

The Quatrefoil Newsletter • Summer 2021

Paperback Lifelines

Lesbian Pulp Novels and Me • By Lisa Vecoli



quatrefolio

Malinda Lo, YA genre-crosser

The Mysterious "Songs of Bilitis" • New at Q: Free Membership



Join us!

Apply to Quatrefoil's Board of Directors.

Do you want to be part of a dynamic nonprofit that is a crossroads for the free exchange of ideas through the worlds of books, film, authors, panel discussions, poetry readings, scholarships, book clubs and community building? Quatrefoil is now accepting applications for our board of directors. Board members are elected to three-year terms. They steer all aspects of the library, from technology to fundraising, programming to operations. In addition to attending monthly board meetings, directors also pitch in at the committee level. We seek diverse candidates and will work to identify, recruit, and retain candidates who are reflective of the racial, ethnic and gender diversity of the Twin Cities. The application and more information is available [here](#).



Free. For All.

In one of the most significant changes in its 35-year history, Quatrefoil launches free membership.

First, Quatrefoil discontinued overdue fines. That was in 2019. Now it's offering free membership to all. What's going on?

Fine amnesty — and now free membership — are aimed at changing policies that might discourage some people from being more actively involved in the library and its activities.

Paid membership has been part of the library since it opened in 1986, so this is a big change. Under the old system, an individual paid \$40 per year to gain borrowing privileges.

Free membership is just as it sounds. Anyone who signs up gets a permanent Q Card that allows them to borrow books and DVDs. This should encourage lower-income people and younger people to think about using Quatrefoil's unique collection, one of the nation's largest.

Nonprofit Quatrefoil “competes” for patrons with excellent library systems in the Twin Cities, which are tax-supported and free. In its early years, Q offered LGBTQ books and DVDs that may not have been available at these larger public libraries. That gap has narrowed, providing another impetus for us to “go free.”

“When Quatrefoil opened 35 years ago, finding books about our lives was difficult,” said Quatrefoil librarian Kathy Robbins. “That has changed, but Quatrefoil offers a depth and breadth of queer materials available nowhere else in Minnesota – all in a place where everyone is welcome to explore and enjoy LGBTQ books, movies and periodicals. Free memberships will encourage more folks to use Quatrefoil's amazing collections.”

Those who want a Q Card must fill out a short application and sign a Terms of Service Agreement. We still ask that materials be returned by their due dates and that patrons pay for lost materials. Lost cards may be replaced for a \$5 charge. We will continue to ask for a donation of \$2 per DVD borrowed.

To all those who have been loyal (and paying) members of Q, the board offers its sincere thanks. We hope you all will sign up for your new Q Card. Spread the word: Quatrefoil membership is free. See you at the library!



—Claude Peck

Writing Outside the Lines



Please don't pigeonhole multi-genre
Young Adult author Malinda Lo.

By CHRISTINE JENKINS

Malinda Lo, the best-selling author of young adult fiction, was born in China in 1974 and moved to the U.S. when she was 3. She has degrees from Wellesley, Harvard and Stanford. Lo lives with her wife in Massachusetts.

Lo's first two novels, "Ash" (2009) and "Huntress" (2011), are fantasies set in a world that includes humans, fairies and other supernatural creatures. "Ash" (called "somber and lovely" by the New York Times) is also a retelling of the Cinderella story in which Ash's romantic interest is the woman who is the king's chief huntress. Her second book, "Huntress," is set in the same kingdom several hundred years before Ash's story. Her next two novels "Adaptation" (2012) and "Inheritance" (2013) are a 2-book science-fiction series set in an "X-Files"-like dystopian American future. Her adventure thriller "A Line in the Dark" (2017) is set in the contemporary world. Her most recent book, "Last Night at the Telegraph Club" (2021) is set in San Francisco's Chinatown during the Cold War in the 1950s. All of Lo's fiction includes one or more LGBTQ+ characters. I interviewed Lo by email.

CJ: I cannot think of another YA author who has written as broadly, genre-wise, as you have. It seems like many YA authors are pigeonholed in a single genre (SF, fantasy, historical fiction, etc.). Is this something you have deliberately tried to avoid?

