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**REVERSE EKPHRASIS AND BAKHTINIAN RE-ACCENTUATION:
CODING ALICE AS A NYMPHET IN GRAPHIC NOVELS**

Abstract: Over the past 50 years, the understanding of the nymphet has mutated from a special type of *becoming*, as seen in Nabokov's master text, to *being* a Lilith-like essence. There are other rules to be observed by the American artists Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie when portraying a nymphet as contrasted to those Soumei Hoshino has to follow in Japan. They navigate different (sub)cultural contexts and address varying conventions, so that visually "translating" Lewis Carroll's Alice becoming a nymphet implies different intercultural negotiations. This paper is a piece of reader-oriented criticism which sets out to explore the visual semiotics at play, especially the meanings conveyed by the particular use of frames, the selection of proxemics, social cues, angles, even of the coloring itself.

The two graphic novels to be explored, Moore's *Lost Girls* (2006) and Hoshino's *Heart no Kuni no Alice/Alice in the Country of Hearts* (2008) present interest as (sub)cultural "translations" within the framework of pop culture. Their framing of ethical concerns differs from that of the so-called "high-brow" literature or of the mainstream throw-away sensationalist writings that proliferate various images of willing nymphets. Naturally, aesthetics also remains to be a concern, given the markedly visual nature of these works, with their meaning and appeal emerging from a combination of image and text. The pressing questions to be addressed are what to show and how to do it, especially how to code her image and "translate" it in the culture of the artist, all while adapting beauty ideals so that the image of the Victorian era girl and the nymphet collide. The last point is especially problematic since, to Nabokov, the nymphet only exists in the eye of the nympholept. He explains the failures of Stanley Kubrick and Adrian Lyne by showing that their films made her

conventionally attractive and, thus, obscured the very deviance and particular distorted vision of the nympholept, which amplifies some elements rather than others. Dolores Haze was chosen not for a budding womanly sexuality, but especially for her underdeveloped, tomboyish physique unto which the nympholept could project his desires for a fairytale-like frozen time. The two portrayals of Alice look like ordinary girls removed from the image of the real Alice Liddel, as they are instances of reverse ekphrasis and visual quotation, being reinterpretations of the already classic, further popularized by Disney, image of a blonde girl in a blue maid-like dress.

Key words: cultural convention, gaze, nymphet, nympholept, re-accentuation

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“Alicious, twinstreams twinestraines, through alluring glass or alas in jumboland?”
(James Joyce)

More than half a century has passed since Nabokov first published *Lolita* and a strange phenomenon is to be observed. His nymphet's name has come to mean, according to The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, simply “a seductive adolescent girl” (Patnoe 2002, 112) or, if one is to rely on the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a “precociously seductive girl”. It would seem that the collective memory has chosen to take for granted what Humbert Humbert said before giving the account of their first sexual encounter: “Frigid gentlewomen of the jury!...I am going to tell you something very strange: it was she who seduced me” (Nabokov 2010, 132). A Nabokovian good reader, however, the kind who would “notice and fondle details”, as defined by Nabokov on the very first page of “Good Readers and Good Writers”, will also notice that this is not the Dolores Haze of the novel. What is now

happening in the academia, but even more so in popular culture, is a proliferation of Lolitas which complicate further our reading of the novel. Should one wish for fewer Lolitas or even for just the one imagined by Nabokov? Some critics prove to be more optimistic than others and, in this respect, Peter Clanfield and Tim Conley show in “‘You Talk Like a Book, Dad’: Pedagogical Anxiety and *Lolita* ” (2005) that the many present day Lolitas populating culture as alternative versions, some more or less nuanced than others, may not only embody a potentially instructive range of (mis)readings of Nabokov’s narrative, but the source text itself, with its own often dramatic interior struggle between voices for narrative dominance, also offers us valuable ways of reading contemporary developments both in popular culture and in the academia.

Consequently, the many re-readings and (sub)cultural translations of *Lolita*, including the so-called “kinderwhore”, are to be regarded as what Mikhail Bakhtin terms “re-accentuations” or intergeneric transpositions: the inevitable process of “images and languages” mutating their meanings and interpretations since our very definitions and connotations of words, tropes, or discourses also change in a socio-historical context. As Bakhtin puts it, “Every age re-accentuates in its own way the works of its most immediate past. The historical life of classic works is in fact the uninterrupted process of their social and ideological re-accentuation” (Bakhtin in Clanfield and Conley 2005, 21). However, we are not free to escape the warning against potential uncritical acceptance of re-accentuations. These are dangerous since they may significantly oversimplify or otherwise distort one’s image of the master text to the point where the original trope is virtually unfamiliar to a contemporary audience. The case of *Lolita* in particular, with its strongly marked rich, dialogic nature, means that it is also more prone to re-readings and to being re-accentuated in other times, places, or, as we shall see, in other media. While Bakhtin focuses on novels, he also acknowledges the importance of the third re-accentuation, that “of images during their translation out of literature and into other art forms” (Bakhtin in Clanfield and Conley 2005, 21). Notable examples of erroneous re-accentuations, which do more harm than the little good of spreading the word about the novel, include the March 1992 issue of *Esquire* magazine, which happily announced that

