

Literature for Us “Older Children”: *Lost Girls*, Seduction Fantasies, and the Reeducation of Adults

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“We are but older children, dear, who fret to find our bedtime near.”

-Lewis Carroll,

Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There

NEARLY A DECADE AND A HALF IN THE MAKING, ALAN MOORE and Melinda Gebbie’s three-volume graphic novel *Lost Girls* (1996) rewrites and sexualizes three classics of children’s literature. The core story involves Alice from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), Dorothy from L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), and Wendy from J.M. Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy* (1911) meeting as adults and sharing the “true” stories, which include tales of childhood sex and sexual abuse, behind the familiar accounts of their respective adventures. *Lost Girls* employs and combines the discursive strategies of a number of popular literary and artistic forms, including pornography, children’s literature, comics, and even psychoanalysis. This raises the question as to the purpose and effect of the work’s intertextuality and hybridity, which can be understood by considering the role of fantasy in the work. Moore and Gebbie play with the line between fantasy and lived experience and pit sexuality and imagination against violence and repression in complex and layered ways through both textual and visual material. We can read *Lost Girls* and make sense of these complex layerings in light of Freud’s highly controversial seduction theory: his early attempt to explain adult

neuroses as resulting from the repression of childhood sexual abuse or seduction, for which questions of fantasy and reality were central. Although the implied reader of *Lost Girls* is an adult, understanding its use of sexuality and fantasy nonetheless offers insight into the workings of the popular children's fiction it retells.

What *Lost Girls* suggests is that children's literature, like the neurotic adult, similarly evidences a repression—in the sense of distressing material that is made unconscious as a defense against psychical conflict—with regards to childhood sex, sexuality, and sexual desire and that the insistence on this repression reverberates throughout contemporary culture. *Lost Girls* implies that the apparent asexuality or the covert sexuality of children's culture constitutes evidence of the widespread impulse to repress childhood sexuality, which in Freud's early theory leads to dysfunction in adulthood. *Lost Girls* functions as an uncovering of this repressed material in the tradition of Freud's earliest work. Freud had proposed that the treatment of hysteria must involve combating repression and bringing the memories or fantasies of childhood sex to light. *Lost Girls* targets children's literature, rewriting it as pornographic fantasies of seduction; in doing so, Moore and Gebbie offer sexualized children's literature as an antidote to repression and the cultural dysfunctions that follow from it—a kind of cultural therapy.

That Moore and Gebbie's project would take the form of a graphic novel is fitting given the ways in which the rhetoric of maturation has been used to understand the graphic novel within the larger context of critical and popular histories of comics. For instance, Scott McCloud writes, "I realized that comic books were usually crude, poorly-drawn, semiliterate, cheap, disposable kiddie fare ... but ... they don't have to be!" (3). Douglas Wolk begins his *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean* by stating, "It's no longer news that comics have grown up. A form that was once solely the province of children's entertainment now fills bookshelves with mature, brilliant works" (3). While longer narratives or collections of previously serialized comics with a sustained narrative arc might represent a more elaborate literary and artistic feat and might therefore appear more "mature," graphic novels remain marginalized by their association with comics, stigmatized as cheap, popular, and sometimes tawdry children's amusements. Even McCloud and Wolk seem to imply a devaluation of works produced for children in favor of

more “mature” works appreciated by adults. However, because Moore and Gebbie are interested in recruiting stigma, popularity, tawdriness, and children’s culture in the service of their more “mature” social, sexual, and political purposes, their use of the graphic novel, with its unstable status with regards to audience, provides a particularly useful medium.

Thus, the form of the graphic novel is itself important to Moore and Gebbie’s cultural intervention in *Lost Girls*. According to William Jones, two decades before the popular *Classics Illustrated* series (which included adaptations of literary classics like *Last of the Mohicans* and *Moby Dick* and ran from 1941 to 1971), comic artist George Storm adapted Johann Wyss’s *The Swiss Family Robinson* into a comic serial that ran in newspapers for 22 weeks in 1921 and 1922 (9). Taking this as the starting point for the intersection between comics and novels, we find it was a crossover work with presumable appeal to both children and adults that was targeted for this early re-imagining across media. Inspired by Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, one of those literary classics that has been frequently abridged and retold for children, *The Swiss Family Robinson* is now itself frequently imagined as children’s literature. This suggests that from its very beginnings the graphic adaptation of classic novels has involved works of ambiguous or unstable status with regards to audience, and in the case of *Classics Illustrated* the adaptations imagined children as a key audience. Moore and Gebbie’s re-imagining of *Alice*, *Oz*, and *Peter Pan* continues this tradition of adapting crossover works with significant appeal to both children and adults.