ML: I am very much following my interests in whatever direction they take me. I'm following the story idea, no matter what genre it's in. As a reader, I read relatively widely, although I read less and less fantasy these days, and more literary fiction, which didn't used to interest me much. Fantasy was a genre that I loved when I was a young adult, especially the novels of Robin McKinley, so it's not surprising to me that fantasy is where my novels began. Science fiction, too, was something I enjoyed as a teen, but over the years I read fewer science-fiction novels and watched more SF television and movies. The science fiction I've written has been very influenced by TV.

The genre that I have read consistently from childhood to now is mystery fiction. I started with Nancy Drew of course, and today I always turn to crime fiction when I want to be completely absorbed in a book. Despite this, I haven't yet written a detective novel. "A Line in the Dark" is a psychological thriller and includes many mystery elements, but it's not quite a murder mystery. I have a feeling I'm saving that for later in my life, maybe after I've written every other genre!

I arrived at "Last Night at the Telegraph Club" almost by accident. I thought it was just a short story. I knew very little about the 1950s when I started writing it, and had never even been particularly interested in that time, although I have enjoyed plenty of historical fiction. The 1950s turned out to be quite fascinating, but it's so close to the present day that you can't really fudge very much of it since people are still alive who lived through those times. I'd like to feel like I have a little more artistic license.

I think I have been pigeonholed even though I skip across genres. I'm still considered a writer of fantasy even though I haven't published a speculative novel since 2013. Beyond that, I'm considered a writer of LGBTQ YA fiction, which is certainly a category that can limit the way one's books are promoted. I'd love to refuse to be pigeonholed, but I don't think refusal works!

CJ: I like your choice to continue to write in the "Ash" universe but to set "Huntress" in a time long before the events in "Ash." Do you have plans to explore that world further?

ML: Not at this time, but you're not the first to ask!

CJ: You clearly did a lot of historical research in writing "Telegraph Club." As a Chinese lesbian, Lily Hu's story as a member of several underrepresented groups during the early Cold War years made me want to know more about 20th-century Chinese immigrants in the United States during and after World War II. Are you considering exploring the 20th-century lives of Chinese in the U.S.?

ML: Probably not in the way you mean. I'm actually very inefficient with my novels. I tend to do an excessive amount of research into one subject (or time period) and then never use that information again. I wish I wasn't so inefficient, but there doesn't seem to be any other way for me to write. I follow the ideas that grab me; I don't follow any sort of logical research plan. This is

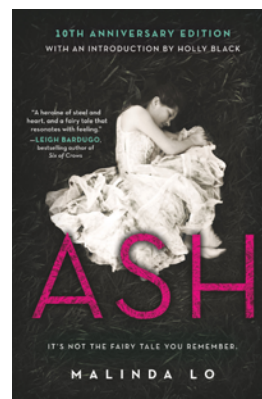
probably one of the reasons I dropped out of grad school and became a writer!

CJ: Where will you head with your writing in the next several years?

ML: I discovered with "Telegraph Club" that I love writing historical fiction, so I anticipate writing more of it. My next novel is a realistic YA novel set in 2013. I'm not sure if that's contemporary or not, but it doesn't feel quite like historical yet. I also feel that I'm ready to write novels about older people (adults). I think I've exhausted pretty much everything I have to say about adolescence. I'm fairly certain I will never write for middle grade or younger ages, because the stories that interest me skew much older.

I'm in my mid-forties, and I'm increasingly aware that I have a limited amount of time left in my life to write. I'm not an especially fast writer, so each novel is going to take me several years. I can't write an unlimited number of books. I already have several in my head that I've been planning to write for a while, so my time is pretty much claimed for the next decade already. Those other books, however, really need to be written. I think about them constantly, and I can't wait to get started.

Quatrefoil board member Christine Jenkins is a former school librarian and library educator who taught courses on YA literature and services to future school and public librarians. She is also coauthor (with Michael Cart) of three books on YA fiction, nonfiction and comics with LGBTQIA+ content.



2009



2011



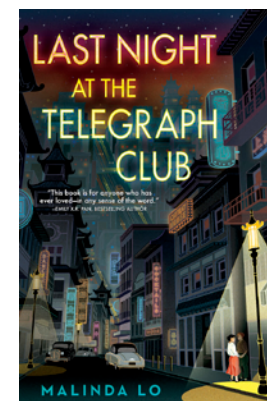
2012



2013



2017



2021

Visit Lo's website at malvindalo.com

Paperback lifelines

An avid collector traces the role of cheap lesbian pulp novels in her coming out.

