Graphic Autofiction and the Vizualization of Trauma in Lynda Barry and Phoebe Gloeckner's Graphic Memoirs

Introduction

In Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006), the narrator remembers the problematic relationship she had with her parents as a child and as she does so, she notes: 'My parents are most real to me in fictional terms. And perhaps my cool aesthetic distance itself does more to convey the arctic climate of our family than any particular literary comparison' (67). Alison's words foreground not the unavoidability of fiction in the graphic memoir, but its usefulness in mediating the autobiographical subject's emotions and experiences. Women's autobiographical comics, in the tradition of which *Fun Home* falls, have dealt with remembering problematic family lives and traumatic childhoods since they first emerged in the US countercultural margins in the 1960s and 1970s.[1] Their visual/ verbal hybridity allows unique uses of autofiction in the negotiation of such memories, different from those allowed by verbal texts. In this chapter, I investigate Lynda Barry and Phoebe Gloeckner's graphic memoirs to show how their incorporation of 'lies' can function positively in relation to the childhood trauma narratives they tell. Simultaneously, I look at how autofiction underscores the status of these texts as feminist statements that question patriarchal formations of the female subject. Focusing on Barry's *One! Hundred! Demons!* (2002) and *What It Is* (2009) and Gloeckner's *A Child's Life and Other Stories* (2000) and *The Diary of A Teenage Girl: An Account in Words and Pictures* (2002), I argue that what Jenn Brandt terms 'graphic autofiction' (70) can allow feminist performances that shed light on silenced/ ignored perspectives on childhood sexual and other forms of trauma.

Memory and Autofiction in Comics

In 1997, Serge Doubrovsky observed that 'since the 80s, it has been a commonplace to state *le retour de l'auteur*' (398). Moreover, he noted that '*l'ère des grands récits* [...] in the meaning which [Lyotard] gave to *récit* as an ideological, totalizing account of human experience in history' is over (339).[2] Pointing to the impossibility of autobiography as the absolute truth, Doubrovsky explains that 'the meaning of one's life in certain ways escapes us, so we have to reinvent it in our writing', calling this reinvention '*autofiction*' (400). Re-centring the status of the author in the creative remembering of the self, Doubrovsky defines 'autofiction' as the awareness and acceptance of the fact that one's life story is partial, fragmented, revised and influenced by the author's subjectivity in a given context. It is not, in other words, a *grand récit*. As Claire Boyle puts it, autofiction involves 'not just an awareness, but a celebration of the fictionalization of the self in writing [...]. In a reversal of priorities associated with autobiography, *autofiction* participates in the valorization of the imagination which takes precedence over any commitment to representing an extra-textual reality' (18). As such, Margaretta Jolly says that whereas autobiography was perceived as a 'transparent window to the past,' in autofiction the window 'becomes a mirror and a scene of writing,' and a shift emerges from the 'making' to the 'making up' of the autobiographical self (86-87).

What the very essence of autofiction recognizes and fosters concerns the nature of re-remembering. Memory is an active interpretation and recreation of the past; it is neither an excavation into it nor a retrieval of actual events as they happened.[3] Sigmund Freud notes that the subject of childhood recollection sees him or herself as an object in the process of remembering. Hence, his or her memory cannot be an exact replica of the previous event, because remembering is guided by particular motives.[4] Consequently, the fragmentation, re-configuration and re-capturing of past experiences in autofictional

writings centralizes authorial presence. It is the author's take on the past that structures both the narrating and the narrated 'I.' In the graphic memoir this is performed through combinations of visual and verbal parts. Questions under consideration in this chapter, then, are: To what extent is the medium of comics appropriate for autofictional writings? How is the autofictional self structured differently in comics? Can the medium and the genre allow subversive feminist statements in structuring the female self?