In the case of *Lost Girls*, the physical production and packaging signal its intended audience, and this construction of *Lost Girls* as a physical object further defies conventional expectations of comics as “cheap, disposable, kiddie fare.” Though the first five chapters of *Lost Girls* were serialized in 1991 in issues 5, 6, and 7 of *Taboo*, a comics anthology, the 30-chapter work was not published in its entirety until 2006. At that time, Top Shelf Productions released the project as an oversized, three-volume hardcover boxed-set priced at \$75. Some individual booksellers and national chains like Borders refrained from stocking *Lost Girls* because of concerns about its sexual content (Wolk, “Alan Moore’s” n.p.), though the back cover of the box that houses the three volumes warns “For Adults Only.” Wolk describes it as “luxurious, exclusive, difficult fine art” (*Reading* 253). The limited

availability and extraordinary price for the set have no doubt limited the audience and helped to define it as an adult work even as *Lost Girls* draws on children's literature and invokes childhood associations.

As adults, Alice, Dorothy, and Wendy meet by accident at the Hotel Himmelparten in Austria and begin telling each other their stories. The classics with which readers are familiar represent versions of their stories in which sex and sexuality are obscured or elided. Each of the women appears to have buried the memories of her childhood only to have those memories reawakened through her sexual explorations with the other women, equating sexual exploration with the curative powers of storytelling. Their stories make clear that the "innocent" child grows up to be a damaged adult. Alice has spent years in a sanatorium, Dorothy has been bored by life on the Kansas prairie and now comes to Europe in search of excitement, and Wendy is leading a numb existence as her older husband's dutiful wife. Each appears to come alive through this experience of invoking and reliving her childhood. Their sexual experiences with each other are interspersed with their stories, with sexual acts often providing pivot points between the present and the past. Not only does this equate storytelling and sex as therapeutic, but it also demonstrates the necessity of returning to the scene of childhood. For both characters and readers, that return is a therapeutic rewriting of their stories and restructuring of their psyches.

This is, of course, a thoroughly Freudian notion, to which Moore deliberately alludes. As the embarrassed Wendy concludes the first installment of her story, Alice reassures her by mentioning "a notable professor of the mind currently practising not far from here, in Vienna," and Alice explains that he would be unsurprised by Wendy's confessions (8.8).¹ This clear allusion to Freud suggests that Freudian psychoanalysis as a cultural discourse is key to understanding *Lost Girls*. Freud and his collaborator Joseph Breuer first proposed the so-called talking cure in their 1895 *Studies on Hysteria*, which details the case of Anna O., or Bertha Pappenheim. Pappenheim suffered from a number of hysterical symptoms, including paralysis in her arms and legs and problems with speech and vision. Prone to daydreaming, Pappenheim was first treated by Breuer with hypnosis, but they fell into a routine in which she would divulge to him these

“imaginative products” during their visits. She coined the term “talking cure” to describe this method whereby talking through her daydreams and experiences effected some alleviation of her symptoms. As Freud and Breuer explain, “[W]e found, to our great surprise at first, that each individual hysterical symptom immediately and permanently disappeared when we had succeeded in bringing clearly to light the memory of the event by which it was provoked and in arousing its accompanying affect, and when the patient had described that event in the greatest possible detail and had put the affect into words” (*S.E.* 2, pg. 6).² The case of Anna O. triggers the discovery that talking about childhood trauma can alleviate its lingering symptoms.

Freud would depart from Breuer in this growing conviction that at the root of all adult hysteria was sexual trauma in childhood (Masson 84). Freud worked out what would later be known as the “seduction theory” in the mid-1890s, first stating it explicitly in a private letter to his friend Wilhelm Fleiss in October 1895 and laying it out publicly in a series of papers all published in 1896 (Gay 92, Triplett 647). In the last of the three papers, “The Aetiology of Hysteria,” Freud most clearly articulates his theory of childhood seduction. He writes, “I therefore put forward the thesis that at the bottom of every case of hysteria there are one or more occurrences of premature sexual experience, occurrences which belong to the earliest years of childhood but which can be reproduced though the work of psycho-analysis in spite of the intervening decades” (*S.E.* 3, pg. 203). Freud points to a number of possible assailants, starting with adult strangers, but he supposes the more frequent is “a nursery maid or governess or tutor, or, unhappily all too often, a close relative” and finally other children, such as a sibling or cousin (*S.E.* 3, pg. 208). Such an experience produces a “psychical conflict” that triggers the psyche’s defense through repression, which works by “thrusting the memory which is distressing to the ego into the unconscious,” thereby inadvertently “creating a hysterical symptom in its place” (*S.E.* 3, pg. 211). This experience creates a precondition or disposition for later neuroses in adulthood, which might be precipitated by another trigger during later childhood or adolescence. Freud made clear in “The Aetiology of Hysteria” that later neuroses were caused not by the initial sexual experience but by the repressed memory-traces of it (*S.E.* 3, pg. 211, 213).