By LISA VECOLI



So, how did you learn how to be a lesbian? When I came out in 1981, I knew one lesbian. (Technically, I knew a few others, like my gym teacher, but they weren't "out" to me.) I asked my girlfriend a thousand questions. Who else is gay? How can you tell? She suggested Judy Grahn's book "Another Mother Tongue." And so, books became how I learned what it meant to be a lesbian.

It took me months to work up the courage to visit Amazon Bookstore. It was on Hennepin Avenue then, with a fierce façade and huge plate glass windows. I parked blocks away, skittered in the front door and dashed to the back of the store. Fortunately for me, that is where lesbian fiction was shelved. There I found stories of women loving women that offered me a lifeline out of isolation and despair.

In 1991, visiting a used bookstore in a suburban strip mall, I discovered lesbian pulps. Pulp novels were usually original material published on cheap paper and were sold everywhere. Their availability and affordability brought books to the masses. The first lesbian pulps appeared in the early 1950s, and by the mid-1960s

there were thousands of titles with significant lesbian content. Collecting pulp novels combined my love of lesbians, books, history and shopping – all into one pursuit. Add campy cover art and titles like "The Bashful Lesbian," "I Prefer Girls," "Pagan Lesbians" and "Lesbos Beach" and I was hooked.

I started small, with a few books from the strip mall. I found a knowledgeable book dealer in St. Paul and began buying 10 or more pulps at a time. Then I found dealers around the country with catalogs and auctions. Years later, eBay became the most frequent source.

The bible for pulp collectors is "The Lesbian in Literature" written by Barbara Grier (three editions: 1967; 1975; and 1981). These books list titles and authors, as well as a code that identifies if the lesbian content is primary, minor or latent. Stars indicate the quality of the lesbian material, while "T" indicates that the book is "trash." An "A***" book is the pinnacle of what was available at the time.

While they do exist, there were fewer gay male/bisexual/trans pulps, as they did not have the crossover appeal/marketability that lesbian pulps had.

Some titles are obviously lesbian, while others use code words like Twisted, Odd, Different, Shadow, Twilight and Unnatural.

Books prices initially seemed arbitrary. Over the years, I learned that the value of the books depended on a dizzying array of factors: the author, the cover art, the cover artist, the topic, the condition and other dynamics including how scarce it was. Prices have increased dramatically in the past three decades. While there are still titles available for \$10-\$20, many books now sell for \$100 and up.

For the first few years, I read them. But even the best of them is set in a time when being a lesbian was a dangerous act. And in order to avoid being banned as obscene, the rules were that in the end one of the women in the lesbian couple would have to get married (to a man), be institutionalized or die. The typical story is set in New York and covers one or two weeks, during which time a naïve woman moves to the big city, gets involved with a lesbian and then is rescued to normalcy by leaving her for a man. The pulps are not where you go for a happy ending.

But for me they tell a story of the time. They document both societal attitudes and the ways lesbians sought connection and community. A*** titles were passed from lesbian to lesbian. It still amazes me that in the 1960s, you could go into a drug store or bus station and buy a book with two women holding hands on the cover.

Forty years after my first lesbian books, I continue to add to my collection of contemporary lesbian novels (now 4,000 books) and my pulp collection (1,100-plus titles). My entire library eventually will be archived at the Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies at the University of Minnesota (some are there now – I need the room at home!). Quatrefoil also has a small selection of pulps available; a larger number of the books are catalogued for researchers, but do not circulate.

Lisa Vecoli, retired curator of the Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies at the University of Minnesota, is a longtime Quatrefoil supporter.



Queery:

When will the library reopen?

In March, 2021, for the first time in its 35-year history, Quatrefoil closed its doors. The action was in compliance with Coronavirus restrictions recommended by the Minnesota health department. No patrons browsing, no Lesbian Fiction Book Club meetings, no Dungeons & Dragons gamers gaming, no poetry readings or book launches.

Then came May 25. The death of George Floyd that day while in police custody sparked demonstrations in Minneapolis and St. Paul and across the country. Stretches of East Lake Street, where Q is located, sustained fires and property damage. Happily, Quatrefoil's precious collection was spared.

Quatrefoil launched curbside pickup to allow people to order books online and safely pick them up in our parking lot.

Like everyone, we had a crash course in meeting by Zoom, where we hosted Queer Voices readings, book launches and pop-up writing workshops.