“Humbert Humbert may have been mad, but he wasn’t crazy. He knew a good nymphet when he saw one. And damned if little Dolores Haze didn’t know what she was getting herself into. But, of course, all younger women are not Lolita.” (Clanfield and Conley 2005, 21-22). From victim-shaming to attempts of lending the nymphet a voice, as, for example, Kim Morrissey does in “Poems for Men who Dream of Lolita”, it is almost with no surprise that we answer the media’s coverage of the case of the 1992 “Long Island Lolita”, Amy Fisher, the teenager who shot the wife of her much older lover. Both *Time* and *Newsweek* used references to Lolita rather than “Fatal Attraction” (1987), although this film was the one to include a jealous, murderous young female figure. This seems to suggest that *Lolita* is “*more* broadly recognizable as an icon of aggressive feminine sexuality” (Clanfield and Conley 2005, 23)., and so, in the eyes of the many, Lolita has metamorphosed from being the victim into the perpetrator. Another re-accentuation to keep in mind is that of Marianne Sinclair’s 1988 book, *Hollywood Lolita: The Nymphet Syndrome in the Movies*: through the selection operated, the implicit message is that a nymphet (or, to use her spelling, “nymphette”) simply *is* one, and, as she is not brought into becoming one, there is no issue of consent. The graphic novels to be used in this paper for an analysis of the ways in which the nymphet status can be visually coded go against this commonplace misconception in ways that privilege an experienced reader’s understanding.

As numerous critics have observed, it is the double-voicing at the heart of the novel which is essential for a proper understanding of the effect of Humbert on the young Dolores Haze. This effect was also achieved through the use of transgressed conventions not just limited to describing Lolita as especially prone to appreciating cinema-like gimmicks. Elizabeth Power’s “The Cinematic Art of Nympholepsy: Movie Star Culture as Loser Culture in Nabokov’s *Lolita*” (1999) draws our attention to the fact that “Humbert defends his molestation not in terms of a literary but in terms of a cinematic romanticism. The nymphetry that Nabokov puts at Humbert’s disposal is more notable for its filmic than its literary artifice” (Power in Clanfield and Conley 2005, 25). If the original text already employed conventions of different visual media, it would seem only natural to expect said media to pick up Lolita using more or less the same cinematic strategies. Arguably less optimistic than some popular culture enthusiasts, Elizabeth Patnoe warns us against the symbolic killing of Dolores Haze

again and again in its appropriations of her. Even so, we should also take this with a grain of salt, since some re-accentuations can restore some of her life and reduce the triteness of her perception in the context of what Michel de Certeau calls in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) the act of “cultural poaching”.

Using the distinction theorized by Umberto Eco in *The Limits of Interpretation* (1990) between “interpretation and use”, namely that “[t]o critically interpret a text means to read it in order to discover...something about its nature. To use a text means to start from it in order to get something else” (Eco in Clanfield and Conley 2005, 33), we shall use two graphic novels, the American *Lost Girls* (2006) by Alan Moore and the Japanese *Heart no Kuni no Alice/Alice in the Country of Hearts* (2008) series when discussing the re-accentuation of the nymphet’s image. The two operate what Roman Jakobson called “transposition”, namely a third type of translation, through which a text changes its code, so that both the symbolic and the iconic modes are activated. These works act like a partial intersemiotic translation, or what one may call a “reversed ekphrasis” as the nymphet migrates from the world of the novel to the world of images. In my defense, while the novel made a clear distinction between Humbert’s high-brow preoccupations and Lolita’s love for the “funnies”, Vladimir Nabokov himself, a ruined Russian aristocrat, a world-famous lepidopterist, a distinguished academic, and an accomplished novelist who detested second-rate art nonetheless hugely enjoyed newspaper cartoons, comic strips, and watching comedies, being able to bring a scholarly, even occasionally pedantic precision to discussions with his wife Vera (Vickers 2008, 2).

The difficulties one might encounter in such re-readings are due to the fact that the school system tends to allow for fewer images in the classroom the older the students are, while reality remains just as intensely visual. Outside the classroom, one is confronted with magazines, advertisements, newspapers, and a plethora of “iconotexts” (Peter Wagner) where text and image are interdependent and only together establish an emerging meaning. The issue is that, since the implicit message of the school system is that the image stage should be one an individual grows out of, “[t]he skill of producing texts of this kind, however important their role in contemporary society, is not taught in schools. In terms of this new visual literacy,

education produces illiterates.” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 15). It would seem as though the Comics Code Authority got it all wrong: we should not force images out of children’s life, but teach them so as to grow into adults who can read, “translate”, and work with images responsibly. Currently, for most people the meaning of language is “intentional”, even inherent in the forms, while the meaning of images is merely “unconscious” and heavily depends upon the context. The Western tradition also contains an age-old disdain for what is termed the “old” literacy, i.e. a reader moving one’s lips, as well as subvocalizing are looked down upon as traces of a prior, spoken culture that serves as a learning scaffold for inexperienced readers. This contempt is also reserved for the “new” literacy which makes use of using images and visual designs, especially in cyberspace, leaving all the praise for the current literacy which is regarded as the sophisticated one, as Humbert nauseatingly tells us. When reading graphic novels, what we need is what James Elkin calls in “Visual Studies: a Skeptical Introduction” a “visual literacy”. They are not competences, since that would be utilitarian and prescriptive, nor are they “visual languages” as defined by Nelson Goodman and Umberto Eco, but what Bishop Berkeley calls the universal language of nature. Much like what generative grammarians tell us, it may be universal, but it is still acquired. This movement towards a “new” literacy, like Richard Rorty’s linguistic turn, generates a whole new type of reading and one may have in mind Jacques Derrida’s critique of logocentrism, as well as the way in which he favored a *graphic* and *spatial* mode of writing, or Gilles Deleuze’s discussion of the philosophical obsession with the problem of the image, which has made philosophy into a form of iconology.