The idea that neuroses are rooted in actual sexual abuse proved extremely controversial, even for Freud, who expressed his own doubts not long after articulating his seduction theory. "The Aetiology of Hysteria" met with a chilly reception when Freud first delivered it as a lecture (Esterson 117), and the eminent German psychiatrist and specialist in sexuality Richard von Krafft-Ebing, who was in attendance, is reported by Freud to have commented, "It sounds like a scientific fairy tale" (qtd. in Masson 9). In September 1897, Freud wrote to Fleiss admitting his error about the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse, and he came to believe that many of the accounts of childhood sexual abuse or seduction he had heard from his patients had not occurred in actuality but in fantasy. In his 1914 essay "On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement" Freud then argued, "If hysterical subjects trace back their symptoms to traumas that are fictitious, then the new fact which emerges is precisely that they create such scenes in phantasy, and this psychological reality requires to be taken into account alongside practical reality" (*S.E.* 14, pg. 17). Two years later in his "Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis," Freud would indicate that it ultimately made little difference whether the sexual act had occurred in reality or in fantasy: "The outcome is the same, and up to the present we have not succeeded in pointing to any difference in the consequences, whether phantasy or reality has had the greater share in these events of childhood" (*S.E.* 16, pg. 370). As Freud's biographer Peter Gay explains, Freud's shift in emphasis from reality to fantasy opened up for him the psyche's system of "coded messages—distorted, censored, meaningfully disguised"—that would lead Freud to his theory of dreams, the Oedipus complex, and the entire framework of psychoanalysis that followed from these discoveries (Gay 96, Masson 113). The reason for Freud's abandonment of the seduction theory has been the subject of a bitter controversy in psychoanalytic circles that is beyond the scope of this project, but what is important for understanding Moore and Gebbie's *Lost Girls* is Freud's notion that the repression of either the reality or fantasy of childhood sexual experience is what leads to neuroses and dysfunction in adulthood. Moore and Gebbie extend this to the functioning of the broader culture.

A large part of the controversy surrounding Freud's seduction theory involves whether the childhood sexual experience or abuse discovered through analysis occurred in actuality or in fantasy. Freud seems

to equivocate on this matter, and while Jeffrey Masson argues that it is certainly important in terms of the treatment of patients (133), *Lost Girls* seems more concerned with bringing to light the possibilities of childhood sexuality precisely as fantasy, as the substance of and fodder for the imagination, and as a counter-defense against repression and its ill-effects. James Strachey makes clear in his note on the translation of Freud's German *die Phantasie* as "phantasy" the connection between fantasy and imagination. Strachey prefers the "ph" spelling, citing this note from the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "In mod. [sic] use *fantasy* and *phantasy*, in spite of their identity in sound and in ultimate etymology, tend to be apprehended as separate words, the predominant sense of the former being 'caprice, whim, fanciful invention', while that of the latter is 'imagination, visionary notion'" (*S.E.* 1, pg. xxiv). Moore and Gebbie's *Lost Girls* appears to be advocating precisely this notion of fantasy as visionary imagination, and it represents the intersection of sex, innovation, childhood, literature, and visual art, all of which are associated with and demand imagination. What they ultimately celebrate in *Lost Girls* is not child sex per se, but the fantasy of child sex and the very pleasures of literary and artistic fantasy. Following Freud, they understand the full power and potential of fantasy.³

Lost Girls is replete with extremely graphic depictions of sexual activity, defying what its authors suggest is the repressed quality of children's literature and contemporary Euro-American culture. Pitting their project against this repressive pall, Moore and Gebbie have embraced the label "pornography": "Our position is this is art *and* pornography. What we intended with *The Lost Girls* [sic] was to sever the connection between pornography and embarrassment, and between the pornographic imagination and the real world" (Colton 3D). To rewrite classic children's books as literary pornography and to have each of the protagonists of these works retell the story of her childhood against the backdrop of World War I is to return to the scene of childhood both generically and structurally to bring repressed material to light. By doing so, both individual and cultural neurosis are averted or treated. Moreover, *Lost Girls* does not just re-imagine the personal past of childhood but also the collective past of national history. It offers sexually explicit art and the sexually unashamed and empowered child as antidotes to repression and violence, and it seeks to reeducate adults by compelling their return to

and rewriting of childhood and its artifacts. As Freud himself notes, "If a person who is at loggerheads with reality possesses an artistic gift ... he can transform his phantasies into artistic creations instead of symptoms" (*S.E.* 11, pg. 50). Repressed fantasies lead to neurosis, but the artistic imagination can work against the formation of symptoms. Sexualized children's literature draws on the fantastical elements of both children's literature and pornography and converts repressed fantasies into art. Moore and Gebbie marshal the explicitness of sexuality and the creativity of art against shame and repression, wedding them to literary classics for children to call attention to the importance of revisiting childhood and embracing childhood sexuality.

