"Everything's Interconnected": Anarchy, Ecology and Sexuality in Alan Moore's *Lost Girls* and *Swamp Thing*

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> Back when I was doing *Swamp Thing*, which was ostensibly a horror comic…. I decided… to try and link up the elements of fantasy horror from our imaginations – werewolves, vampires, zombies and the like – with real life horrors – racism, sexism, pollution, the collapse of the environment – and thus lend these social issues some of the weight that fantasy fiction could offer. (Moore 2006)

Alan Moore's tenure on *Swamp Thing* ran from late 1983 through to Autumn 1987. During this period, Moore and his collaborators produced a commercially successful and socially engaged series that defied the censorship of the Comics Code Authority in its depictions of sexuality, drug-taking and fantasy horror. Moore's work on the title helped transform what could be depicted in mainstream comics as his politically-minded treatment of fantasy drew directly on the underground comics of the 1970s. But Moore's tenure on *Swamp Thing* also looks ahead both to his more recent work in the fantasy genre and to his subsequent attempt to revitalize the underground press with the magazine, *Dodgem Logic* (2009 – 2011). The overlapping of different fantasy worlds with the reality of readers is particularly significant in *Lost Girls*, a pornographic cross-over event in which Lewis Carroll's Alice, J.M. Barrie's Wendy and L. Frank Baum's Dorothy undertake an adult decoding of Wonderland, Neverland and Oz. Sexual freedom stands at the heart of Moore's politics and *Lost Girls* thematises this position in a more overt and sustained manner than any of Moore's other fictional works, playing with readerly expectations in ways that challenge the simplistic opposition of fantasy and history. Considered together, *Swamp Thing* and *Lost Girls* provide a powerful testament to Moore's lifelong political and intellectual engagements, yielding particular

insight into the ways in which his work deploys fantasy as part of a larger project of social intervention.

Shortly after leaving *Swamp Thing*, Moore described his work on the series as "trying… to take some possibly unpopular political beliefs and to make them accessible" (Moore 1987). In particular, these beliefs relate to environmentalism and anarchism, but it was horror and incest that appear to have first caught the censors' attention. Moreover, it is in the relationship between the lead female character, Abigail Cable, and Swamp Thing that Moore's political engagements manifest themselves most directly. Issue 29, "Love and Death," is told predominantly in a past-tense narrative depicting Abigail's realisation that her husband Matt's work colleagues are "recorporated" murderers; the plot is interrupted from the start by post-traumatic flashbacks which chart a parallel realisation that she has unknowingly engaged in multiple instances of incest with her uncle, Anton Arcane (who had possessed her husband). The issue, which violated CCA prohibitions against depictions of the "walking dead" and of "sexual perversion" (Comic Book Legal Defence Fund 2014), was published without the CCA seal. As Andrew Edwards argues, "the depiction of undead characters tugging at Abby in a double-page spread no doubt set alarm bells ringing" and "the incest theme must have set off the equivalent of Defcom 1 at the CCA" (2012). In fact, the main issue must have been incest not zombies for the CCA approved the next issue, "A Halo of Flies," with its seal sharing cover space with John Totleben's image of undead hands clawing Abigail away from *Swamp Thing*. Reference to incest returns in issue 31, at which point *Swamp Thing* became the first mainstream series to publish outside the Code.

"A Halo of Flies" initiates the American Gothic story arc – "a shockwave of nightmare ripples out across the sleeping continent" (Moore, Bisette and Alcala 1984, 1) – and here the conjunction of fantasy horrors and real life horrors recalled by Moore begins in earnest. The two part "Nukeface Papers" (issues 35 and 36), for example, tackles the nuclear power industry by creating a supernatural villain, "Nukeface," addicted to nuclear waste. Nukeface's murder of Swamp Thing in issue 36 illustrates the potency of nuclear energy's threat to the environment, while the final full-

page image, in which he walks off into the distance framed by clippings from existing newspaper accounts of nuclear disasters, directly links the story world with the historical reality of its readers (Moore, Bissette and Totleben 1985, "Nukeface," 23). This overlapping of worlds itself links back to the unexplained appearance of two unidentified characters in "Halo of Flies" (Moore, Bissette and Alcala 1984, 12), figures whom readers familiar with the wider DC universe would recognise as Lyla Michaels and the Monitor from the *Crisis* storyline. A 12-issue series with multiple tie ins from other titles, *Crisis* ran from early 1985 to 1986 and was designed to clean up the continuity issues that had accrued over the previous 50 years and which had resulted in the creation of multiple alternative universes. As Swamp Thing's erstwhile occult mentor, John Constantine explains, the crisis within the storyworld revolves around the end of the multiverse:

> A whole series of parallel universes, parallel Earths…
>
> Something's eating its way through them, like a maggot munching through a stack of maps.
>
> In order to survive, the remaining worlds are being sort of folded together, making them stronger.
>
> (Moore Bissette and Totleben 1986, 7)

The idea of consolidating multiple realities and the accompanying image of multiple universes overlapping, which appears in *Swamp Thing* 46 (Moore, Bissette and Totleben 1986, 7) and elsewhere in the *Crisis* series, operate as powerful metaphors for the interaction between fantasy worlds and consensual reality, a relationship thematised directly in the dialogue between Swamp Thing and Constantine:

> ST: Why… should physical destruction… affect the immaterial realms…?
>
> C: Everything's interconnected, stupid.
>
> (Moore Bissette and Totleben 1986,10)

Constantine's comment illustrates the overarching message of Moore's *Swamp Thing*, which presents an anarchistic comment on freedom that emphasises the interconnection of sexuality, ecology and politics.

To the extent that the series organises itself around these topics and presents a story world open to the interchange between the fantastic and the real, *Swamp Thing* operates as a microcosm of Moore's oeuvre as a whole. Sexuality in *Swamp Thing* becomes the central site from which to explore the twin concept of interconnectedness and mutuality, which have a long history in anarchist thought and which are directly linked to ecology in the thought of contemporaneous writers such as Murray Bookchin. Bookchin's seminal text, *The Ecology of Freedom,* first published in 1982, details his development of "social ecology," which "has its origins… not merely as a cognitive dimension of epistemology but as an ontological consociation with the natural world" (2005, 114). Bookchin calls for "a fresh awareness of the relatedness between things and an imaginative insight into the possible" and he argues that pre-literate societies conceptualised their connection to nature as "a procreative relationship" expressed overtly in various fertility rites (2005, 83, 129). Though Moore does not reference Bookchin directly, *Swamp Thing* similarly identifies sexuality as a fundamental aspect of ecology's social dimension. Thus, in "Rite of Spring", an idealised vision of the interaction between the human and natural worlds is realised metaphorically through Swamp Thing's sexual relations with Abigail Cable:

> In him, I ride the amber sap, oozing through miniature labyrinths. Clusters of insect eggs burn like nebulae, suspended in their unique and vine-wrought cosmos…
>
> Through him, I sprawl with the swamp, sopping, steaming, dragonflies stitching neon threads through the damp air surrounding me…
>
> Beyond him I wrestle the planet, sunk in loam to my elbows as it arches beneath me, tumbling endlessly through endless ink.
>
> The bark encrusts my flanks. The moss climbs my spine to embrace my shoulders…
>
> We… are… one creature…

(Moore, Bissette and Totleben 1985, "Rite," 17).

The page layouts and images depicting this experience – in which panel borders are removed such that images of Abigail and Swamp Thing merge with representations of the natural world – reinforce this dissolution of barriers and align an ecological sensibility with the hermetic belief in the correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm. This investment of natural systems with magical meanings foreshadows the quest for knowledge that motivates the American Gothic / Crisis storyline, but it also reveals the way in which *Swamp Thing* co-opts the *Crisis* narrative to represent an expansion of consciousness.

Moore's move away from mainstream comics in the late nineteen eighties left him more time to devote to projects beyond the purview of corporate interest, but *Swamp Thing* represents a point of continuity between these two phases of his career. October 1988 saw the publication of "The Mirror of Love," a poem depicting a history of homosexuality co-illustrated by Stephen Bissette and Rick Veitch, both of whom were longstanding collaborators on *Swamp Thing*. The poem counterpoises a history of sexuality, illustrated by Veitch, with what, given Moore's opposition to organised religion, must be considered a fantastical space inhabited by two angels, illustrated by Bissette. The historical sections begin by subverting the cultural assumptions about what constitutes natural sexuality, "things loved freely once, ignoring gender", then chart a dialectic of love and oppression, and culminate in the question, "As we approach the future, will Utopia's spires hove into view, or death-camp chimney stacks?"(Moore, Bissette and Veitch 1988, 2, 9). Bissette's angels, meanwhile, are lovers who serve as potential points of resistance from within the Judeo-Christian tradition (in line with the belief popularised by Milton that these angels are intersexed) and they also provide the narrative frame: "While life endures we'll love, and afterwards, if what they say is true, I'll be refused a heaven crammed with Popes; Policemen; Fundamentalists, and burn instead, quite happily with Sappho, Michaelangelo and you" (Moore, Bissette and Veitch 1988, 9). "The Mirror of Love" was the first item in the anthology *AARGH!*, a title glossed on the contents page as "Artist's Against Rampant Government Homophobia."