When I use the word “image” as in “the image of the nymphet”, I contrast it with the term “picture”, since you can hang a picture, but you cannot hang an image and “[a]n image is what appears in a picture, and what survives its destruction – in memory, in narrative, and in copies and traces in other media” [translation mine] (Barthes 2007, 16) and, unlike the picture, it also involves social activity and interaction. Its meaning is intersubjective. Let us now attempt to trace the ways in which the seeable and the sayable may clash in Alice’s story as a nymphet as explored in the two graphic novels.

Curiously, there is actually one reference to Lewis Carroll in *Lolita*, namely when Humbert at one point makes out “a half-naked nymphet stilled in the act of combing her Alice-in-Wonderland hair” (Nabokov 2010, 257). The potential erotic ambiguity of Alice had been amply speculated before. In *Lewis Carroll: A Biography* (1955), Morton Cohen writes the following:

We cannot know to what extent sexual urges lay behind Charles’s preference for drawing and photographing children in the nude. He contended the preference was entirely aesthetic. But given his emotional attachment to children as well as his aesthetic appreciation of their forms, his assertion that his interest was strictly artistic is naïve. He probably felt more than he dared acknowledge, even to himself. (Cohen in Vickers 2008, 26)

While this is neither the time nor the place to discuss it, it has certainly entered popular culture and even Nabokov himself, an admirer of Carroll, hesitated in an interview with *Wisconsin Studies*, speculating that:

*Some odd scruple prevented me from alluding in *Lolita* to his wretched perversion and to those ambiguous photographs he took in dim rooms. He got away with it, as so many Victorians got away with pederasty and nympholepsy. His were sad, scrawny little nymphets, bedraggled and half-undressed, or rather semi-undraped, as if participating in some dusty and dreadful charade.* (Nabokov in Vickers 2008, 27)

Let us keep in mind for now that Nabokov, who translated *Alice in Wonderland* into Russian, remarked that Lewis Carroll was, in a sense, the first Humbert Humbert.

The two portrayals of Alice, drawn and colored by Melinda Gebbie for the American graphic novel and by Soumei Hoshino in the Japanese one, are those of rather ordinary, unremarkable girls in the two drawing conventions, but neither actually looks like the Alice Liddel for which *Alice in Wonderland* was originally written. It is worth noting that the real-life Alice Liddel had short brown hair, but that, when the book was first published and Carroll commissioned an artist to draw the illustrations, he suggested for Alice two models, two blonde girls he had photographed. Alice was of another world to begin with, as she had no face to be found in reality. The Alice of Alan Moore’s graphic novel has a childish candor and an oval face, while Soumei Hoshino’s Alice is a typical character of shōjo manga or

Japanese graphic novels intended for a young female audience, with large, Bambi-like eyes, tiny mouth, long, flowing hair, and elongated limbs, the nose sometimes entirely omitted for aesthetic reasons. She is already a product of a “glocal” process (Roland Robertson) that combines originally local traditions with global tendencies. In the days before mass communication, beauty standards tended to vary greatly from region to region. Most Eastern Asians showed a preference for willowy women with small breasts as these were traditionally deemed to be graceful and attractive. Japan, in particular, before the Emperor urged the nation to pursue Western beauty ideals in the 1860s, praised the image of the woman who blackened her otherwise unsightly white teeth and bound her torso to make it as narrow, cylindrical, and curveless as humanly possible, the very opposite direction from the one taken by Europeans using the corset.

Alice Fairchild of *Lost Girls*, whose last name is just another sign of the irony omnipresent with Moore, has childish reactions, but her appearance carries hints of the maturity to come, like Lolita in the film adaptations, while the manga’s Alice Liddell retains cynical reactions and a youthful appearance, childish only when she forgets to check her reactions such as when she permits Peter White to approach her only in his “cute” rabbit form, not in his “threatening” human one. Typical of the so-called Lolita subculture popular with young girls in Japan, especially in Harajuku and Akihabara where there are specialized boutiques and themed cafés promoting this identity and lifestyle bordering on the limits of age play, Alice Liddell’s dress “deemphasized the bust and hips with a flattened bodice, high waistline, and full skirt that extends past the knees (with volume created by layers of underskirts that further conceal the hips). [...] A Classic Lolita poses to evoke the illusion of being a very young girl, i.e. with knees together and toes pointed inward, head slightly lilted to one side” (Winge 2008, 53). Although different, we recognize both to be Alice because they observe the code we are used to: both are blonde and wear the iconic blue maid-like dress. Our recognition of them as Alice is instant, but when contrasting them it becomes self-evident that visual communication, too, is always coded. The only reason we do not always feel it as such is when we are not passively aware of the code because we are familiar with it. Wonderland becomes Humbert’s elected world, “a paradise whose skies were the color of hell-flame” (Nabokov 2010, 168), of bliss and

immorality strangely coupled. Here, the nymphet is an exile, “trapped within the logic and structure of a honeymoon” (Freeman 866), struggling to make sense of an unfamiliar setting, but she “cannot rely on the romantic cult of nature, asexual and familial sentimentalism” (Freeman 1998, 866), while the nympholept tries his best to remain “incurious”. The nymphet’s story is on a different route when no longer set in the real world, as Martin Amis predicted: “No doubt the Lo-Hum story would have worked out wonderfully, in Hollywood, in dreamworld or ad-land. But this is only America, car-tool and lawn-sprinkler America, and Hum is Lo’s stepfather, and three times her age, and for two years he rapes her at least twice a day” (Amis 1994, xiii-xiv).