Moore has provided a manifesto of sorts explaining his theory of pornography, thereby clarifying the motives for sexualizing children's literature in *Lost Girls*. Moore suggests that the enlarged breasts and buttocks of the Venus of Willendorf, a small sculpture dating from the prehistory of Europe, reveal a connection between the history of culture and the history of smut. The Venus of Willendorf, according to Moore, is evidence that the development of culture has been prompted by sexual desire and pleasure. "Sexual openness and cultural progress," he writes, "would seem pretty much to have walked hand in hand throughout the opening chapters of the human story in the West" ("Bog Venus" 32). Moore argues that, in contrast, eras marked by sexual repression and shame have resulted in a cessation of cultural progress, in the outright collapse of civilization, or in the perpetration of unspeakable atrocity. He charges that driving pornography underground leads to disastrous consequences for the maintenance of a healthy, productive social order: "[S]exually progressive cultures gave us mathematics, literature, philosophy, civilization and the rest, while sexually restrictive cultures gave us the Dark Ages and the Holocaust" (35). Having been driven to the edges of society and the fringes of cultural production, pornography was severed from art. Moore argues by implication that pornography must be rescued from this "wretched ghetto" (33), and his invocation of the fall of Rome, the Dark Ages, and the Holocaust suggests that the stakes of reviving artistic pornography could not be higher.

Although José Alaniz, reading *Lost Girls* through Foucault, suggests that Moore and Gebbie's project is on "a mission to unmask the veiled product of an institutionalized incitement to discourse on sex

masquerading as literature for kids,” it seems more likely that the act of unmasking itself further participates in the incitement to discourse, manifested by the centrality of talking about and demonstrating sex throughout the three-volume work. Rather than liberating sexuality or fantasy, the incitement to discourse provides more opportunities for power to operate. Therefore, Foucault’s landmark and now oft-quoted introductory volume to his *History of Sexuality* casts serious doubt on the theory of repression and sexuality underlying *Lost Girls*. As Foucault argues, power can work through the incitement to discourse and not just its repression, which would suggest that a graphic novel like *Lost Girls* is part of the network of power that it purports to resist. The articulations of discourse can themselves entrap and constrain in unanticipated ways. However, Foucault does say that his aim with regards to the repressive hypothesis “is less at showing it to be mistaken than at putting it back within the general economy of discourses on sex in modern societies since the seventeenth century” (11). In other words, power works *both* through incitement *and* repression. Moreover, the incitement to discourse, which potentially multiplies opportunities to exercise power, can also occasion a counter-discourse that can work against more hegemonic agents or institutions. Moore and Gebbie’s complex celebration of fantasy, seduction, and sex offers possibilities for mobilizing the art of sex and fantasy against more prohibitive institutions and their effects.

Irrespective of whether Moore is right about the connection between sexual permissiveness and cultural progressiveness, his comments suggest that *Lost Girls* is meant to recover pornography from the fringes of artistic production. With the advent of the internet and home video technologies, the viewing of pornography has become a mostly private affair, and as a result, Moore argues that producers have lost the incentive to maintain artistic and creative standards that are encouraged by public exposure and discourse: “[I]t would seem that pornography has proliferated and degraded in its quality Porn is everywhere, just as it was in ancient Greece, but nowhere is it art” (“Bog Venus” 38). *Lost Girls* is designed to reassert the potential for artistic pornography and perhaps to save us from the catastrophic dangers of sexual repression. To the extent that the child is thought to function as the most significant embodiment of sexual purity and innocence, and to the extent that one understands that purity and

innocence as evidence of the cultural repression of sexuality, to sexualize children's literature is to attack a central pillar in the repressive apparatus.

In his review of *Lost Girls*, Philip Sandifer notes that Moore has "a tendency towards the pathologically didactic." Given this apparent objective, integrating children's literature and pornography suggests itself as a strategy because both reflect a particular tension between didacticism and pleasure. Children's literature and pornography either are designed or function to provide both. For this reason, a pornographic children's literature for adults seems particularly useful for encouraging a reconsideration of sexuality, innocence, play, and art. The history of children's literature can be traced precisely in terms of how it manages the question of instruction, and many of the landmark texts of children's literature, like John Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book*, published in 1744, and Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, published in 1865, are understood as landmarks precisely because of the ways they mark a shift in the negotiation between didacticism and pleasure. Although the history of children's literature might be understood in terms of the movement away from "pure" didacticism to a more "mature" focus on pleasure, much of children's literature continues either to provide explicit lessons or to be used for instruction while remaining particularly concerned with what will interest or pleasure the child. Pornography similarly operates with this dual function or focus, clearly designed to pleasure viewers while also either working or claiming to instruct. In fact, some pornographic films even include "disclaimers" that they are intended for instructional purposes. While some viewers must surely use pornographic texts for their instructional value, the claims made by producers themselves are more likely designed to ensure the text appears to possess some merit beyond its ability to arouse, as though arousal were not sufficient justification. Children's literature suffers from the same pressure to defend its merit on the grounds of its potential for instructional use. Since Moore and Gebbie appear interested in both pleasure and instruction—in promoting a particular understanding of pleasure, art, and sexuality—pornographic children's literature provides a particularly useful hybrid form for fulfilling those functions.

