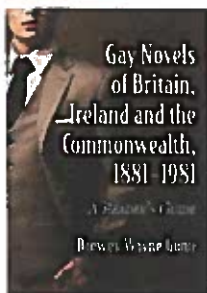
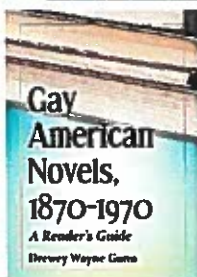


"From the Closet to the Open Stacks: Reflections on the Past Fifty Years at the University"

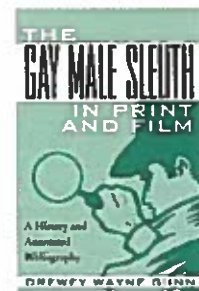
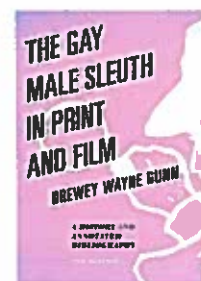


Dr. Drewey Wayne Gunn in 1969

Please join us for a reception honoring Dr. **Drewey Wayne Gunn** on Thursday, October 22, 2015 at 2:00 p.m. on the 2nd floor of the James C. Jernigan Library.



Professor Emeritus Drewey Wayne Gunn (Language & Literature) is in process of donating his research collection of some 1000 books to the Jernigan Library. This collection of materials concerning gay literature will form a unique resource unparalleled in South Texas. The collection formed the basis of several recent books authored by Dr. Gunn. He will share his insights related to his research and reflect upon his long and eventful career at Texas A&I and Texas A&M University-Kingsville.



Sponsored by Women & Gender Studies and the James C. Jernigan Library

FROM THE CLOSET TO THE OPEN STACKS:
REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST FIFTY YEARS AT THE UNIVERSITY

Drewey Wayne Gunn

Thank you all for coming this afternoon. I am going to reflect on two quite different subjects that intersect, I admit, mostly on a personal level: the campus's LGT history over roughly the last fifty years, and the results of my own research in gay literature, which ultimately led to the collection I have donated to the Jernigan Library. I thank Professors Schueneman and Roberson for giving me the opportunity. It is an honor that means more to me than they could possibly guess. The date, October 22, has special significance for me. It marks the 21st anniversary of Jacques's death after our having been together for 21 years. He would have been proud if he could have been here with me today; at least in spirit he is.

This moment is something I could not have even imagined when I first arrived on campus in August 1968. After finishing my final degree from the University of North Carolina the year of worldwide student protests and spending a summer in a very liberal camp in Massachusetts patronized by rich New York kids, Kingsville was rather a shock. An article about the university published by *Fag Rag* in Boston (of which more later) was headlined "If You Liked the '50s, You'll Love South Texas." True, we had our own student protests: La Raza Unida began with students here. But sexually the campus was puritanical to the max. One of the young lecturers in my department married her boyfriend when he arrived to spend Thanksgiving with her in fear that she might lose her job if it was discovered they were sharing a bed out of wedlock. One of the stories I heard soon after my arrival concerned a teacher who returned quite drunk to the row of identical houses, in one of which he lived, and accidentally got into the wrong one, frightening the woman who lived there. He was summarily fired. Not surprisingly, gay faculty members

were rooted out as quietly as possible, though one of the deans was a married closet case. Two political science teachers departed without protest and took jobs in the Valley. One of the finest members of a science department was fired so discreetly that not even his chairman ever knew the reason. I was never able, however, to pin down the rumors about a gay party with Celanese employees and university faculty members at which someone took incriminating photographs that supposedly led to the departure of a number of teachers. In contrast, straight teachers dating students produced only bemused gossip.

Contradictions abounded (as they would across subsequent decades). Gay members of the drama department, for example, managed to survive, sometimes flamboyantly. Dr. Larry Life even lived across the street from the President's house, where Mrs. Jernigan allegedly kept a pair of binoculars to check out suspicious activity. A number of the more liberal teachers introduced methods into their classrooms that would undoubtedly cause them to be fired under today's standards. In 1972 three of us in the English department—two gay, one straight—put together a symposium featuring underground films as part of the university's cultural series. At almost the last moment, the head of the committee got cold feet and decided we had better okay the event with President Jernigan. I was invited to his office in College Hall (where incidentally I became aware how isolated the head of an institution can become as I amusedly watched his two vice-presidents jockeying to figure out what he wanted to hear from them). His conclusion was that if I caused trouble, my job was on the line; if it were a success, he would take credit. At least it was a straightforward answer. We blurred one shot of an ejaculating penis, but otherwise we showed the films, some quite homoerotic, uncensored. The event was such a success that we put on an additional standing-room-only session on Saturday. The only fallout came from a Baptist minister who said one of the male students in his congregation was so traumatized by a shot of a

