



English 494

# Fairy Tales Few Dare to Tell: Breaking Molds and Gender Stereotypes through Sexuality in Lost Girls

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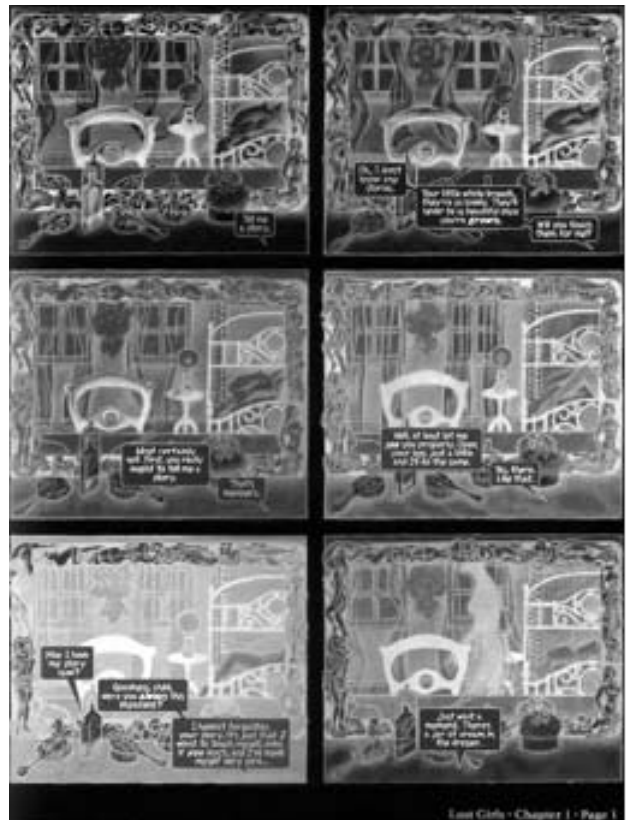
*“That wide expanse of human awareness and behavior which is loosely signified by the term ‘sex’ provides for the artist a vein so rich that it is never exhausted.” –Rosalind Miles*

## Introduction

Fairy tales and childhood stories convey society’s expectations about what it means to be a woman. Using beautiful, artistic, colorful renderings and characters that depict female archetypes familiar to audiences within the popular literary cultural context, *Lost Girls* places gender roles under scrutiny, granting women the opportunity to be sexually voyeuristic and giving both genders good reason to engage in homosexual behavior. In the novel, Alice from *Alice in Wonderland* (Lady Alice Fairchild), Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz* (Dorothy Gale), and Wendy from *Peter Pan* (Wendy Potter) have all grown up to embark upon a sexual rendezvous for several months of vacation in an Austrian hotel. They retell memorable scenes from their classic stories to each other adding a pornographic twist. Lady Fairchild’s character takes the lead in this erotic escapade, and through her we begin to see how the graphic novel transforms the chaste adolescent Alice figure into a complex, sexually wanton woman jaded by the shattered mold of her early years.

## Alice Shatters the Glass

From the onset, the story hoists Lady Alice Fairchild out of her prescribed role. The opening scene entails her and a young woman speaking to one another from a bed. A hidden young woman requests that Lady Fairchild tell her a story. We learn that the young woman is still in fact a child when Lady Fairchild remarks, “your little white breasts, they’re so lovely. They’ll never be as beautiful once you’re **grown**” (1; ch.1). The bolded word **grown** draws the reader’s attention to the girl’s yet undeveloped form and establishes the Peter Pan motif of refusing to grow up. This is the very motif *Lost Girls* is named for and sets the tone that Lady Fairchild struggles with her given aged circumstances. Women are not the usual suspects when it comes to sexual deviance. While it still remains slightly ambiguous at this point whether or not the women are engage in a sexual act, it becomes blatantly obvious in subsequent frames.



Lady Fairchild’s involvement in a lesbian affair, particularly one involving a child, is shocking. Conversely, if the situation were to reverse into that of a man with a young boy, a reader might not be as taken aback. While the man-boy event is not entirely common, it is still repeated enough in society—and subsequently, literature—that it does not carry the same shock value *Lost Girls* does. In traditional children’s literature, “the typical female protagonist is weak, demure, passive, in need of rescuing...[her] greatest reward is to become the bride of her prince-rescuer and serve him happily ever after” (Rudman 183). Males are usually the hero, “strong, brave, active, highly extroverted...[initiating] action and [controlling] the situation” (Rudman 183). Therefore, the woman-girl event is one that is unfamiliar and perhaps considered taboo to most audiences.