Moore indicates that Tijuana Bibles, or eight-pagers, offer a precedent for his own work in *Lost Girls*. These eight-page, pornographic pamphlets distributed in the United States and dating from the

1920s often depicted popular cartoon characters, like Popeye or Mickey Mouse, engaging in a variety of sexual adventures. As Art Spiegelman has noted, "From today's perspective, part of the early Tijuana Bibles' appeal lies in their peculiar combination of debauchery and innocence" (5). The influence of these early comics is obvious in the work of Moore and Gebbie. Not only are they borrowing the technique of including recognizable and "innocent" literary characters, but they incorporate the format of the Tijuana Bibles as well. Each chapter of *Lost Girls* is exactly eight pages, the traditional length of Tijuana Bibles. Moore explains his interest in the art form:

The great appeal of showing thoroughly nonsexual figures such as Blondie, Jiggs or Popeye taking part in pornographic skits lies in the greater contrast, with the sexual content seeming dirtier when in the context of some previously spotless cultural icon. There is also the subversive pleasure that is to be had in puncturing the anodyne and sexless vision of society presented by the Sunday funnies. ("Bog Venus" 35)

Despite the work of literary critics like Jacqueline Rose and James Kincaid, who have demonstrated that children's literature does indeed contain the traces of sex and sexuality, no doubt many readers still imagine that children's literature is a truly sexless pursuit. To look to children's literature as a source for a new kind of Tijuana Bible is to employ contrast as a means of shocking readers into a new way of thinking about sex and sexuality. The style of Gebbie's illustrations replicates this at the visual level, as she employs the cartoony conventions of newspaper comic strips like *Blondie* or *Archie*. Using this familiar style potentially disarms readers and further invokes the childhood practice of skipping the news to turn to the funnies. Of course, the comics page reacts to and comments on the news, and much of its humor and situations are for and about adults. Thus, just as Moore borrows from ambiguous texts like *Alice* and *Peter* with their dual audiences as models for the story of *Lost Girls*, Gebbie similarly draws from ambiguous texts with dual audiences as models for her illustrations, following a tradition established by the Tijuana Bibles, which return the adult to the artifacts of childhood while repurposing those artifacts. McCloud provides another reason for this style. He argues that the less realistic the illustration the more available to identification by the reader: "Thus, when you look at a photo

or realistic drawing of a face ... you see it as the face of another. But when you enter the world of the cartoon ... you see yourself" (36). As a tool for the reeducation of adults, Gebbie's illustrations invite readers to see themselves in the cartoon figures of *Lost Girls*. The work suggests that adult readers must return to the scene of childhood, to start over from the beginning. This is, of course, exactly what the characters themselves do.

Moore and Gebbie use the arrangement of panels to visually represent the structure of each character's psyche. The default arrangement consists of six or nine rectangular panels of equal size. As Dorothy tells her story, only three stacked rectangular panels of equal size appear, with the text occupying the same panels as the images, the simplest arrangement with the exception of the full-page spreads used for the most fantastical moments of each woman's story. The reduction and simple arrangement of panels during Dorothy's narrative suggest her relative simplicity and straightforwardness. She is the least inhibited of the three women and the first to launch into her story in any detail. She also appears to be the least educated and sophisticated. During Wendy's narrative, the arrangement of panels is far more complex. A wide rectangular panel appears at the top of each page with the figures in black-and-white silhouette. Below are three rectangular panels of images with three smaller panels further below of separate text. This arrangement suggests the compartmentalization and tidiness of Wendy's psyche and memories, with the silhouettes and their relative lack of detail suggesting her more acceptable memories and the larger, more detailed, and more vibrant panels reflecting the uncovered material coaxed out of her by Dorothy and Alice. The details of her childhood sexual experiences with Peter and the Lost Boys are depicted in these colored panels. In the sequences of Alice's narrative, each page consists of three oval-shaped panels suggesting mirrors, and the panels are surrounded by white space in which the text is printed. The use of only three panels mirrors the simplicity and straightforwardness of Dorothy's sequences, but the unusually shaped panels reflect Alice's unique perspective and persona.

Like Freud's patients, each of the women of *Lost Girls* enacts the talking cure by retelling her childhood story, and each thereby provides a model for the reader's restructuring of his or her own sexuality and psyche. In doing so, these women revise their own relations

to memory, imagination, desire, and pleasure. The Alice who was precocious as a child in Carroll's original is now provocative as an adult, inciting Dorothy and Wendy to share in elaborate detail their respective sexual histories. To these women, the adult Alice retells her story, the story behind *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. She explains how an older man, a friend of her father, molested her one afternoon after providing her with some wine, which disorients her and creates a feeling of her body growing and shrinking in size. During the sexual act, Alice concentrates on a mirror hanging on the wall, and she imagines herself escaping the scene of violation by disappearing through the looking-glass. She begins to think of the girl in the mirror as her real self. After that experience, nothing makes sense to her anymore. The nonsense and strangeness of Wonderland and the Looking-Glass world are effects of how strange the world is made by the profoundly disturbing and disorienting experience of being molested by her father's friend. Alice proceeds to tell the story of her life to Dorothy and Wendy, and the reader can detect traces of the *Alice* books in the story she tells. For instance, the beast of the nonsensical "Jabberwocky" poem originates in Alice's posttraumatic nightmares as a phallic monster that *jabs* at her, as her father's friend had done, and the garden of live flowers from the second chapter of *Through the Looking-Glass* finds its basis in the names of the girls—Violet, Daisy, and Pansy—with whom Alice experiences a series of sexual escapades at a girls' boarding school. Upon completing her story in the final chapter of *Lost Girls*, Alice declares, "I can't speak for you two, but I feel positively girlish again" (30.2). This is signified by her willingness to leave her mirror behind at the Hotel Himmelparten: "I once thought part of me was stuck inside it, but not now. We've rescued her. Now it's just a beloved old thing" (30.3). While her mirror is old, she is not, having recovered her lost girlhood and found solace in doing so.