AARGH! harnessed creative talent — and mobilised political commitment — from across the UK and US comics scenes in opposition to Clause 28, which banned reference to same-sex relationships within the school curriculum. The collection thus highlights the crossover between mainstream publications (Marvel, DC, *The Guardian*) and the underground, but it also anticipates two of Moore's most enduring graphic novels: *From Hell*, illustrated by Eddie Campbell, and *Lost Girls*, illustrated by Melinda Gebbie. Both of these works started out in the pages of *Taboo*, a fantasy horror co-created by the *Swamp Thing* team of Bissette and John Totleben and both projects interrogate the intersection of violence, gender and sexuality within larger cultural contexts.

The emphasis on sexuality is particularly overt in *Lost Girls*, which, perhaps not coincidentally, is also the more fantastical of the two texts. *Lost Girls* places Alice, Wendy and Dorothy together in the fictitious Austrian Hotel of Himmelgarten on the cusp of World War 1. The predominant chapter structure involves one of the three female protagonists recounting earlier, often traumatic, sexual experiences while observing, or engaging in, the sex-play of the other two. The characters and plots that inhabit and structure these memories are drawn from the more iconic parts of Carroll, Baum and Barrie's texts such that these works of children's fantasy appear almost as screen memories, nearly (but not quite) masking the sexual experience at the core of each recollection. Thus, chapter nine transforms Alice's encounter with the White Rabbit into a metaphor for childhood sexual abuse, while chapter 28 identifies the Wizard of Oz as Dorothy's father, with whom she engages in apparently consensual – if increasingly unsatisfying – sex as a young woman. Captain Hook, meanwhile, becomes an aristocrat who sexually exploits Peter in chapter 25 and is defeated in chapter 27 by the sexual assertiveness of Wendy, whose vagina becomes the crocodile (Hook's nemesis) from Barrie's version.

Himmelgarten translates as "Sky Garden," a clue to its function as a nexus between utopian fantasy, in which sexuality is aligned with freedom, and a dystopian world in which the darker forces of history pervert sexuality into violence. The hotel thus operates both as a meeting point and as a base from which Alice, Dorothy and Wendy can explore other sexually charged spaces. They

make two such journeys, to a tropical island in the Bodensee, which is an even more fantastical environment for sexual experimentation, and to Paris, for the premier of Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. Paris, depicted in chapter 10 ("Stravinsky") operates as a portal, opening their sexual journey as a threesome, for this is the first time Wendy joins Alice and Dorothy's sexual coterie, while the visit to the Bodensee in "Snicker-Snack" (chapter 20) depicts the high-point of fantasy and sexual freedom, precipitating a descent into darker themes in the text's final part. Visually, the development of the protagonists' sexuality is communicated through the page layout. In "Stravinsky" their sexual encounter is narrowly circumscribed by an increasingly violent audience, and appears dominated by the artistic vision of Stravinsky and the Vaslav Nijinsky (see Figure 1, 10.6); in "Snicker-Snack", the page layout is the same, but here the top panel is devoted to the three women, who inhabit a magical realist space and demonstrate a fluidity of identity throughout their interactions with numerous lovers of different races and species (see Figure 2, 20.4). In the intervening chapters, the structure of the narrative and of the page layouts largely relegates the sexual activities of the coterie to the margins, making way for a fuller exploration of their personal histories and other relationships. Across these chapters it becomes increasingly evident that for these characters the quest for carnal knowledge has become a process of sexual healing. Moreover, this process of discovery and recovery is enabled by an opening-out of sexuality via the embrace of polyamory and the removal of what Judith Butler describes as the "highly rigid regulatory frame" that constrains gender performance and sexual practice (1999, 43). There is no suggestion that any act of consensual sex is unusual and all sexual preferences are presented without comment or explanation. Though all of the characters are cisgender, the extensive use of role-play celebrates a fluidity of gender roles and sexual orientations such that *Lost Girls* disseminates a set of fictions that compete with the "regulatory fictions" described by Butler, while also remaining sensitive to "sexuality and its implication in various dynamics of discursive and institutional power" (1999, 43, xxvi).