Lady Fairchild’s name carries undercurrents that seem to work as another device the authors have used to break her out of the stereotypical expectations. Lady Fairchild is neither fair nor child. While she does exude a certain beauty in her face and build, being a woman who is considered fair in literature is most often associated with youth. Lady Fairchild is of later years, closer to seventy than seventeen. The continuous sexual fantasies she indulges in along with her voyeuristic tendencies are something one would not expect from a woman old enough to be a grandmother. Exemplified in the spirit of her name is Lady Fairchild’s archetypal Alice counterpart from the children’s tale, a young girl who takes fantastic risks, exudes independence, and demonstrates tireless curiosity. This not only breaks gender stereotypes, but age ones as well.

### The Mirror

The mirror has been in Lady Fairchild’s family since she was a child. As she prepares to move to the Austrian hotel, a conversation with a servant reveals that it is the only possession of real value to her. Through the lens of the mirror, this exchange occurs:



Monsieur Rougeur, Hotel Himmelgarten manager, meets Lady Fairchild for the first time and praises her fiction writing. He states, “as a connoisseur of such literature, may I say that in your ladyship’s hands, fiction becomes the very mirror of reality...where memorable characters reflect our truest selves” (6; ch.1). This operates on the metalevel to show how Lady Fairchild’s persona captures the Alice archetype’s true self, a woman laden with repressed sexual desire.

Juxtaposed to this in the very next scene, Lady Fairchild masturbates in front of the mirror and then asks it how she looked. To the reader’s surprise, the mirror responds. It becomes clear that the mirror is also a character. Fairchild says she wishes to “touch you”, speaking to the mirror as if it were in fact another person. She then professes that “the barrier between [us] doesn’t melt anymore...it doesn’t break”, indicating that like Alice in Wonderland, at some previous

point the mirror could be transfigured into a threshold through which to pass into another dimension, a place of fantasy turned reality (8; ch.1).

The mirror becomes a symbol that encourages the reader to engage in the voyeuristic behavior reflecting on risqué characters in the same way it does, without judgment. With the entire first chapter rendered using the mirror to outline each frame, it reminds the audience that this is an “other” reality, a fictitious plane of existence. Simultaneously, as Rougeur states, and as Alice recounts her ability to step through the looking glass earlier in her life, the graphic novel itself is a reflection of a reality that is or could potentially be. Female fantasy and expression are no longer mutually exclusive entities. They are one and the same in *Lost Girls*.

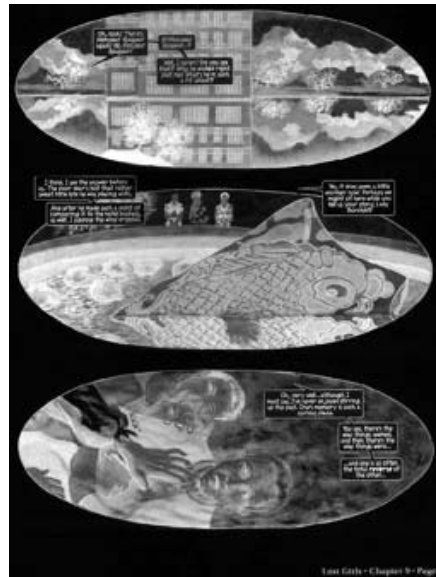
### Men as the Other



There are few male characters at all in the novel. The main one is the jolly, overweight, self-indulgent hotel manager, Monsieur Rougeur. Throughout the first portion of the novel, while

the women are engaged in exploring each other sexually, Rougeur takes a fascination with trying to fly a kite. At first glance, his childish, carefree spirit is endearing. But after several scenes with Rougeur and his toy, the behavior takes on a new life. A kite can only be flown alone, yet the undertaking eludes him. Dorothy mockingly asks, “Havin’ trouble getting’ your kite offa the ground?”, to which Rougeur replies, “Haha! It was easier to

launch this hotel” (1; ch.7). Embarking upon a risky business venture that involves much assistance from others is no match for the solo task of getting simple kite up in the air. The kite become as phallic symbol, and extension of Rougeur, recreating a masturbation scenario disappointingly impossible for him to achieve. Failure to launch takes all the fun out of flying a kite.