Nearly all of the panels contain some sexual content. Of Moore's three source texts, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* might be the most surprising as the inspiration for this visualization of sex, though it calls explicit attention to the investment of children's literature in maturation and sexuality. Dorothy reveals to Alice and Wendy what is supposed to be the "true" story behind the one in Baum's book. As Dorothy explains, the twister that takes her out of Kansas is actually the physical disorientation of her first masturbatory experience.

Dorothy's "discovery" of Oz is really the discovery of her own body. "Felt like I'd been picked up and twisted around, then put down someplace else in some whole other country ... Them next years I spent explorin' all that new territory; had all kindsa big adventures," she says (7.7). Those adventures include a sexual relationship with a blonde farmhand she describes as too dumb to understand her. "I might as well have humped a ragdoll, or something you stick out in a field to scare the birds," she says (14.5). After Dorothy tells the boy she won't see him anymore, he writes her a poem. Although it is a pathetic attempt, she notes that at least she has helped him discover he has a brain after all, just as she does for the Scarecrow in the original novel. Her encounters with two other farmhands inspire the figures of the Cowardly Lion and the Tin Woodsman: one boy growls obscenities at her but turns out to be intimidated when she becomes sexually aggressive, and the other boy lacks feelings and reminds her of a machine during sex. Through their encounters with Dorothy, she teaches the first one courage and the second one love. Finally, Dorothy's father is made to feel powerful like a wizard when he transgresses the taboos against incest and public sex with Dorothy, but she eventually realizes that he is nothing more than a man: "He weren't no Wizard. He was some farmer bangin' his daughter, worried over bills, worried his wife was gonna know" (25.7). Moore's Dorothy realizes that the figure of power, her father, masks his anxious manhood as a way of maintaining his authority. As with Alice, *Lost Girls* concludes with Dorothy's sense that she is now liberated from her past: "I sure feel better, all them secrets out in the open" (30.2). Having revealed that her sexual experiences/fantasies of her uncle really involve her father, she robs them of their power to haunt her.

Wendy's development is the most pronounced and instructive. In the first volume, Wendy arrives at the Hotel Himmelpargarten with her husband, Harold Potter, who works for a ship-building business. Wendy embodies the prudery *Lost Girls* attempts to undo. She prefers a room with two twin beds instead of a double. In the first several chapters Gebbie illustrates Wendy as wearing only the most concealing clothing, and she is the most reticent of the three women to tell her story. She hates even to try on Alice's jewelry because she fears "luxury erodes our upright qualities," and when Alice makes a sexual advance toward her, Wendy responds with moral indignation and revulsion (12.3). Alice simply forces herself on Wendy, who eventually

relents and enjoys the experience. At the instigation of Alice and Dorothy, she begins her story, in which we learn that the “real” Peter is a boy prostitute Wendy and her brothers encounter in Kensington Gardens. He follows them home, scales the drainpipe after dark, and copulates with all three siblings. The children then take to visiting Peter in the park, along with a group of street urchins, and their game of pretend in which Wendy plays “mother,” as she does in *Peter and Wendy*, turns sexual. The children return again and again to the park to experiment sexually with Peter and the Lost Boys.

In Moore’s version, the character of Captain Hook is a fashionably dressed man with an arthritic hand who trolls Kensington Gardens making sexual advances to children, and at one point, he brutally rapes Peter’s sister, the basis for the character of Tinkerbell. Wendy finds herself fantasizing about the older man, but when she encounters him in the park one night, she recalls, “I could think about what I liked. That didn’t mean I wanted it to really happen to me. That didn’t mean anyone could force it on me” (27.5). Feeling herself empowered by her newly discovered sexual agency, she confronts the man, taunting him sexually by digitally manipulating her bare genitals. She rightly notes that he fears mature women, and in Gebbie’s illustration Wendy’s genitals morph into the mouth of the crocodile that consumes Hook in Barrie’s original (27.6). Wendy explains that following this episode, “My own desire had scared me so badly that I locked it all away in the darkness beyond those railings [of the park]. I married Harold, 20 years my senior, because desire ... w-well, frankly, it wouldn’t be an issue” (27.7). The Wendy who represses her sexual desires is the same middle-class prude who first rebuffs Alice as a debauched aristocrat. By telling her story, listening to the stories of Alice and Dorothy, and returning to the sexual explorations of her childhood, Wendy is liberated from the confines of her class and gender mores. Alice and Dorothy similarly share and confront their sexual awakenings, finding in childhood a key to health and salvation, but in the form of fantasy. As Alice concludes, “We can’t disown the girls we were Can’t let them remain lost to us” (27.8). This statement reflects a very Freudian notion: the discovery of the keys to neuroses and healing in childhood, in repressed memories, and in talking. So Wendy moves from sexual liberation to repression and then back to liberation via her re-immersion in her childhood, which is modeling a possibility for the reader.