Farah Mendlesohn's description of four different types of fantasy — "the portal-quest, the immersive, the intrusive, and the liminal" (2008, xiv) — can help us map the ways that *Lost Girls* uses the genre to explore the complexities and ambivalences of sexuality. In particular, the complicated negotiation between the forces of (military) history and (sexual) imagination that underpins the plot of *Lost Girls* is manifested in a shift in the predominant type of fantasy structuring the text. Initially, *Lost Girls* presents itself as a portal quest, in which "a character leaves her familiar surroundings and passes through a portal into an unknown place" (Mendlesohn 2008, 1). It opens with a chapter whose title, "Mirror," echoes the "Mirror of Love," and the first panel introduces a very literal mirror of love, placed within a baroque erotic frame and used as a central component in Alice Fairchild's auto-eroticism (See Figure 3, Moore and Gebbie 2009, 1.2.iv). Nico Dicecco argues compellingly that "the mirror brings together sexuality and the comic book form to highlight the audience's role, as a desiring subject" (2012, loc. 1791). Further, she suggests that by drawing on each reader's prior acquaintance with Alice, Dorothy and Wendy, the text's meta-narrative reflections invite "us to recognize ourselves in what we read" (2012, loc. 1939). This process of recognition is further complicated, however, by the mirror's prior associations with the portal quest and the harrowing journey of self-discovery that we undertake with Alice: "I recall that there was something very important, very **fragile**. But then a terrible **thing** happened and it got **broken**" (Moore and Gebbie 2009, 1.2). This disclosure, related by Alice who at this point is both masturbating and dissociating, further links fantasy with the interplay between the narrative construction of identity and repressed or distorted memories: "The mirror never breaks. The mirror never melts. / Not any more" (Moore and Gebbie 2009, 2.1). Unlike in Carroll's texts, the object of Alice's quest is neither to escape mundanity nor to return to it but rather to move into a new phase of post-traumatic growth characterised, and facilitated, by the development of new imaginative and sexual experiences. Rather than having the mirror transport Alice, it becomes an object that Alice takes with her, a symbol of the dissociation initiated by childhood sexual abuse. Leaving the mirror behind thus becomes a metaphor for sexual healing in which she is able to imaginatively reconstruct

her life story and identify with her former self: “As for my looking glass…/ 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” (Moore and Gebbie 2009, 30.3).

However, though on one level the mirror represents a certain psychological blockage, it also comes to stand for the power of the imagination to deal with and work through traumatic experiences. It is in this capacity that the mirror has also operated as the framing device through which we as readers experience *Lost Girls*, and when it is broken by an invading German soldier (Moore and Gebbie 2009, 30.5), it is suddenly clear that the portal quest has been hijacked by an intrusion fantasy. “Where the portal-quest fantasy is a fantasy of the world Re-made or of Healing, the intrusion fantasy is a fantasy of entropy and resistance to entropy” (Mendlesohn 2008, 181); but *Lost Girls* inverts the normal structure as here the real or historical world invades the fantasy world rather than the other way around. This inversion is most overt in “Snicker-Snack”, in which “the *sub*-surface, the sense that there is always something lurking” (2008, 116) visually translates into the sequential images that detail the assassination of Franz Ferdinand and Sophie, Duchess von Hohenberg. History thus presented appears as both nonsensical and inevitable:

> For an hour we frolicked, kissed and frigged without a tourist anywhere. Presumably they were all off at this Archduke’s parade we’d heard about.
>
> From my lagoon of legs, the idea of people holding parades and wearing clothes seemed alien and unreal…
>
> Another world, where dismal and nonsensical affairs were endlessly occurring.
>
> (Moore and Gebbie 2009, 20.10)

Here Moore twists the Carrollean satire, in which recognisable characters and comportments are parodied in the figures and logics of Wonderland, repositioning nonsense in the domain of history rather than fantasy. In these places where history intrudes, the exploration of sexuality and vulnerability becomes far more disturbing as *Lost Girls* realises Moore’s ambition for art that can

“keep commenting upon our own cultural progress, upon our own emotional or intellectual progress” (Moore and Gebbie 2011).