Another key difference between the two lies in the very use of color, following different visual conventions, namely that of American comics visually parodying sentimental illustrated children’s stories and fin de siècle painting while the Japanese manga is predominantly black and white with the exception of a handful of pages at the beginning of each volume. The Alice of *Lost Girls* is colored using soft pastels which gently follow the volumes, art nouveau flatness never being complete in the graphic novel and the colors have an occasionally dusty or smoky feeling to them. The manga uses only block color or screentones at most because, as Tanaka suggests, the Japanese look at the world as a system of lines while Europeans trained their eyes for light and shadow. The consequence is the attitude towards transformations and, in the case of sequential art, to pacing. Working with lines, “[e]ven if we change the shape a little bit, it still looks like the same thing. Japanese people know that. But westerners think in terms of light and shadow. If you change the light, everything changes. Japanese people know that no matter how much you change a shape, the elements are still there.”(Kelts 2007, 213-4). Her face also looks extremely different, considering it is supposed to be more or less the same character. While Melinda Gebbie’s Alice adheres to quasi-realism, the Alice of the manga is drawn without a nose more often than not and her eyes are, canonically speaking, disproportionately large. Before the 1960s, shōjo manga was predominantly created by men who implicitly promoted the passive ideal of the monthly magazines such as *Shōjo Kai* (Girls’ World) in 1902, and so “enlarged eyes and pupils, with long lashes; long and

thin arms and legs; and petit noses, mouths, breasts and hips” (Gravett 2004, 75) turned into a code which signaled youth, cuteness, and submissiveness. *Anime Style* editor, Hideki Ono, speaks of this selection as subtraction, so that the shōjo main character has “hair [that] is drawn to the fine details – every strand. But the ear is not shown. They only draw the parts they want. The eyes are big for sensitivity, the breasts are big, but no one wants to see nostrils, so you leave them out.” (Ono in Kelts 2007, 214). This code is reinforced in how-to manga style drawing guides for Western audiences, so that readers are no longer shocked to see “big eyes with larger-than-normal pupils. I also raise her eyebrows and draw her mouth slightly open to convey her innocence. I draw a very small shadow nose to enhance her cuteness.” (Okabayashi 2007, 250). What shōjo manga has done was actively mutate meanings, so that large eyes are synonymous with the *kokoro* (heart) or the *hara* (belly) as symbols of one’s inner self, while, traditionally, the outer self is located by the Japanese in the face. Osamu Tezuka, the godfather of manga, did not take the iconic large eyes of manga female characters from Disney only, as urban legends have it. The Takarazuka actresses come into play since, as a child, he noticed

the actresses’ eyes, heavily highlighted with mascara and twinkling with the reflections from the bright spotlights. He found that this stage technique for projecting emotions through the eyes also worked in manga. [...] Tezuka also understood that, in the unspoken affairs of the heart, the eyes are the prime communicators of feeling, our first language. (Gravett 2004, 77)

Let us now see how Alice is first presented to the reader. The Alice of the American graphic novel is first introduced as a body and nothing more, imposing a voyeuristic approach as we only see her as zoomed-in body parts mediated by the mirror. The Alice of the manga is first seen waking up from a noon nap in the garden, just as unknowing and unsuspecting as the reader for whom the first page, with its cryptic reference to a “game” about to start, is a puzzle. We then observe her not in a moment of solitude, but interacting with her older sister, Lorena, in a dialogue which foreshadows the structure of the narrative to soon unfold. If the book Alice’s sister reads in *Lost Girls* is simply an untitled one, boring Alice because it lacks pictures and it is “improving”, thus promoting Victorian ideals, Lorena’s reading is a mise-en-abyme of Alice’s adventure, announcing the ambiguity obtained through refracting

mirrors: is it at once a psychology book, a fairy tale, and a novel. Notice the psychoanalytical overtones in her discussion with Nightmare and her anxiety afterwards, as she is firm in her belief that Wonderland, where everyone desires her, must be her own pathetic delusion precisely because she feels undesired in reality, recognizing what Humbert called “the Freudian prison of thought.”, (Nabokov *Lolita: A Screenplay*, 728). Alice’s secondary dilemma, projected over the image of a hypothetical faceless prince in a sparkly background and later fading into a close-up frame of her memory of Blood, the Mad Hatter, first flirting with her, is revealed in fairy tale-like terms. While she mockingly muses that, seeing the proverbial prince on a white horse would make her happier to see him fall off that horse, she stops to wonder what her desires would be if he was not, in fact, any sort of prince on a white horse to begin with. Alice is dissatisfied with the end of the story, which is taken straight from *Alice in Wonderland*, and so deems the whole story meaningless if “So she wakes up, is that it?” (Hoshino 2008, 4). However, Peter White, the Prime Minister of Wonderland who is a man-looking rabbit, kidnaps her when Alice is pretending to be asleep as she hopes that she does not have to react and deal with his absurdity. Consequently, she is abducted in *body*, not in spirit.