In retelling their stories, each woman expresses doubt about the line between fantasy and experience, and given how central this distinction is to Freud's thinking about the seduction theory, we find *Lost Girls* similarly questioning or blurring the line between them. In one moment a character appears to confirm that the original stories with which we are familiar are like fantasies. Rolf, a man Dorothy meets at the hotel, tells her, "Like shoes, we try our fantasies on, yes? Sometimes they are too big for us, sometimes we outgrow them; they become too small, too confining. Or perhaps they wear out; become dull, familiar, merely comfortable" (2.3). Rolf's comments indicate that the original stories have become outdated. The women's retellings, which are supposed to be the actual experiences behind the fantasies, nonetheless offer alternative fantasies. The fantasies they offer are perhaps more expansive or more adaptive or appropriate for the present, like the new pair of shoes to which Rolf refers. Moore and Gebbie offer a new story, or fantasy, for the twenty-first century, one of sexual exploration and play, but also the transcendence of sexual trauma and the experience of sexual pleasure.

The women allude to the fantastical quality of their stories throughout *Lost Girls*, and each appears prone to fantasy and daydreaming. When Wendy and her husband pull up to the hotel, he remarks, "Look, I'm not criticising, old girl, but we nearly missed the blasted hotel. Too much daydreaming" (3.1). He later finds their room too "fanciful" (3.2). Alice's childhood "memories" begin to be unlocked during her first sexual experience with Dorothy, when she remarks, "I just remembered a sort of ... a sort of dream I used to have. A sort of game ... when I was young" (4.7, ellipses in original). Alice's shift from "dream" to "game" creates uncertainty as to whether the events she "recalls" are real experiences or fantasies. Dorothy similarly creates uncertainty: "Sex was this whole different world. I made up sorta ... daydreams about it" (6.3, ellipses in original). She says this before beginning her story, casting doubt on whether the events she recounts with the farmhands and her father actually happened or whether they are part of her daydreams about sex.

This play with fantasy is further elaborated when the three women attend the premier of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* in Paris on May 29, 1913. Stravinsky later described the origin of *The Rite of Spring* as coming in a dream: "The idea of *Le Sacre du printemps* came to me while I was still composing *The Firebird*. I had dreamed a scene of

pagan ritual in which a chosen sacrificial virgin danced herself to death” (qtd. in Hill 3). As they watch the ballet, the three women gradually undress and begin engaging in sexual acts in their seats while the audience breaks out into a riot. Alice later wonders in her diary, “Did that really happen?” (10.6). The riot did actually happen at the Paris premier, but the sex between the three women in the midst of this historical event is presumably a fantasy inspired by *The Rite*, the music for which would go on to be featured in Disney’s *Fantasia* (1940), Italian for “fantasy.” Placing these three fictional characters, who are presumably fantasizing about sex, in the middle of a violent historical event involving a staged dream is to further blur the boundaries between memory, experience, fantasy, and history and also to contrast the women’s sex and pleasure with the anger and violence surrounding them.

Sandifer argues that *Lost Girls* strips the original texts on which it is based on their fantastical elements by turning the fantasy worlds of Wonderland and the Looking-glass into Alice’s own psyche, Dorothy’s incredible companions in Oz into human farmhands, and Peter Pan and the Lost Boys into a boy prostitute and group of street urchins. “In that regard, then, he is stripping the fantastic out of the children’s stories,” writes Sandifer. However, Sandifer also acknowledges that *Lost Girls* does nonetheless invoke fantasy:

But all the same, the fantastic continually intrudes upon the pornographic narratives. Alice, Dorothy, and Wendy’s stories are all drawn with panel layouts unique to their narrators, but they share one feature—each time they tell their story, at the climactic moment, Gebbie draws a splash page {a page filled by a single panel} that, while still highly sexualized, clearly takes place within the fantastic. These splashes range from Captain Hook and Peter Pan posed as though sword fighting, but with their erect penises standing in for swords, to a page with a horrifyingly robotic Tin Man fucking Dorothy (who has Little Orphan Annie eyes) with his metal penis while she’s suspended upside-down in manacles. The sex acts, then, reach their (literary) climax in the form of these ruptures of fantasy—ruptures that serve, in their own way, as intrusions of the real, as the fantasy they contain is closer to the familiar original text than the purely sexual narrative that has been overlaid.