But, it would be a mistake to see the distinction between sexuality and war or between fantasy and history as absolute. Just as sexuality and war are both constituted by desire, so too are the worlds of fantasy and history underpinned by imagination. Even as it heralds the destruction of the fantasy world — “And the spell was broken, just like that” (Moore and Gebbie 2009, 20.7) — the invasion of history undertakes a necessary work within the text for dismantling the fantasy dispels the illusion that sexuality exists distinct from public life. Alice perceives that the political turmoil consuming the world outside Himmelgarten allows the remaining guests to indulge their innermost desires: “What a pity it took the Archduke’s assassination to drive your less liberal guests away, allowing this splendidly good-natured orgy” (Moore and Gebbie 2009, 22.1). But rather than revealing a hidden core of pure sexuality untarnished by worldly interests, the ensuing scene reinforces the notion that every performance of sexuality — including those that come represent sites of resistance — is contingent and constructed. Moreover, as readers we are warned to beware of those who profess themselves to be sexual liberators. The hotelier, Monsieur Rougeur, is here shown to be a forger, self-proclaimed child molester and rampant confabulator. Indeed, though Himmelgarten appears as a place of free sexuality, the acting out of fantasy is underpinned by a hidden system of economic exchange: “For staff, I hired prostitutes. Everyone could act how people do in fictions. In romances” (Moore and Gebbie 2009, 23.5). While this is emphatically not an indictment of sex work, it reminds us that every act of consensual sex involves a complex negotiation in which power is omnipresent.

While *Lost Girls* aims at “a new approach to pornography and a better world” (Moore and Gebbie 2011), it steers clear of utopian fantasies. Unartistic pornography may be symptomatic of a sexually repressive culture (Moore 2009), but it would then be absurd to think that a less restricted approach to sexual expression would result in a pornography that abides by some universal code of sexual norms or ideals. Several chapters directly thematise the relationship between art and life, as

when Monsieur Rougeur, whilst being anally penetrated by Alice, exclaims, "Our life sometimes becomes… ohhhh… like our **pornography**" (Moore and Gebbie 2009, 23.4). This statement raises complex questions about the relationship between fantasy and the real world for it is uttered by Rougeur in response to Dorothy's accusation that the tale of him selling his own body and that of two children, whom he himself sexually exploits, is a fiction driven by desire: "I bet you're makin' this **up!** You got that big ol' thing in your ass, so you're talkin' dirty" (Moore and Gebbie 2009, 23.4). In view of Moore and Gebbie's own battles with censorship and in the context of *Lost Girls* as a whole, Rougeur is at his most convincing when he defends the distinction between fantasy and reality: "Fiction and fact: only madmen and magistrates cannot discriminate between them"; however, here the narrative and meta-narrative levels of the text pull in opposite directions for Rougeur proceeds to assert his own factuality (and hence culpability): "**I**, of course, am **real**, and since Helena, who I just fucked is only thirteen, I am very **guilty**" (Moore and Gebbie 2009, 22.4).

Fantasy in *Lost Girls* plays an important role in the psychological health of individuals and the societies to which they belong. Once the mirror of love is broken, fantasies of political domination usurp sexual fantasy and the horrors of the First World War invade the story world. This perversion of desire, which carries ecological as well as psychological consequences, is brutally represented in the final two pages of the book. The penultimate page zooms in on a landscape desolated by war and its final panel provides an ambiguous image of a young man's face, which bears a glazed and (possibly) post-orgasmic expression (see Figure 4). On turning the page, however, it becomes clear that the man is dead — disemboweled and castrated — such that the entropic dissolution of Thanatos replaces the creative ecstasy of Eros which underpins the majority of *Lost Girls* (see Figure 5). The confessions of Monsieur Rougeur are, if true, clearly reprehensible, and the actions of other sexual exploiters in the text, such as Hook, seriously problematise the presentation of the work as a piece of pornography; however, this unnamed soldier is clearly worse off than Peter, who survives Hook's assaults both physically and emotionally, or Alice, who survives and ultimately overcomes a series of abusive experiences. *Lost Girls* thus

accords with Moore's subsequent comments on the representation of violence, sexual and otherwise, in works of fiction:

> in the real world, which the great majority of people are compelled to live in, there are relatively few murders in relation to the staggering number of rapes and other crimes of sexual or gender-related violence, this being almost a complete reversal of the way that the world is represented in its movies, television shows, literature or comic-book material…. Why should murder be so over-represented in our popular fiction, and crimes of a sexual nature so under-represented? Surely it cannot be because rape is worse than murder, and is thus deserving of a special unmentionable status... Certainly, the actual victims of rape that I've known and spoken to don't seem impressed with the idea of a "fate worse than death." (Moore 2014)

While it includes numerous scenes of sexual violence, *Lost Girls* depicts only three murders, all of which are linked to political — and specifically, imperial — violence: the soldier, as well as the Archduke Ferdinand and Duchess von Hohenberg, whose assassinations in chapter 20 are handled with considerable restraint. In addition to working toward a more proportional representation of non-sexual to sexual violence, linking murder to ideology adds an additional layer of reflexivity for both writer and artist posit a direct link between the repression of sexual fantasy and the increase of actual violence within a culture (Moore and Gebbie 2012). Similar attitudes to the representation of fantasy violence — both sexual and non-sexual — are evident in Moore's earlier three-part essay on sexism in comics:

> how many times have you opened a copy of Savage Sword of Conan to find some barbarian forcing a lithe Kothian dancing girl back into the hay, ignoring her feeble half-hearted complaints and taking his cue from the delirious ecstatic look that the artist has drawn onto her face, showing you that she doesn't mind *really*….
>
> The message of this sort of story is that women enjoy rape and that they say "No" when they mean "yes". When one reads in the papers about some of the astonishing

> proclamations made by judges presiding over rape cases, one wonders if our entire judicial authories [sic] were not given copies of 'Conan the Rapist' to read during their formative years. The other message contained in this material is that *real* men are good at drinking, reducing people to dog-food with their broadswords and interfering with tavern wenches."
>
> (Moore 1983, 19-20)

Appearing in *The Daredevils* from April to June of 1983, 'Invisible Girls and Phantom Ladies,' shows Moore ruminating on the real-world effects of representations of sex and violence in works of fantasy several months before he began writing for *Swamp Thing*. Notably, Moore identifies fantasies which fetishize non-sexual violence and censor sexual violence as irresponsible in terms that anticipate his own use of fantasy to raise the consciousness of his audience.

In this emphasis on altering the consciousness of its readers, we see the impact of an underground ethos on Moore's work. Moore identifies art as a vector for remaking the world, which he defines as 'not just the physical structures but the mental and ideological structures that we've erected' (Moore 2006). Such apocalyptic visions are, moreover, linked to the ingestion of psychoactive drugs in a tradition stretching back to Aldous Huxley's attempted use of mescaline to gain admittance "into the kind of inner world described by [William] Blake" (2004, 5), another of Moore's acknowledged precursors. Thus, the magical realism of "Snicker-Snack" is linked to the protagonists' use of opium such that the combination of drugs and sex drastically expands what Aldous Huxley described as "the reducing valve of the brain" (Huxley 2004, 11) in *The Doors of Perception: Heaven and Hell*, a book given a cameo appearance in *Swamp Thing* 35 (Moore, Woch and Randall 1985, 22). "Snicker-Snack" represents the climax of the characters' sexual liberation precisely because, within each of the heroines, what Huxley calls the "measly trickle of consciousness" (Huxley 2004, 11) is transformed into an imaginative torrent that transforms perception and fosters a sense of interconnection: "When we came, our spend was Africa, was cannibals, was zebra panic thundering down the pubic veldt" (Moore and Gebbie 2009, 20.5).

Though reference to African cannibalism is not unproblematic, here the image acquires a positive association as part of a more general — and importantly imaginary — transgression against cultural taboos. This embrace of abjection, which includes the confusion of the human and the animal, has direct antecedents in *Swamp Thing* where the expansion of consciousness is linked to the ingestion of a psychoactive organic compound, an act which symbolises a transgression against the moral codes governing sexual behaviour. Initially, Swamp Thing tells Abigail that a kiss "would be… unpleasant for you" because "we are so… different" (Moore, Bissette and Totleben 1985, "Rite," 7). When the opposite turns out to be the case, he plucks a tuber from his own body for her to eat and this substance initiates Abigail's psychedelic experience. The act of consuming part of one's lover relates to powerful cultural taboos which, in sexual acts involving orality are operative in activities ranging from fellatio and cunnilingus to the actual consumption of bodily secretions or excretions. The dialogue between Abigail and Swamp Thing charts this movement from revulsion in the face of abjection to the intimacy of mutual consent:

> AC: The first time… the first time I thought about somebody *eating* part of you, I…
>
> Well, I threw up.
>
> But… if this is like, something that you *want* me to do…
>
> ST: It is…
>
> AC: Well, okay.

(Moore, Bissette and Totleben 1985, "Rite," 12)

Beyond aligning an ecologically attuned expanded consciousness with shamanic ritual and sexual exploration, the carnal relations of Swamp Thing and Abigail are thus used to challenge the moral and legal codes that regulate amorous practices in relation to bodily difference.

