbian Literature, 1966: Annual Review," *The Ladder* 11, no. 3 (December 1966): 22.
32. Damon, "Lesbian Literature, 1966," 22.

33. Damon, 22.
34. Gene Damon, "Lesbian Literature in 1962," *The Ladder* 7, no. 4 (January 1963): 6–13, 26.
35. Damon, "Lesbian Literature in 1971," 31.
36. Damon, 31.
37. Gene Damon, Lesbiana, *The Ladder* 16, no. 7/8 (April–May 1972): 31.
38. Gene Damon, Lesbiana, *The Ladder* 16 no. 9/10 (June–July 1972): 35.
39. Advertisement in *The Ladder* 7, no. 11/12 (September 1968): 31.
40. Barbara Grier, *The Lesbian in Literature*, 3rd ed. (Naiad Press, 1981), xvii.
41. Gene Damon, Jan Watson, and Robin Jordan, "The Ladder, 1975," in Barbara Grier, *The Lesbian in Literature: A Bibliography*, 2nd ed. (Reno, NV: Naiad Press, 1975), 4.
42. Damon et al., 4.
43. Damon et al., 4–5.
44. Damon et al., 5.
45. Damon et al., 4.
46. Julie R. Enszer, "Lesbian History: Spirals of Imagination, Marginalization, and Creation," in *The Routledge History of Queer America*, ed. Don Romesburg (New York: Routledge, 2019), 237–49, quotation on 238.
47. Barbara Grier, *The Lesbian in Literature*, 3rd ed. (Tallahassee, FL: Naiad Press, 1981), n.p.
48. Grier, xviii.
49. Terry Castle, introduction to *The Literature of Lesbianism: A Historical Anthology from Ariosto to Stonewall*, ed. Terry Castle (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 1–56, quotation on 48; and Lillian Faderman, preface to *Chloe plus Olivia: An Anthology of Lesbian Literature from the Seventeenth Century to the Present*, ed. Lillian Faderman (New York: Viking, 1994), vii–xiv, quotations on vii and xiv.
50. In partnership with Coletta Reid, one of the principles of Diana Press, Grier edited *Lesbian Lives: Biographies of Women from The Ladder* (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1976), *The Lesbians Home Journal: Stories from The Ladder* (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1976), and *The Lavender Herring: Lesbian Essays from The Ladder* (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1976).