For a work so self-professedly invested in explicitness, Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie's *Lost Girls* depends very heavily upon the hidden and the secret. Or, to invert the observation to a form more suited for sound bites (Since, though it is many other things as well, *Lost Girls* is indisputably high concept), for a work so self-professedly invested in hidden magical realms, Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie's *Lost Girls* has a lot of cumshots. Both of these statements, indeed, seem so obvious that one has to wonder if they’re worth making here, especially when the popular press is, quite understandably, abuzz about *Lost Girls* and making virtually the same point.

But if the observation that pornography about beloved heroines of children's literature is steeped in contradictions comes off as blatant, let us not forget that blatancy is at the heart of both genres anyway. So perhaps some degree of obviousness is necessary if one is to be at all faithful in one's review. Let's put all the obvious cards on the table, then – *Lost Girls* is very good, very hot, very weird, and, in today's political climate, going to be very controversial.

Let us also put the elephant in the room, as it were, on the table. It seems almost, forgive my infelicity, perverse not to point out that *Lost Girls* is the decade-long project of a strange bearded man who came to sleep with and marry the artist, and who worships the ancient Roman snake god Glycon, who he admits was created as a fraud. What is perhaps most striking about *Lost Girls*, then, is that the reader thinks about almost none of this while reading it, if only because of how very obscene the book is.

Because this is, I think, what is so very easy to forget in talking about *Lost Girls*: the book is obscene. I do not merely mean shocking – though it certainly is that as well. It could be shocking by just suggesting that Alice, Dorothy, and Wendy might be having sex. It goes much further than that, such that if we must remark upon the contrast it offers between its literary origins and its goals (and I cannot see how we could avoid doing so), we must not lose sight of some simple facts. This is a story where Dorothy is fucked up the ass while masturbating a horse, Captain Hook jacks off on Wendy while she's deflowering Peter Pan, and Alice is kept in an opium-induced haze while the Red Queen orders her to rape the servant girls into submission.

The fair question, of course, is what it's all for – what the obscenity and snake gods and gossip
add up to. Thankfully, Alan Moore has (I hesitate to say suffers, since it seems he enjoys every minute of it) a tendency towards the pathologically didactic. And the tendency is very much on display here, most especially when Moore embarks on a lengthy section in which a character reads aloud from a pornographic book while repeatedly glossing the text with his observation that "It is quite monstrous... except that they are fictions, as old as the page they appear upon, no less, no more. Fiction and fact: Only madmen and magistrates cannot discriminate between them" (Moore *Lost Girls* 22:4). This comment, however, is tempered by the speaker's own admission that he's presently having sex with a thirteen year old girl. And, while Moore is not a magistrate, he does worship a fake Roman snake god – a theological decision that, to say the least, leaves open the possibility of madness.

And so we, perhaps, ought not be surprised when Alice, in describing her erotic vision of herself in the mirror, mentions "legs twined into a warm caduceus" (Moore *Lost Girls* 9:5). After all, Moore has tilled this ground before, in the tenth issue of *Promethea*, when he devotes twenty-two straight pages of brilliantly pathological didacticism to a magical sex act "corresponding to the lunar sphere of dream, imagination, sexual fantasy... opening inside us, a six-petal lotus, an ecstatic flowering of possibilities, fantastic, sensual, limitless" (Moore *Promethea*). In *Promethea*, sex is inexorably linked with a vision of the divine – one that is in turn linked with an external realm of dreams and possibilities, literalized in *Promethea* as the Immateria – the realm in which all human imagination resides.

On the one hand in *Lost Girls*, by sexualizing Neverland, Wonderland, and Oz, Moore is repeating the move from *Promethea*, linking sexuality with the realm of human imagination that he in turn associates with the sacred and divine. But on the other hand, *Lost Girls* seems to take the opposite tact as the fantastic elements of the original stories are made mundane. It is not, after all, strictly accurate to say that Moore tells a pornographic story set in Oz, or in Neverland. Rather, Moore tells pornographic stories that parallel the originals. And so the Scarecrow, Lion, and Tin Man become farmhands that Dorothy sleeps with, the Red Queen becomes a seductive schoolteacher, and Peter Pan becomes a young male prostitute. In that regard, then, he is stripping the fantastic out of the children's stories.

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 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, since the fantasy they contain is closer to the familiar original text than the purely sexual narrative that has been overlaid.

So the sex act becomes the transitional gateway into, as Alice describes it, "an inverted world where nothing made sense in the way it once did" (Moore *Lost Girls* 9:8). But this inverted world is at once two worlds, both of them seemingly contradictory – both the familiar fantasy world and the adult world, that the sex act initiates Alice into, but also the adult world that the sex act marks Alice as a part of. This adult world, of course, is one that is traditionally marked within children's literature through the abandonment of the exact sort of fantasy world it's being equated with.

It is unsurprising, then, that until the end of the book, when the three protagonists experience
a simultaneous orgasm in the midst of the orgy that follows the end of their stories, all three characters have found themselves in a sexual rut. At the ends of each of their narratives, they describe their past feelings of alienation—of, as Wendy puts it, how "my own desire had scared me so badly that I locked it away in the darkness beyond those railings" (Moore Lost Girls 27:7). As potent and powerful as the sexual awakenings are, they are also fundamentally abortive, at least in the forms offered within the narratives. It is not, within Moore's world, enough to be awakened—enough to enter the fantastic world. It is also necessary to tell the story. It is necessary for the sex act and the sexual world to be part of a public (and, as the reappearing caduceus points towards), spiritual discourse if they are to survive and function.

If I've one fear on the subject, then, it is that, despite the controversy and ensuing conversation that Lost Girls is going to engender, it will be rendered to the same dust pedestal to which we exile Maus and Sandman—works so self-evidently great that we seem never to get around to discussing them. Lost Girls is, after all, a rather obvious text. There aren't going to be many people who miss what's going on here. But for a work that so repeatedly gasps, grunts, and moans the unspeakable, such deferential treatment would serve mainly to slip a condom on the whole affair. No—Lost Girls deserves better. It deserves for us to descend like a pack of wolves, hungrily consuming and tearing apart every sex scene and beat oft(in) the story. It demands that we get our hands, dicks, cunts, and asses dirty along with it, and for our comments to be made from the other side of the looking glass the book offers to shove us through.

To do otherwise just wouldn't be obscene.

Notes:

[1] All page numbers are to chapter and page of Moore's text.

References