Swamp Thing's initial misgivings acquire an added resonance in the context of a Gothic tradition that reads the monster as racial other; however, it is the issue of LGBQ rights that becomes linked most directly to the sexualised relationship between the human and natural worlds. Swamp Thing's lack of male mammalian sexual organs precludes heterosexual genital relations, but this

absence facilitates rather than prevents more creative physical and psychological interpenetrations. Ingesting the tuber not only allows Abigail to take a part of Swamp Thing inside of her body, but "Rite of Spring" and subsequent issues make it clear that both beings experience their passion physically as well as psychically. Numerous panels show them kissing and cuddling, before, during and after their sexual activities, while the postures they adopt as well as their dialogue clearly reference depictions of more conventional erotica depicting human couples. "You know I haven't eaten since breakfast," Abigail states suggestively in "The Parliament of Trees," bringing one of his tubers to her lips while another arcs up from between his legs (Moore, Woch and Randall 1986, 5). In the next panel, Swamp Thing gives his wholehearted consent — "Please… be my guest" — pushing her head down onto the rhizome in her hands, which by this point is secreting considerable amounts of fluid. Nevertheless, while the phallus is heavily implied throughout this scene, the images make it clear that it remains symbolic rather than literal as the tuber Abigail ingests is clearly taken from Swamp Thing's chest.

The opening pages of "Parliament," meanwhile, self-consciously play with readerly expectations about sexual images in print publications, pushing the boundaries of what, in 1986, would have been considered acceptable in a mainstream comic, even one publishing outside of the comics code. This is directly thematised in the frame narrative for this issue, told through the pictures and commentary of a paparazzo who is trying to sell a photoset of the lovers, taken in secret, to the Houma Daily Courier. The first panel depicts the photographer setting up his pitch with the next twelve panels — depicting the opening of a sexual encounter — presented as two contact sheets. In addition to calling attention to the status of these images as images (and indeed as made images by virtue of the fact that the contact sheets are presented as being hung up to dry), this framing device strongly suggests the making of a softcore magazine. In what follows, Moore and artists Stan Woch and Ron Randall, present very explicit sex scenes but, because this intimacy exists beyond dominant frames of cultural reference, it remains unrecognisable as pornographic or legally obscene outside of the storyworld. The rigidity of regulatory frameworks in determining

what does and does not count as sex is exemplified in Matthew Candelaria's insistence that their intercourse "is *not* sexual as human beings generally consider sex" (Candelaria 2012, loc. 460). Crucially, Candelaria's objection does not derive from the fact that Swamp Thing is not human, but rather from a reduction of sexuality to penile penetration of a vagina. "With Swamp Thing's almost limitless physical variability," Candelaria observes, "fulfilling sexual contact seems not only possible, but easy to achieve," further noting that "it is clear that there is no sexual activity, no physical penetration" (loc. 465).

That a highly educated writer can make such claims in a peer-reviewed academic publication in 2012 speaks to the persistence of heteronormativity throughout western culture. The irony here is augmented by the fact that Moore explicitly links the subsequent persecution of Abigail to the sort of state-sponsored homophobia he later combats in *AARGH!* Issue 48 sees Abigail arrested as a sex offender following the photos' publication while in issue 51, we learn that she has been charged with "Crimes Against Nature," which her attorney describes as "those laws… usually reserved for people who have carnal relationships with farm animals" (Moore, Veitch and Alcala 1986, "Home Free," 4). In Louisiana, where the series is set, this would be RS 14:89, a state law which criminalises homosexuality and which as recently as 2013 led to the arrest of a 65-year old man for agreeing to have sex, in private, with a male, undercover police officer (Mustian 2013). That Moore had such laws in his sights twenty-years earlier speaks to his longstanding commitment to LGBQ rights, but his critique goes one step further. Though Issue 50 (July 1986) definitively concludes the supernatural level of the Crisis narrative (the main crossover issue was Issue 46), the American Gothic arc does not conclude until Issue 53, "The Garden of Earthly Delights," in which Abigail is freed and the genre shifts from fantasy horror to sci-fi. This issue and the preceding one, "Natural Consequences," tie together the three strands that connect the arc as a whole: sexuality, ecology and anarchism. Having jumped bail, Abigail ends up in Gotham, where she is arrested and held pending her return to Louisiana. In order to free her, Swamp Thing holds the city to ransom, transforming it into a jungle landscape reminiscent of the apocalyptic scenes from J.G. Ballard's

Unlimited Dream Company (1979). Batman, meanwhile, is positioned as an agent of a repressive state enforcing the criminalisation of non-heteronormative sexuality and as an opponent of the natural world itself, deploying technology evocative of agent orange and clear-cut logging (Moore and Totleben 1986, 12-15). Swamp Thing's spectacular triumph over Batman thus becomes equated with the apocalyptic power of the natural world: "though man might boast of having conquered nature that's not the case, for if nature were to shrug or to merely raise its eyebrow then we should all be gone" (Moore 1987). Significantly, along with this natural revolution comes a social revolution in which law enforcement breaks down, as police officers ingest Swamp Thing's psychoactive tubers (Moore and Totleben 1986, 6), and the bounds of sexuality begin to relax, "By dusk… the first few converts remove their clothes and go naked amongst the hanging gardens of Gotham" (Moore, Veitch and Alcala 1986, "Natural Consequences," 20).