nude woman in Kit Carson's film *David Holzman's Diary* that he wasn't sure whether it was a man or a woman. (No one took seriously my comment that the minister should be more worried about the boy's ignorance of human anatomy.)

I took a leave of absence in 1972 upon receiving a Fulbright to Denmark, spent a summer in France and fell in love with Jacques in 1973, and remained in Europe for four more years, leaving when the French government started making it difficult to hold onto a green card. When I returned to campus in August 1977, for a number of divergent reasons I found a different university. It remained relatively narrow in its outlook, yet the headline for the February 25, 1977, issue of the *South Texas* had read "Gay Students Organize, Seek Self-Awareness." According to the report by editor Kaye Presley, the catalyst had been an article by journalism professor Dr. Hari Dam. In a department newsletter he had proclaimed that the media have a responsibility to decide what news they will report. He announced that "we will oppose homosexuality on the grounds that the love it preaches is sterile: it does not lead to the creation of a new life, which is the goal of love. Homosexuality is blasphemous; it is demonic in nature. It denies the authority of God, who is infinite love and who is the creator of this university [sic]. In the name of describing the 'visible world,' we are not going to sanctify homosexuality." The *South Texan* followed up its story with a series of articles about homosexuality and religion, homosexuality and the law, ending with a moving statement by Ross Paige, the only student to out himself in the pages of the student newspaper. A handful of students responded to the series; their letters to the editor were uniformly negative. Somehow Boston's *Fag Rag* heard about the story and sent a reporter here later in the spring. The resulting report is actually more informative than those in the *South Texan*. In it Taylor Cage, a larger-than-life figure who now has his own radio show in Austin, outed himself. Taylor was the sort who would walk into Young's, roll his

eyes, and announce in a booming voice, “Oh, I just love heterosexuals. They’re so cute.” Anyone who wanted to take issue with him thought twice when they realized his sheer size, not to mention the “I dare you” gleam in his eye.

The 1980s brought new awareness that at least some of our student body were either gay or drug users. Their deaths from AIDS-related causes steadily rose, and in the 1990s at least one professor died. I remember one day at the height of the plague being at a table in the SUB with Dr. David Pratt, a biology professor. He mused that he had never known a gay person. I was still paranoid enough to say nothing. Yet whenever Jacques was here, it must have been obvious we were a couple. Professor Schueneman remembers his even coming to some of my classes. When he died of a heart attack in 1994, my closest friends spontaneously created a memorial service for him to bring me some sense of closure.

Jacques was my support throughout much of my research on Tennessee Williams, helping me when we visited various archives together. Earlier, as I had wrestled with learning French, together we translated bawdy poems by the gay French poets Paul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud. These were published in 1979—a fact, by the way, that I have never shared with the university even though two of our translations were reproduced in *The Penguin Book of Homosexual Verse* in 1983. Even now the institution might quake at the title of the original publication. The bulk of my research while I was teaching, however, complemented what I was doing in the classroom, the approved route to building an academic reputation. So, in addition to Williams, I wrote about Mark Twain, Carlos Fuentes, John Millington Synge, John Steinbeck, and the like.

It was not until I retired in August 2001 that I felt free to read whatever I wanted. During the 1970s and 1980s Joseph Hansen published a twelve-volume gay mystery series. I remember

waiting impatiently for each new volume to come out. Upon retirement, using Amazon's search feature, I began to explore other gay mysteries and found that there had been an explosion in the 1980s and 1990s that I did know about. By the time I had read some one hundred examples, old habits kicked in, and I started trying to bring order to what I was discovering. Soon it became a full-time project and led to *The Gay Male Sleuth in Print and Film*. Several differences between gay and straight detectives struck me forcefully. As I wrote in my introduction, the cognitive processes that the gay detective goes through function as a paradigm of the stages of self-actualization that all gay men (and women) go through if we are to achieve wholeness in our lives. The gay sleuth symbolically confronts the ultimate mystery every gay person must face at some point in our lives: our difference from our family and the general society into which we have been born. Quite often in the earliest novels, in solving the crime, the gay detective also solved the mystery of his sexual identity.