What both graphic novels take from *Lolita* and express in the conventions of the new media is what Frederick Karl identifies as the ambiguity of “a claustral, enclosed feeling” masked by the emphasis on “spatiality and constant movement” (Karl in Giles 2000, 13). It is worth remembering how Nabokov suggested that the initial spark for the novel was the first drawing of a monkey: the bars of its cage. The irony hidden in the Beardsley School scene of the novel surfaces when Miss Cormorant, advocating for a better understanding of the children of the new world, remarks that “We live not only in a world of thoughts, but also in a world of things. Words without experience are meaningless. What on earth can Dorothy Hummerson care for Greece and the Orient with their harems and slaves?” (Nabokov 2010, 168). She might be unknowingly selecting the two aspects of life Dolores, transformed into Lolita, knows very well or, rather, it is Humbert who, under the pretence of his “photographic memory”, gains the trust of his reader and knowingly twists her words to hint at his keeping Lolita confined despite the illusion of freedom the teenager

might have enjoyed. The nympholept does not pamper her, but buys/bribes her while seeing Lolita as commodity herself, while he is already busying himself with thoughts about other nymphets for when she will have outlived her use. Alarmingly even, he indirectly makes her his accomplice in his fantasy, indulging the thought that he might enjoy, through her, a Lolita the Second and even a Lolita the Third. The same looming fear of the inevitable aging of the child is to be found in Fyodor Sologub's *Melkiy bes* (Petty Demon), a late decadent Russian novel found in Nabokov's family library which has been seen as a sort of *Lolita à l'envers*:

Only the children, those eternal, tireless vessels of God's joy in the earth, were alive, and ran, and played. But sluggishness was beginning to weigh even upon them, and some faceless and invisible monster, nestling behind their shoulders, peered from time to time with eyes full of menace into their faces, which suddenly went dull. (Sologub in Bethea 2004, 51)

There is a sense of both escape and confinement, a tension and interplay between the two: Alice the nymphet may wander off, yet she is anything but free as she is trapped by her own image which arrests the gaze of others. The subjective versus objective distinction, which made the original novel dialogic, is not lost in the transposition, but it is made possible in the visual by the use or absence of a perspective angle. The reader may observe, in this respect, the American graphic novel's preference for objectivity and the predominantly subjective framing of the manga. The very shape of the frames also opens new possibilities of signification. Let us take a brief overview of what they can tell the reader. Circles, if used, are deeply ambiguous. Generally speaking, they may denote the "endlessness, warmth, protection (Dondis, 1973: 44)" (Kress and van Leuwen 1996, 52). However, let us keep in mind that the more abstract a sign is, its semantic extension also increases. Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie allow, at times, the reader to take comfort in this intuition of protection, but, once one notices that the framing itself is coded, changing according to the main story told at the time, be it that of Alice, Wendy or Dorothy, it acquires new meanings. There is an intertext at use, namely the so-called erotic Tijuana Bibles of the 1930s, as each chapter has 8 pages. Not surprisingly, Alan Moore appreciates them both for breaking the stereotype against what comics can or cannot do and for their tongue-in-cheek treatment of iconic figures, 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 the sexless vision of society presented by the Sunday funnies” (Moore 2013, 48). While Wendy’s story is told in elongated panels, giving the sense of confinement explained by her Puritan upbringing, Dorothy’s story has panels which expand horizontally, like the hot flat landscapes of her Kansas home, as Annalisa di Liddo observes in the chapter “Alan Moore Comics - Finding a Way into Lost Girls” of her 2009 volume, *Comics as Performance, Fiction as Scalpel*. The frames of Alice’s story are oval, signaling either openness and endlessness or confinement, as the mirror and image which traps her. Since angularity is usually thought to be of the mineral because “[i]n organic nature, squareness does not exist” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 52), it may hint at the rational as opposed to the sensual. Through this, the frames of Alice’s story betray our expectancies: we think of curvaceous lines which permit organic growth, but they are of the crystalline world, produced, and refined through exact control.

The manga shows a marked preference for squares, which may mean either power, progress or a force of oppression, and for trapezoids. The latter, like the triangle, “is a (fused structure of) a participant and a vector, because it can convey directionality, point at things. The meanings it attracts are therefore less like ‘qualities of being’ than like processes, as in the well-known revolutionary poster by El Lissitzky” [Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge, 1919]” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 53). The tendency towards angularity signals “action, conflict, tension (Dondis, 1973: 44)” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 53) and, what is more, vertical elongation, used in the most tense moments creates, through its more pronounced distinction between top and bottom, a bias towards opposition, suggesting to the reader that what is important will dominate the top. Because of the preference for trapezoids, what the readers find in the manga is a plethora of examples of horizontal elongation, generating the kind of structure in which what is positioned to the right is presented as “Given” and what is on the left is the “New” since the Japanese read from the right to the left. This assumption is taken for granted by the Japanese, yet it recalls, as a code, the satiric scrolls of the artist priest Toba (1053-1140) where, “[a]s on a modern computer, the readers’ eyes could ‘scroll’ through the landscape, moving right to left