By the final issue of Moore's run on the series, however, Swamp Thing has become powerful enough to institute a global utopia, yet he has also learned to divorce his use of power from his personal interests. He has become a veritable god, who could "restore Africa's crumbling topsoil," "rebuild the forests… of the Amazon," "drop grapes… into the mouths… of all the hungry children… turn the Gobi and Sahara… into green and rippling meadows" (Moore, Bissette, Yeats, Veitch and Alcala 1987, 8). But, in a break with comic-book conventions, he decides to go home instead, concluding that "mankind must stand or fall… by its merits alone" (Moore, Bissette, Yeats, Veitch and Alcala 1987, 17). In having Abigail and the Swamp Thing withdraw from the public world into a private space – a living mansion constructed of swamp flora – that the reader only ever encounters from the outside, this issue validates the sort of emotional and sexual intimacy largely excluded from mainstream comics of the time. The peculiar representation of hyper-masculine heroes such as Superman, for whom sexuality and domesticity represent dangerous divergences from their commitment to saving the world, is here replaced by an ecological and anarchist sensibility in which everyday human beings must assume responsibility for the fate of the planet. Visually, this point is conveyed in the last three panels that include Abby and the Swamp Thing

(Moore, Bissette, Yeats, Veitch and Alcala 1987, 22), for these depict the lovers departing into the misty distance from a vantage point located behind two human characters, Chester and Liz, who will take charge of Abigail's environmental group.

This ending might appear to privilege individual happiness over collective good and to eschew politics in favour of romance. Indeed, on seeing her new home, which Stephen Bissette renders in decidedly Lovecraftian dimensions, Abigail observes, "It's just like a fairy tale or something," and Swamp Thing refers to the structure as a "castle" and describes her as "a Hans Andersen Princess" (Moore, Bissette, Yeats, Veitch and Alcala 1987, 19). But such knowing allusiveness alerts us to the political intent behind this ostensibly romantic fantasy. The accordance of a fairytale ending to a couple who have overtly flouted the rules about who may love whom and in what ways stands as a political act in its own right; moreover, in refusing to have Swamp Thing emerge as a monstrous god out of the machine to magically solve the ecological crisis, Moore demonstrates a fidelity to his anarchist principles. This ending dissolves the dreams propagated by religious or technological messianism (it is worth recalling that Swamp Thing himself exists as a byproduct of the US military-industrial complex); further, it advances an educational programme of the sort that Moore subsequently identifies as a necessary precursor to freedom:

> Ultimately, anarchy begins at home. Life without rulers… will entail self-rule, which cannot come about unless we properly accept and understand that we as individuals… are totally responsible for our own lives and destinies.
>
> (Moore 2010, 4)

Here too the intersection of the public and private undermines the gendering of space while the emphasis on educating "a large majority of people… to a point where they [are] able to direct their own lives without interfering in the lives of others" clarifies the political function of fantasy in both *Swamp Thing* and *Lost Girls* (Moore 2010, "Fear" 5).

Whereas social ecology is built on a series of historical analyses aimed at identifying the roots of the present and the parameters of the possible (Bookchin 2005, 134), Moore's use of

fantasy performs a similar task, inviting us as readers to actively destroy and refashion the worlds we inhabit. But for Moore fantasy, like drugs, is best used not for escapism but rather as a means to a practical end. Pleasure — and sexual pleasure especially — remains an awfully important aspect of the reading experience, but if we remain unable to translate our readerly activities into performances that go beyond the page, we will have missed the point. This does not of course preclude laughter or having fun, as is made clear in the aptly titled, "I Read the News Today, Oh Shit…," an editorial Moore published the month after the UK's 2010 national election:

> Picture yourself in a boat on a river, only it's not a river so much as a riptide of burning mermaid tears that won't stop screaming, and it isn't really a boat, it's actually a whale-vulva made out of diamonds. And by "picture yourself" I mean "picture a kind of schizophrenic jukebox that's either playing all the records backwards or is somehow spraying them across the room like hurtling black vinyl coasters of sizzling death." Welcome to the psychedelic summer spectacular fourth issue of *Dodgem Logic*. We'd love to turn you on.
>
> (Moore 2010, "Oh Shit," 1)

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