Later, we see Rougeur’s kite abandoned in a fountain. The kite, adorned with a boy riding on the back of a koi fish, play son both the expression “fish out of water” and the word “coy”. Rougeur, too timid to

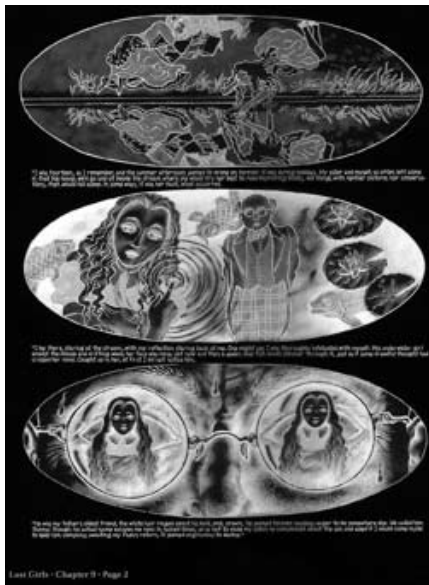
succeed, gives up; he places his fish in a more appropriate element, away from his incapable hands. This scene proves to be a metaphor for the manager’s inability to perform the childlike, basic function of self-pleasure, thereby emasculating the man and reducing him to a joke, which the women pick up on immediately. This renders Rougeur sexually incompetent, and as one of the main (and only) male characters in the book, begs the question, what do women need men for at all?

This makes sense considering the novel centers around female expressions of sexual power. Their primary function is to give one another pleasure. Suzanne Pharr, in her article on homophobia, comments on perceptions of homosexuality in our society:

A lesbian is perceived as being outside the acceptable, routinized order of things. She is seen as someone who has no



societal institutions to protect her and who is not privileged to the protection of individual males. Many heterosexual women see her as someone who stands in contradiction to the sacrifices they have made to conform to compulsory heterosexuality. A lesbian is perceived as a threat to the nuclear family, to male dominance and control, to the very heart of sexism. (88)



Indeed, Alice in *Lost Girls* has evolved into a full-fledged lesbian, in part due to her first sexual encounter as a young girl when she was molested by her father's hurried "white hair" friend, "Bunny" (2; ch. 9). This white rabbit led

her down a transcendental hole, "an inverted world where nothing made sense in the way it once did" (8; ch.9). Her perspective carries the plot forward and guides the other women in the story to partake in her homoerotic adventures. Women become saturated in sexual prowess for themselves and one another. They take control in the pornographic, female-centric narrative, adopting a dominant role once reserved for men. Perhaps it is Lady Fairchild's way of reclaiming her stolen youth.

There are several more examples of inverted gender dominance and propensity toward homosexuality. In chapter 12, Alice rapes Wendy. Mr. Potter, Wendy's husband, cast as an old prude, is seduced into having sex with an effeminate man in chapter 13. In an account expanding upon Dorothy's story, she reveals an incident with a young man from her childhood who she had engaged in

an affair with.

Exciting at first, Dorothy quickly grew bored of their tryst stating, "I wanted to be doin' it with somebody who had real thoughts and feelin's



just like I did...I might as well have humped a ragdoll, or somethin' you stick out in a field to scare the birds" (5; ch.14).

The young man was akin to Oz's Scarecrow, void of a brain. This seems to be a response to Mr. Potter's attitude revealed toward Wendy in a previous chapter. In a letter he comments on his wife, stating, "she's like most women. Rather soft. A bit wet. Sometimes, you know, I wonder

what [women] find to think about. Not like us chaps, of course, we're always thinking about something. Think, think, think, think, think. I tell you, sometimes it's B----- exhausting." (6; ch.11). On the one hand, both genders have an opinion that the other gender is mentally deficient. On the other, both are driven toward homosexuality seemingly from that opinion.

The novel ends when hotel guests are forced to evacuate due to the onset of World War I. This war, caused by men and fought by men, ceases the female fantasy entirely. When the women make their exit, Lady Fairchild leaves her mirror behind. One of the last frames shows a male soldier shattering Alice's treasured family heirloom with the grip of his large gun. This symbolic gesture is profound.

The gun is another representation for the phallus and using it to destroy the lens which allows for female fantasy highlights society's patriarchal mindset that seeks to suppress an alternative reality. However, the final word is given when an image depicting a fallen soldier with his core insides blasted and pouring out of him ends the novel. This implies that the very patriarchy which suppresses the female counterpart will be its own demise.

### **Conclusion**

The effect of this novel not only deconstructs stereotypical notions of how females ought to behave using the antithesis of the conventional, but on a larger level it ascends the inner sexual being classic literature has suppressed until now. It forces them—and therefore, us—to grow up. Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie's style provides pornographic shock value directed at adults employing vulgar, risqué, and unconventional yet aesthetically pleasing artwork to both seduce and numb the reader into readily accepting a reconstructed female identity, one that places women's sexual power onto a more equal playing field with the male counterpart while simultaneously steering them away from one another. This presents an option to the canon that has the capacity to promote powerful social change. (The discourse become open to the possibility anyway).

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