Gebbie’s illustrations then add spectacular manifestations of fantasy that replicate the verbal text at the visual level. For instance, as

Wendy finishes the second installment of her story, including details about her elaborate sexual adventures with Peter and the Lost Boys, she says, "In the forest of my dreams, I lay amongst my wild cubs while they suckled me and licked me, under the tropic skies" (15.6). This statement is followed by a wordless splash page of a nude Wendy suckling five furry boys with tails. On the next page the reader is brought back to the scene of storytelling with Wendy's addressing Alice and Dorothy: "And so, you see, we didn't really do it. Not on that occasion" (15.8). The fantastical illustration signals here that Wendy's story has taken place in fantasy rather than in reality. Thus, by combining the verbal text with illustrations as graphic novels do, *Lost Girls* is able to lay claim to both "reality" and "fantasy" within the boundaries of its world. Clearly, Moore and Gebbie are playing with the line between reality and fantasy in a way that Freud would describe as overdetermined.

Lost Girls further equates pornography with childhood through this shared emphasis on play, fantasy, and imagination. Monsieur Rougeur, the proprietor of the hotel, says as much in the midst of his own sexual explorations with the three women: "Pornographies are the enchanted parklands where the most secret and vulnerable of all our many selves can safely play" (22.8). Imagination and play serve as the juncture between childhood and sex, so to the extent that Moore understands imagination as necessary for combating brutality, both childhood and sex provide ways of accessing imagination. For adults, that means returning to childhood through fantasy, and literature provides one key way to record, disseminate, and consume that fantasy. If sex and childhood are to be imagined as an antidote to violence, then the texts of sex and childhood—pornography and children's literature—are key to that defense.

Lost Girls makes clear its motives for wanting to restore artistic pornography as a spur to imagination. While Alice, Dorothy, and Wendy are involved in this storytelling, the world around them descends into the First World War. Archduke Ferdinand is assassinated, and most hotel guests flee, leaving the women alone. After they too leave, German soldiers invade the hotel, and on the final page, Gebbie provides a set of panels depicting the disemboweled corpse of a soldier on the battlefield. This contrast accounts for Moore's promotion of aesthetic pornography and sexualized children's literature as antidotes to brutality. The Hotel Himmelpark is a sexual utopia, one in

which guests are free to experiment with all sorts of sexual partners and practices. Moreover, it provides its guests with a space in which to return to childhood and thereby begin again. As Wendy notes near the conclusion of *Lost Girls*, "I feel full of possibilities again, like when I was young. As if my imagination can wander where it likes" (30.3). Unrepressed imagination or fantasy is both the antidote to war and the victim of war. Alice responds to Wendy, "I suppose that's what war destroys. All the art and architecture, the fields and flowers and young people's dreams ... All the imagination" (30.3, ellipses in original). This advocacy of imagination accounts in part for the particular set of choices *Lost Girls* embodies. War, as cultural neurosis, results from and perpetuates the absence of imagination.

Lost Girls does not just rewrite children's literature. These texts re-envision childhood itself. Just as Alice, Dorothy, and Wendy retell the stories of their childhoods, Moore and Gebbie are retelling the stories of our childhoods. Childhood innocence, by which we usually mean their ignorance of sexual matters, is one of the key strategies for maintaining a clear distinction between the child and the adult. For this distinction to operate, however, all evidence of childhood sexuality must be suppressed or overlooked, and children's ignorance must be enforced and policed. Sexual shame has long been effective for ensuring children avoid sex or sexual knowledge as long as possible, for ensuring that they see it as something unpleasant and dirty, as not for them or about them. One side effect of this tactical use of shame has been that it persists into adulthood. So successful is the association between sex and shame that many adults have trouble shaking it off even after reaching the age of maturity, when certain kinds of sexual activity become permissible. This occasions the embarrassment Moore and Gebbie indicate is linked to pornography and the enjoyment of pornography. Adult shame or embarrassment in pornography therefore amounts to adults acting like children, or how they think children should act. In fact, the first volume, called "Older Children," begins with an epigraph from the poetic prelude to Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*: "We are but older children, dear, who fret to find their bedtimes near." Thus, Carroll understands the adult as only an older child. If *Lost Girls* is to work as an intervention into the ghettoization of pornography, it must short-circuit the shame attached to sex that began as the innocence demanded of children.

To the extent that children's literature and culture participate in promoting or reinforcing that innocence, then subverting innocence and shame must involve the subversion of childhood innocence and the perception or fact of children's literature as asexual. Just as the implicit sexuality of the original texts is exaggerated in *Lost Girls*, so is the ability of the three girls to act in and on their worlds. They always could act, of course, and they were always quite powerful, but to sexualize their power is to bring them more fully in line with a power-knowledge usually reserved for adults. What Moore and Gebbie are calling for in *Lost Girls* is the reeducation of adults, and to accomplish this they have gone back to the artifacts of childhood and rewritten them.

Notes

1. *Lost Girls* is paginated by chapter, so each citation refers to chapter and page.
2. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* is abbreviated *S.E.* Each citation refers to volume and page.
3. It nonetheless seems more common in the United States to use "fantasy" rather than "phantasy," so outside of quoted material I will employ the former spelling.

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