We are excited that Quatrefoil has reopened. For now, the library is open from noon to 5 p.m. every Saturday. Procedures will be updated as needed to keep patrons and volunteers safe. We hope to expand hours as time goes on.

Some book clubs have returned to in-person meetings while others remain virtual, at least for now. We hope to return to in-person events, game nights and occasional book sales; watch for updates. Curbside pickup continues for those who prefer getting materials that way.

Thanks to our many volunteers for hanging in there through more than a year of being closed. Welcome back to our patrons. Stop by to sign up for your cool new Q Cards, which are now free of charge. You also may print the application from our website and bring it in. It will be great to see you again.



Ancient Songs

The mysterious backstory of the homoerotic "Songs of Bilitis."



Published in 1904 in an edition of just 971 copies, "The Songs of Bilitis" is a handsome volume and one of the oldest in Quatrefoil's collection.

The book is also a notorious fake, a fraud, a hoax.

The complicated story began in 1894, when French poet Pierre Louys published the "Songs" in French. He had translated the erotic love poems from the ancient Greek, Louys said, and their author was Bilitis, the beautiful farmgirl-turned-courtesan who knew the famed poet Sappho and married her beloved Mnasidika after an unhappy marriage to a man. Stretching credulity, Louys claimed the poems — 143 of them! — had been written on the plaques decorating the walls of Bilitis' subterranean tomb in Cyprus, and were discovered centuries later by an archaeologist.

In fact Louys composed or adapted the poems himself, doing it so convincingly that he fooled even experts — for a while. Despite revelation of the hoax, the book

continued to attract fans on its own merits, and for its same-sex eroticism. In the lesbian underground of the early 20th century, copies were much sought after. The pioneering lesbian group Daughters of Bilitis, founded in 1955, took its name from the woman who may or may not have written any sensual poems herself.

The English translation by Horace Manchester Brown that is in Quatrefoil's non-circulating collection was "privately printed for members of the Aldus Society," a group of bibliophiles. An inscription in the opening pages says "this little book of antique love is respectfully dedicated to the young ladies of the society of the future." A 1988 paperback reprint of the book, with illustrations by Willy Prograny, is available on the library's open shelves.

Despite the hoax, and the long journey across eons and from Greek to French to English, these lyrics of love have proven their staying power.

— Claude Peck

Quatrefoil Offers Curbside Pickup

Even as the library reopens, some patrons may wish to continue using curbside pickup. Here's how it works:

- 1) Visit qlibrary.org and click to browse the catalog.
- 2) Click on "Request Hold" next to items you wish to check out. Please limit each request to five books and five DVDs.
- 3) Email the library at curbside@quatrefoil.org with additional questions. You may also call the library's main line at 612-729-2543 and leave a voicemail with your order, name, email and phone number. Pickup hours are 4-8 p.m. Wednesdays and 1 p.m.-5 p.m. Saturdays. We will alert you when your order is ready to pick up.
- 4) To pick up, enter the parking lot off of 13th Ave. S. Call when you get there and a volunteer will bring your requested materials out to you. To check out DVDs, which have a suggested donation, you may pay by phone with a credit card or pay in cash when you pick up. Please have exact change.
- 5) You may return materials to our 24-7 book drop by the back door or drop them off when you come back for another order.

Quatrefoil Library • 612-729-2543 • curbside@quatrefoil.org

Help Quatrefoil Thrive

- 1) Go to qlibrary.org and view various ways to contribute—through membership, an annual gift, a bequest, shopping at our regular book sales.
- 2) Buy books and DVDs from us anytime on Amazon, at amazon.com/shops/QuatrefoilLibrary
- 3) Volunteer: We rely on more than 80 volunteers to run the front desk and help with special events and library operations. Go to Quatrefoil's Facebook page and click "Volunteer."
- 4) Give us your used books and DVDs: Drop off LGBTQ+ books and DVDs during library hours, or contact us. New materials are added to the collection, and we sell duplicates to support operations.



1220 E. Lake St.
Minneapolis, MN 55407

qlibrary.org

612-729-2543

info@qlibrary.org

Follow us on Facebook

Twitter: @Q_Library

Instagram: @QuatrefoilLibrary

HOURS

Saturdays, noon to 5 p.m.

Please note that Quatrefoil expects to gradually return to its pre-Covid hours — 7 to 9 p.m. on weekdays and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekends. Please check our website for updates.



Edited by Claude Peck
Design by Joshua Garvey