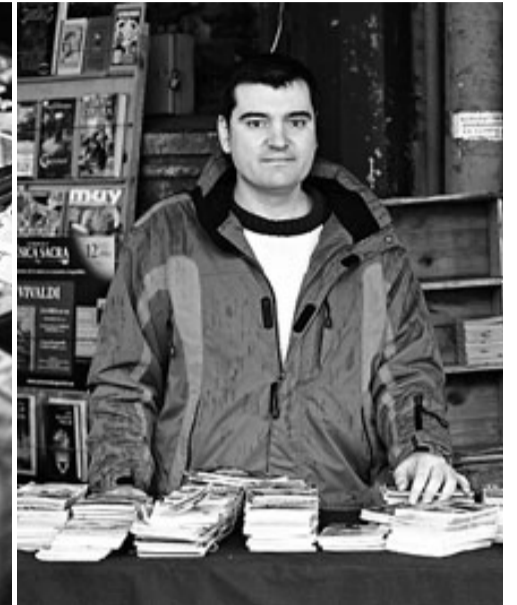




Books

FANS OF THE LURID
AND SENSATIONAL
ARE A DYING BREED

End of the story for pulp fiction



There are no plans by publishers to reissue pulp fiction titles; Roger Blanco book and comic dealer has a stand in Barcelona's Sant Antoni market / L.HEARN

LOUIS HEARN

● It's a misty Sunday morning and Roger Blanco has arrived early at his stand in the Mercat Sant Antoni to unpack the wooden crates filled with weathered paperbacks. With titles like *Filthy with Mud and Blood*, the covers offer lurid depictions of swashbuckling gunslingers and hatchet-wielding fiends doing something with or to a selection of semi-clad ladies. These pulp novels are called *bol-silibros* because of their ideal size for an adolescent boy to carry around in his back pocket.

There are, however, no adolescent boys visiting the market stand, only older gentlemen with the ubiquitous cigar clenched in mouth. In fact, one would be hard-pressed to find among Roger's customers someone under 50.

"Every generation has its product," explains Roger. "Pulp

novels were theirs; modern people have video games."

José Guira, 85, is one of the regular visitors to Roger's tables. He began reading the books in the 1960s for entertainment while travelling as a sales representative throughout Spain. "The trips were long back then," he says. "I used to travel on a train between Barcelona and Galicia called the 'Shangai' that took 40 hours."

Roger agrees that most of his customers have similar expectations from the books. "Easy to read, and not very complex. They're for passing the time," he said.

Conspicuously absent are the young collectors who hound Sant Antoni's comic book tables to haggle over issues hermetically sealed in plastic. Instead, the books here are strapped together carelessly with rubber

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"Do you know the story of Leda and Jupiter?"
"Yes, Jupiter turned into a swan and was able to possess the beautiful Leda ... but you're no swan."
Corbet leaned over and pressed his lips into the warm hollow between his hostess's neck and shoulder.
"Leda, I'm going to be your Jupiter, but in an entirely human form," he murmured with a warm accent.
With his left hand, he searched for the zipper of her dress. Leda didn't protest.
(Come with Me to Hell! by Clark Carrados)
•

bands, and customers looking to swap arrive with their novels heaped in grocery bags.

Germán Puig, manager of the comics and collectibles store Norma Comics, doesn't find this surprising. "When I was young and just discovering comics, I used to go to a shop near my house where I'd sometimes see old people trading in these books," he says. "I wouldn't call the novels 'disposable,' but the people who read them weren't interested in collecting them. It was more a practical thing of reading them and then trading them in for others."

Puig underscores the idea that the novels were the entertainment of a previous generation. "No one has asked about these books in the 15 years I've been working here," he says. "I think the majority of people who used to read them aren't with us any-

more."

Although many other fads from the past enjoy revivals, there seems to be no great rush to resuscitate the bolsilibro phenomenon. The publishing rights to many of the novels belong to Editorial Bruguera, whose bolsilibro empire foundered in 1986 and was bought by Grupo Zeta. A spokeswoman for the publisher says they have no intention of bringing out the old genre collections but will focus instead on the more "literary" novels in Bruguera's vast archives.

All of this means that the pulp tradition in Spain will die out as soon as the remaining copies in stands such as Roger's are worn and torn into extinction. "These books are just the kinds of things that get erased from your memory," says Puig. "In the future they'll be forgotten completely."

INTERVIEW. LEM RYAN. PULP WRITER

'I was producing a novel a week'

LOUIS HEARN

● Francisco Javier Miguel Gómez, better known by his pseudonym Lem Ryan, published his first pulp novel at age 15 in the early 80s and was able to witness first-hand the demise of the pulp tradition in Spain.

—Why did Spanish pulp writers use American names for their pseudonyms?

Books in the Spanish language are what sell the least here. So to have any chance of being taken seriously, you had to sound American. My pseudonym comes from science fiction writer Stanislaw Lem and the actor Ryan O'Neal, who was

popular back then.

—I've read pulp novels in which main characters' names change from one chapter to the next, as if the author had forgotten and not bothered to look back. Didn't anyone read the book before they published it?

I was producing a novel a week without sketches or synopses. Sometimes you'd forget about things you wrote in the previous pages, or you found that you'd created a batch of sub-plots and had only two pages left to resolve them all. As for rewrites, there were none. We finished the book and sent it off to the publisher on the same



Lem Ryan, pulp fiction writer/L. HEARN

day. And the editors were all so busy that as long as what arrived on their desks was minimally readable, they sent it to press.

—How did you work with the artists on the cover art?

On the first page of the manuscript we had to write a general description of the scene we wanted on the cover, and then Bruguera sent that to the artists. At that time, though, Bruguera was already having problems with debt, and some artists refused to continue drawing covers if they hadn't been paid for the previous ones. So what the publisher would do is recycle covers from other novels that had nothing to do with your story. The cover art for my book *Endless Life*, for example, shows a spaceship blowing up. No spaceship blows up in the novel.

—But the sexy ladies on the

covers — you deliver those goods, right?

During the dictatorship, erotic magazines and films were prohibited in Spain, so there were legions of Spaniards travelling up to Perpignan to see movies like *The Last Tango in Paris*. With the transition to democracy, Spain experienced a sudden surge of erotic books, magazines and films. You had to put some sex in your novels, otherwise it seemed like you just weren't aware of the revolution going on around you. You can imagine how little a 15-year-old kid like me knew about sex, but hey, I tried.