I also noted that all detectives, gay or straight, by their very role play a dual part: if they are to solve the crime, they must be able to think like the criminal. That is, though they have made the conscious choice to be on the side of law and to work for the greater good of society, they are keenly aware that they have the innate potential to be outlaws. The gay detective's general appeal to readers who have been branded by society as sexual outlaws but who are determined to live honorable and productive lives should be fairly obvious. Unlike the straight detective, however, the gay sleuth's double role is bifurcated yet once more, for he can choose whether and when to blend into straight society or to merge with the gay community. That is, much like the caped avengers of comic books, even the most uncloseted gay sleuth can slip in and out of personas as he sees fit. Thus the gay detective becomes an example of the consummate double agent—the doubled double agent, so to speak. Though threatened by the

agents of lawlessness *and* by homophobic agents of law, the gay detective maintains a distinct advantage, even a superior position, by being able to judge both and even to play one against the other, engaging all the while within his own peculiarly marginalized community.

That community is remarkably democratic. Sherlock Holmes (despite his street boys), Miss Marple, Sam Spade, Philip Marlowe, Kinsey Millhone—all are restricted by ethnicity and the class into which they were born. They have trouble building bridges to people unlike them. In the gay milieu, sex furnishes the great leveler of race, ethnicity, class, caste, and profession (though one must admit the sometimes troublesome barriers still existing of looks and age). Thus the gay sleuth has access to a wide-ranging net of information that is missing for the traditional sleuth. It will be interesting to see if and how marital respectability will change the hitherto fluid nature of the gay community.

Expanding my search for gay mysteries, I rediscovered the wonderful world of gay pulps. Beginning in the late 1950s the Supreme Court began extending Constitutional protection of free speech to the print media, both text and images. Until then, under the Comstock law of 1873 any material judged obscene by the postal authorities could be seized and the publisher could be prosecuted. The very presence of a homosexual in a work of fiction was enough to raise red flags; the presence of a happy, well adjusted homosexual who did not meet a bad end was almost unthinkable. As a result of the new liberation, during the 1960s paperback houses that before then had specialized in heterosexual erotica and lesbian fiction written for straight male consumption began to explore the possibility of a gay consumer market. To their surprise, the publishers discovered that not only did such a market exist, there were writers chafing to publish a new kind of gay fiction, one in which gays lived happy and healthy lives, even flourished. Because these paperbacks were distributed by the same agencies that distributed magazines, they

appeared throughout the country—in grocery stores, drugstores, 5&10¢ stores, bus terminals, tobacco shops—in towns both large and small.

I bought my first gay pulp in 1969 at the convenience store on the corner of Armstrong and King. As was usual for men of my generation (I later discovered), I bought two more innocuous paperbacks, placed the gay pulp in the middle, looked around to be sure none of my students or colleagues was present, and walked over to the cashier, heart pounding. When I got home, the book was a revelation. For the first time in my life—and I was then twenty-nine—I read a novel in which the gay characters were not murdered, did not commit suicide, did not wallow in regrets; a novel in which sex between men was not something furtive and shameful but was quite a lark. During the 1970s, as competition between the publishers set in, these gay pulps became largely pornographic—one-handed reads, they were called. But at their best, they provided positive role models and offered useful sexual advice. They were the first books written by gay authors *about* gay characters *for* gay readers. That *for* is all important; until then gay writers, such as Capote, Vidal, and Baldwin, had been forced to write largely for straight audiences in order to be taken seriously by straight publishing firms.

At the time I was not reading the pulps for their literary worth, but when I began exploring pulp mysteries, I realized that here we find the first strong examples of gay pride years before that became a slogan. Lesbian scholars have long embraced lesbian pulp fiction, particularly that published in the 1950s by lesbian writers. But gay male scholars have been singularly reluctant to look at gay pulps as anything other than a curious social phenomenon. Many of these pulp writers are still living, but they are virtually ignored. My dismay at this state of affairs led to my editing *The Golden Age of Gay Fiction* in 2009. It is a collection of essays by and about those authors and their setting; one of the contributors was Dr. Roger Tuller, a member

of our history department here, who traced the changing laws concerning obscenity. That collection brought me an invitation to speak at the American Studies Association in 2010. There I met Jaime Harker, a professor at the University of Mississippi. Together we edited a second collection, entirely of scholarly articles about the pulps, *1960s Gay Pulp Fiction: The Misplaced Heritage*. The subtitle comes from the way this literary heritage has become misplaced in at least two senses of the word. If not quite altogether, it largely has been lost, forgotten, disregarded—one might even say discarded. And it has become mislabeled, the text viewed as pornography by cultural historians and the covers as a source for campy refrigerator magnets by marketers. Major universities are now scrambling to build their pulp collections, but it too early to tell whether our arguments are having any effect.