as the scrolls were opened out. Perhaps that flowing view and reading survives in manga? [...] It is no accident that the vertical white gaps ‘gutters’ between frames are frequently made to abut more closely than the horizontal gutters, in effect making each row of frames more readable, not unlike a screen” (Gravett 2004, 18). In this context, an attentive reader might notice that Alice is generally shown on the right, the “Given” with which we are supposed to empathize, while the many nympholepts craving her attention, even violently demanding it, generally take the position of the “New”. The “Given” is information that is already familiar to the reader and which serves as a “departure point” for the message, a kind of Archimedean point of reference from which to reconstruct the changing fictional landscape, while what is positioned on the other side is presented as “New” or information not yet known to the reader, hence worth of special attention. The extensive use of close-ups in the manga owes a great deal to its implicit goal of making the reader become emotionally involved, but it also makes manipulation possible. When participants in an image are connected by a vector, we are urged to believe that there is a narrative. If the process between the participants is a transactional one, then one of the characters is an Actor and the other is the Goal. If the process is reactional, then there is no Actor, but a Reactor, and no Goal, but a Phenomena. The problem arises when we see close ups of non-transactional Reactors who look bored, animated, or puzzled, at something we cannot see. This can become a source of representational manipulation. A caption may, for example, suggest what the Reactor is looking at, but, needless to say, it can be something else than the object of the Reactor’s gaze when the picture was taken or when the thought found in the speech bubble was formed (Kress and van Leeuwen 67). Therefore, the ample use of close-ups and medium shots of the nympholepts only heighten the sense of confusion the reader experiments.

Let us now ponder why the mirror frame is significant only in *Lost Girls*, while the manga makes use of more or less the same imagery (roses and potions, for example) while showcasing no mirror proper, only physical and psychological doubles. What the manga focuses on is the dynamism of the story, the fluidity of character. Let us not forget that the ideal shōjo is more than selfless: she is I-less. The American graphic novel uses the mirror both as framing and as a narrative excuse, tying together the various episodes Alice recollects. As Roland Barthes remarks, the

mirror is narcissistic for the Western man, but for the Eastern, it is essentially a symbol of the very emptiness of symbols, reflecting nothing but other mirrors. The Eastern mirror is empty and a Tao master suggests a man's spirit should be like a mirror, desiring nothing and retaining nothing (Barthes 2007, 86). Had the manga used the image of the mirror it would have been just another symbol for the defacing of the self and that, for the Japanese, is associated with freedom and a purity that is to be desired rather than an oppressive state. For a Western reading, though, the mirror pluralizes what Foucault calls the heterotopic nature and it theatricalizes it. The sense of confinement is achieved in the manga through social cues, not through framing. Whenever discussions extend over more than two or three speech bubbles, Alice diverts her gaze, even when smiling. This may not seem much, but considering that Nightmare has already told Alice that this is the world of her desire, a world where she is the embodied desired ideal, let us keep in mind what Morris says about the importance of social framing:

As he answers the girl's last statement he begins talking and reaches the point where normally he would look away, but instead he is still staring at her. This makes her uncomfortable, because she is forced either to lock eyes with him, or to look away from him while he is talking. If he continues to talk and stare while she deflects her eyes, it puts her into the 'shy' category, which she resents. If she boldly locks eyes with him, he has forced her into a 'lover's gaze', which she also resents. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 126)

The medium shot (at the knees), the medium-close shot (at the waist), and the close-up are also important in the framing at work. This is accounted for by their being associated with different fields of vision. The close-up roughly corresponds to close personal distance as in the case of friends or, in the case of the extreme close-up (anything less than the head and the shoulders), it is already the intimate distance, because we see the face or head only. A far personal distance means seeing the other person from the waist up, as it happens with the manga's Alice when the reader is withdrawn from the intimate distance which normally favours empathy, yet feels intrusive at times. Sometimes, we see the whole figure of the nympholepts, which means that, as readers, we are at close social distance from them. These notions,

derived from “proxemics”, as Hall calls them, are helpful in assessing the emotional response the manga wants to elicit. As Maurice Grosser, a portrait painter, reveals, at a distance of more than thirteen feet, we view people “as having little connection with ourselves”, and hence “the painter can look at his model as if he were a tree in a landscape or an apple in a still life” (Kress and van Leuuwen 1996, 131). At a portrait distance, “the sitter’s soul begins to appear” and, when “within touching distance, the soul is far too much in evidence for any sort of disinterested observation” (Kress and van Leuuwen 1996, 131). According to Sixten Ringbom in *Icon to Narrative, the Rise of the Dramatic Close Up in Fifteenth Century Painting* (1965), the close-up emerged during the Renaissance for this very reason: to convey “the subtlest of emotional relationships with a minimum of dramatic scenery” (Ringbom in Kress and van Leuuwen 1996, 133). The medium-close shot, preferred for figures of authority, may also convey a different meaning, since patterns of distance can also become encoded, “voices” of a certain status being framed in a specific way. According to David Morley and Charlotte Brunson in *The Nationwide Television Studies* (1978), close-ups are preferred when a subject is emotional, while the breast pocket shot is the typical framing of the “expert”. The nymph tends to be defined by her fluid emotional response and the nympholepts tend to withdraw knowledge from her so as to control or manipulate her, but once this understanding of proxemics is applied to the manga, the consistency of this strategy becomes even more visible. Another key strategy is the point of view. The manga prefers to use the frontal angle when presenting Alice, while when we see her in the company of other characters, what we get is an oblique view. More strikingly, whenever one of the nympholepts is in a confrontational situation, we get an over-the-shoulder view. What does this tell us about whom we are supposed to empathize with? As Gunther Kress and Theo van Leuuwen explain, the frontal angle carries a message of inclusion, an implicit statement that what is seen is part of the reader’s world, something one is involved with, while the oblique says that this is *not* part of the reader’s world, but *their* world. This might be the secret as to why the reader does not feel truly disturbed reading *Heart no Kuni no Alice* despite the numerous bloody scenes and its grim constant reminder that life is worthless and people replaceable. Made to empathize with Alice, not only because we find out the inner workings of this world at the same pace as she does since she is never slow to