I donated both my mystery and pulp collections to Duke University, which asked for them and to whose library I felt some obligation, it having been a resource for me while I was a graduate student at UNC. It did not even cross my mind to offer them to the Jernigan Library, even though the Interlibrary Loan Service had been absolutely indispensable to my research. There seemed little if any interest in sexual issues on campus. By the late 1990s gay and lesbian students had organized anew, this time seeking and gaining official recognition from the university. But its members appeared to be mostly interested in supporting each other than in discovering their history. The Women's Studies program apparently had run its course by the time I retired, and at the time I was writing my first books, no queer studies courses had been offered, so far as I knew. Sexual orientation was still not much discussed on campus, let alone gender identity. When in 2008 the Texas A&M University System drew up its policy on Civil Rights Protections and Compliance, both sexual orientation and gender identity were conspicuous for their absence. In fact, protection was accorded only on September 3 of this year,

a mere fifty days ago. According to our Compliance Officer, our university had moved to include similar language in its local policy on July 3.

Yet, as we all know, attitudes about sexual minorities changed rapidly in the wake of the Supreme Court's 2003 decision, and those changes were reflected on campus. Unity sponsored well attended drag shows in Jones Auditorium as well as at a theater in Corpus. When Dr. Roberson and Dr. Brenda Melendy moved to revitalize Women's Studies, *Gender* was added to the program's title. I'm not quite sure how gender became a catchword covering LGBT concerns, but it has, nationwide. Dr. Stanley Hodges tells me that the first Queer Theory course was offered in the Department of Psychology and Sociology in 2010. The Department of Language and Literature was comfortable inviting my friend Michael Nava, the author of the Henry Rios mystery series, to give a series of readings in 2009, followed by lesbian activist, dancer, and choreographer Sharon Bridgforth in 2013. Still, I never dreamed that Dan Savage might be invited to address the entire university, followed by Piper Kerman. Certainly I never imagined that TAMUK would be the first in the A&M system to ask for guidance on reassigning an employee's gender identity, let alone imagined that, literally within days of the recent Supreme Court decision, the president of the university would send out a notice to employees that any same-sex couples seeking joint insurance coverage needed to file pronto, an offer to be immediately taken up by at least one gay couple.

Meanwhile, I had started new projects, and stacks of books were cluttering practically every room of my house. I have always felt that no book really belongs to me until I have interfaced with it: underlined it, annotated it, color-coded it. Not even rare first editions escape. So my books are far from being the pristine archives that most research libraries hunger for. Yet they remain very readable, very useful. It made sense to leave them to a nearby institution, where

I could still access them if need be. I put out feelers to A&M—Corpus Christi, just because it is in a metropolis. But I also sounded out Professors Roberson and Hodges. They convinced me that my collection could be useful for programs in place here. I then approached Professor Schueneman. The clincher came when he emailed me some days after our initial conversation, reaffirming that the Jernigan Library would very much like to have the collection. I also felt reassured that a state institution would be a safe haven when I learned that Don Kelly had left his valuable collection to A&M at College Station.

In contrast to the gay mysteries and pulps, my collection coming here is composed largely of what we might call “mainstream” novels, the majority published by recognized publishing houses. They were the basis for two readers’ guides: *Gay Novels of Britain, Ireland, and the Commonwealth, 1891–1981* and *Gay American Novels, 1870–1970*. My exploration of the books, the majority of which I had never heard of despite trying to keep up with gay studies, left me again puzzled why gay scholars seem fixated on a handful of writers, generally those, if the truth be told, whom their straight colleagues approve of. Thus we always hear of Wilde and Forster, Vidal and Baldwin, Waugh and Murdock, but never Forman Brown, Lonnie Coleman, Rose Macaulay, and John Broderick, who are every bit as worthy of our attention.

Despite cross-cultural influences, the two English-language literatures—the British and the American—are distinctly different. Class plays an important part in the British novel. Most of the authors, even those in Australia or South Africa, were educated in the so-called “public” schools and then at Oxford or Cambridge. They tended to converge on London, where they formed relatively tight cliques, quite supportive of their members through reviews and publishing opportunities under their control. Various distinctive gay genres emerged: the schoolboy and the university novel; the colonial novel, which often had a military setting; and

the expatriate novel, generally set on the Continent or in Africa. Love stories abounded, especially after World War II. The first gay sleuths appeared in British mysteries a decade before they showed up in American fiction. In the majority of these novels, gay identity is a given, rather than a problem. Several novels across the decades contain a defense of homosexuality couched in the phraseology of the time. But as many find the character's homosexuality so natural that no explanation is needed. A few characters agonize about their sexuality, even killing themselves; most enjoy its pleasures. Some are fairly closed about their orientation; others are blatantly open. Perhaps most distinctively different from gay American fiction, a strong strain of bisexuality runs throughout British letters. The recognized masterpieces, save those by Irish writer John Broderick, we already had in our library: *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, *The White Peacock*, *Maurice*, *Brideshead Revisited*, *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, *The Twyborn Affair*. With the addition of the novels in my collection, we now have the larger gay context in which these well known works appeared.

The gay American novel grows out of a tradition of romantic friendship that dates back to Charles Brockden Brown and informs the works of Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, James, Twain, Howells, London, Wister—the list continues to the present day, when it is called bromance. The fiction produced in the U.S. is more insular, yet richer in ethnic and religious diversity than that found in England. Curiously, it seems freer and simultaneously more guarded at each stage of development. It is more democratic, less elite and class conscious. Religion played an increasing role after World War II. Family tensions, created by hostile fathers and misguided mothers, were a staple from the time of the first true gay American novel in 1886. Gay American writers were also interconnected in all sorts of ways, sometimes unexpected. But these friendships grew out of encounters and friends in common, not out of a shared class

system. Most writers were college graduates, but their alma maters were scattered across the states; Harvard and Columbia were only two among a score. Instead of one city, there were multiple magnets for gay authors. New York exerted the greatest pull, but even there Greenwich Village and Harlem offered alternative centers. San Francisco and Los Angeles and, to a lesser extent, New Orleans and Chicago had their appeal. Other countries, other cultures attracted American gays feeling stifled by puritanism. The South Seas in the 19th century and the Caribbean, Tangier, Paris, and Berlin in the 20th century promised greater sexual freedom. The American gay literary scene, as a result, was not as inbred as the English and, to a corresponding degree, was not as supportive. Still, tight friendships grew up among coteries of gay writers. Six degrees ruled at the publisher and in bed.

Gay school novels are comparatively rare. The military as a profession was never an attraction, so we have almost exclusively gay combat novels. The one all-male milieu to form the setting for a significant number of American novels is the prison. Novels about hustling are an integral part of our literary heritage. As in England, mysteries admitted transgressive sexualities early on, usually as murderer or victim. Gay science fiction languished in all English language writing since it was assumed that the ideal sci fi reader was a teenage boy. The incredible blank for so long in American letters was the gay western, given that the genre is an American invention and that trappers, miners, and cowboys, living as they were in an all-male environment, must have occasionally done something other than strum on a guitar or play their harmonica. The first true example appeared in 1966, *Song of the Loon*, and became the first gay best seller. Although originally published as a pulp novel, it is now part of the Jernigan collection.

There are now more than five hundred books in the Drewey Wayne Gunn Collection of

Gay Literature. Others will be added in due course. The collection can be accessed as a whole by going to the LibGuide on the library webpage. What sets it apart from other similar collections, including the Don Kelly one at A&M, is that it is circulating, not archival. That is, it is available in the open stacks and for interlibrary loan. Professor Schueneman and I talked the matter over and decided that to be truly useful as research materials, they needed to be readily accessible, open for interested reader to pull off the shelves and inspect at leisure. Hopefully, the collection will serve the students well here. What is now needed is for someone to donate a comparable collection of lesbian and transgender literatures. Even as we move into a post-gay era, these works remain an important part of our cultural heritage, a reminder of where we have been and a guide to where we are going, not to mention how many of them are simply darn good reads.

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Texas A&M University–Kingsville

22 October 2015.