draw logical conclusions so as to accelerate this process whenever possible, we nonetheless perceive her circumstances as alien and, though she is constantly under threat stated and un(der)stated, we are silently reassured that she will not be among the ones killed next.

Her position in this world is also determined through the way she frames her desires and needs. The other characters demand things directly, while she asks for them or even pleads, which causes an ever so subtle imbalance of power. Her scolding, too, has none of the effects she hoped for: rather than to be taken seriously, it becomes one of the nympholepts' declared fetishes and they provoke her for it. The power struggle is never too explicit as the top-down angle, the point of maximum power, is less frequently used than the frontal angle, the point of maximum involvement. In the American graphic novel, the situation is even more alarming; neither Bunny nor Mrs. Redman ask Alice for sexual favors, but take advantage of her without busying themselves with her consent. Only when Alice Fairchild grows into a "batty old spinster", now a nympholept herself, does she voice her desires and act upon them directly. Both when a nymphet and when a nympholept, Alice is usually seen from a frontal angle. The most explicit of the scenes with Mrs. Redman are, however, seen from a top-down angle, reinforcing the unvoiced threat. Is *Lost Girls*, because of its explicitness, just that, a lewd book depicting visually the wayward ways of a young girl aging or is there something more to it? Nabokov admitted in "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*" that some of his readers were misled to believe that *Lolita* was pornography and "expected the rising succession of erotic scenes; when these stopped, the readers stopped, too, and felt bored and let down." (Nabokov 2010, 299-300). While *Lost Girls* does have Lewis Carroll's Alice, here ironically named Fairchild, engage in more and more complex erotic activities, story-telling as catharsis, identity construction, fiction, and memory still take up a great part and the framing is highly responsible for this. Sensual perception and the reconstruction of the past in the form of the narrative seem to call one other, and Alice is still living the aftereffects of a childhood cut short. In the first scene with the "talking mirror", the answer to the plea for a fictional diversion is a sensorial one: "Oh, I don't know any stories. Your little white breasts, they're so lovely. They'll never be as beautiful once

you're grown. Will you touch them for me?" (Moore 2006, 10). Also in terms of framing, *Lost Girls* mocks the pretence of omniscience, as seen in chapter 11 of Book 2, when Harold sends a letter to his boss complaining about the dullness of Himmelgarten, while the erotic frenzy juxtaposed over his voiceover ironically undermines all his assumptions. While the manga had us empathize with the shōjo and experience the growing discomfort of the desire-filled gaze of the others, the American graphic novel forces us, much like Nabokov's screenplay version of *Lolita*, not only to be voyeurs ourselves, but also to catch others in the act of peeping. Despite this aspect, it does not achieve as great a rendering of the Bakhtian heteroglossia as it could have.

In terms of style, the artist's most evident visual influences in *Lost Girls* are Art Nouveau and Impressionism, though volumes are not completely forsaken. What both artistic currents have in common is the affinity for curved contours and on a "sort of musicality", as indicated by Dez Vylenz's interview with Melinda Gebbie. Her sweet lines are complemented by the influence of Impressionist painting, which emerges from her peculiar use of color. In the same interview, Gebbie claims she told Moore when starting to work on *Lost Girls* that she "want[ed] color to be an actual part of the storytelling device" (di Liddo 142). Her soft, sensuous pastels turn colder in Alice's traumatic memories, as opposed to the warm nuances of Dorothy's narrative in Kansas. While Wolk accuses Alan Moore of formal fetishism which generates a rather stiff narrative construct, this does not break the line started by Nabokov. When asked by Alfred Appel, Jr. for *Wisconsin Studies* about the experience of other novelists, who speak of the way in which "a character takes hold of them and in a sense dictates the course of the action," Nabokov retorted in Poe-like fashion:

I have never experienced this. What a preposterous experience! Writers who have had it must be very minor or insane. No, the design of my novel is fixed in my imagination and every character follows the course I imagine for him. I am the perfect dictator in that private world insofar as I alone am responsible for its stability and truth. (Nabokov in Pifer 1978, 54)

In a sense, Alan Moore might be answering Victorian prudishness with Victorian obsession for the schematic and for form. The main focus of *Lost Girls* is not so much the narrative proper of the nymphet, but the political aspect of depicting her misadventures. The issue of censorship is largely political in character: as Kendrick puts it in *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (1987), the primary goal of censorship is not to eradicate “obscene” materials, but to ensure that the obscene is recognized and demarcated as such, thereby preserving society's moral parameters (Kendrick in Giles 2000, 64). This also holds true for Japan:

For over 250 years during the Edo period (1600-1868), government control over political expression was absolute. For many artists, dabbling in erotic expression has always been far safer than dabbling in politics, yet still a good way to tweak the noses of the authorities. Even today, those engaged in producing erotic or pornographic material often have a rather romantic image of themselves as rebels working against the establishment. (Schodt 2012, 57)

Though there is a great difference in the explicitness of the material discussed, Leslie Fiedler, in his 1958 review entitled “The Profanation of the Child”, deemed the story of *Lolita* to be “an irreligious book rather than a pornographic one” because its most unsettling aspect is the “blasphemy against the cult of the child” and its skill at parodying concomitant “myths of sentimentality” (Fiedler in Giles 2000, 13). Its sin is, it would seem, making pedophilia less “unthinkable” by it depicting it “beautifully”. The two graphic novels also contradict the Victorian image of Alice the child, taking the young girl as the starting point and constructing the nymphet or the shōjo of the *Lolita* subculture around her, not allowing the reader to forget her existence outside the gaze which validates her as erotic object, but invalidates her as subject.

Alan Moore’s *Lost Girls* and Soumei Hoshino’s *Heart no Kuni no Alice* both focus on the *Lolita*-like image of Alice, misread by nympholepts who follow a pattern of cruelty added to the narrative’s cruelty of pattern, but they are faced with different concerns and operate different re-accentuations. Alan Moore confronts the erotica scare head on and, in doing so, focuses on Alice Fairchild’s bodily and sensual experience. The intertextuality with the *Tijuana Bibles* of the 1930s by means of its construction also

hints at the taboo at the heart of the work, and the defense of pornography given by Monsieur Rougeur is extremely close to Nabokov's own discussion of erotic fiction in "On a Book Entitled Lolita". What Alan Moore calls for is no longer making a special case out of sexuality in fiction, also reversing the trend identified by Roland Barthes in "The Empire of Signs". To do so he does not escape references to aggression, culminating with an image of a soldier in the Great War with a poppy-like wound at the end of the graphic novel, a bitter irony after poppies had been used as Alice's own erotic drugged-fueled madeleine, as, in America, violence is idiomatic.

The manga is not as overtly eroticized, understandably since this would not have served any purpose as there is already a place for *hentai* (perversion) in the *honne* (inner nature). Alice is not shown to forget herself because of her desire as the threat of violence always looms above her. What Soumei Hoshino sets out to show is the constantly deferred effort of the *shōjo* to have her identity recognized or, at the very least, to not have her agency called into question when the nympholepts want to validate their claims upon her body. Essentially an "outsider" and treated as one, she is reminded of her special status and treated as the one irreplaceable character. Like Lolita, however, this special treatment owes everything to sheer probability and is, thus, felt to be a transient state: Blood the Mad Hatter, Boris the Cheshire Cat, and the Ace of Hearts all admit to knowing, in theory, what outsiders are, but they are interested in Alice because she is the first they encounter since they have joined "the game". The enchanted hunters pursue the *shōjo*, though she refuses the ritual war hunt. The readers never stop too much to wonder how Alice might have fallen out of grace had another outsider arrived, but the occasional hints at "the previous game" never allow them to get too comfortable. Having the readers empathize with the *shōjo* disguises, for a while, the interest of the nympholepts as a compliment, especially since they are framed as "experts".

Despite their differences, both graphic novels illustrate a combination of the sublime (and sublimated Eros) with the abject, the latter as theorized by Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), namely as situated " 'at the crossroads of phobia, obsession, and perversion', describing it as a liminal phenomenon that disturbs identity and system by its tendency toward the 'immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles' "

(Kristeva in Giles 2000, 55). Lolita was, for Humbert, both a fetishized substitute, made more obvious by Nabokov's screenplay version, and a sublime simulacrum. Alice Fairchild suffers from fetishization more acutely, while the Alice Liddel of the manga falls easier into the hyperreal. If Humbert addresses the reader, begging "Please, reader...Imagine me; I shall not exist if you do not imagine me..." (Nabokov 2010, 129), the nymphet is also only brought into existence by the gaze of a nympholept and depends on his will. There is no other place where she might exist, there is no home to return to, once her nymphic quality has been established through verbal and visual cues, including social ones. When the Humbert of the screenplay asks Lolita if she will leave him, she correctly asserts that she has nowhere to go. What Humbert may dream is to be left alone in his Wonderland of choice, "my mossy garden. Let them play around me forever. Never grow up" (Nabokov 2010, 18). And, one might add, never grow out of the image projected upon them, as the nympholept's task is "to transform its landscape from the status of a natural environment into a constructed, and therefore reversible, object" (Giles 2000, 11). This is "translated" and made visible in the visual language of the graphic novels precisely by varying the angles and frames while showing a marked preference for some conventions over others. While some readers have deeply misunderstood *Lolita* to be romantic, the graphic novels are less ambiguous about the violence of the hierarchy. Whatever the nympholepts may claim, as Harold Bloom claims, the story of the nymphet is not one of love, but of violation of love, of betrayed trust (of the nymphet), and, one may add, of inevitably betrayed hopes (of the nympholept).

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