Joost de Bloois points to the restriction of autofiction to literary studies, noting however that '[h]istorically and conceptually, "autofiction" is closely related to issues and strategies in contemporary visual art [and that] addressing the question of "visual autofiction" may [...] allow unclogging the debate within literary studies' (n.p.) Comics is a composite art, based on the combination of words and pictures, panels with visual illustrations and narrators' captions, speech and thought balloons.[5] Hence according to Smith and Watson 'readers may observe stories in the visual plane that are not explicitly signalled by the verbal plane, and vice versa, thus engaging contesting stories and interpretations of autobiographical memory and meaning' (169). Additionally, in comics, the split between the authorial, the narrating and the narrated 'I' is performed in exaggeration because of the visuality of the medium. This is why the presence of the author/ cartoonist becomes more obvious in the graphic memoir. The drawn self/ cartoon visually captures the artist/ cartoonist's take on himself or herself as an object: '[T]here is the hand or aesthetic autograph of the author/ artist that draws; the narrator/ architect whose narrating voice runs above the frame; the autobiographical avatar, an "I" both imaged and voiced; the dialogue bubbles of the characters, including the narrated "I"; and the addressees within the comic and beyond' (ibid). These components allow productive uses of autofiction towards the expression of cartoonists' unique experiences.

Commenting upon comics' suitability for the genre of life writing, Charles Hatfield proposes that 'comics, with their hybrid, visual-verbal nature, pose an immediate and obvious challenge to the idea of "nonfiction"' and that life narratives told via the medium 'can hardly be said to be "true" in any straightforward sense' (112). Later, he clarifies that 'the genre isn't about literal but emotional truth' (113). Elizabeth El Refaie introduces the term 'authenticity' to denote 'an interpretation of events as they are experienced by the artist, with aspects that are quite obviously and deliberately exaggerated, adopted or invented' (171). For Hatfield too, authenticity in autobiographical comics is 'that of the present talking to the past.'[6] The autobiographical subject becomes formulated via the older, wiser artist's perspective, which modifies childhood experiences in a way that mediates their impact on his/ her development. The representation of each cartoonist's emotional truth becomes facilitated through the visuality of comics. Hatfield suggests that 'if autobiography is a kind of rhetorical performance in which one [...] tries to "persuade the world to view one's self through one's own eyes," then autobiographical comics make this seeing happen on a quite literal level, by envisioning the cartoonist as a cartoon' (114).

In addition to our awareness of authorial presence, the inherent 'gappiness' of the medium calls for reader participation in filling in empty spaces – gutters – between panels to structure a narrative, rendering meaning formation an interactive process between reader and text, foregrounding the unattainability of 'autobiography' as absolute truth (El Refaie, 183). If we also consider the associations of comics with the juvenile, superhero narratives, children's illustrated fairy tales and illiteracy, the representation of extra-diegetic truth becomes further removed.[7] However, when it comes to narrating childhood traumatic memories, these characteristics of comics can be put in productive use. Hillary Chute explains that traumatic events and experiences that cannot be

adequately expressed through language can be mediated to readers either through the *aporias* within comics, or through the manipulation of their visual dimension.[8] If, as Freud suggested, 'screen memories' of traumatic events are fragmented and episodic, comics offer a domain in which to visually and verbally capture these memories as such (306). Cathy Caruth has noted that 'to be traumatized is [...] to be haunted by an image,' foregrounding the impact of the visual in relation to the mediation of trauma (4). If trauma 'mocks language,' as Leigh Gilmore suggests, then the visual becomes a more suitable medium for its expression (6).

One of the most significant examples of the genre of graphic autofiction is Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, the story of his father's survival through the Holocaust and the effect of this traumatic experience on Art. Published in 1986, *Maus* won the Pulitzer prize in 1992 and signalled the cultural legitimation of the graphic memoir.[9] The book depicts Jewish people as mice, thus translating into the visual register of the narrative, the metaphorical, insulting use of the word 'mouse' to refer to and construct Jewish people as a not-quite human race. In so doing, *Maus* undercuts 'essentialist readings' of people as less than human in the narration of Holocaust experiences, thus structuring the cartoonist's unique understanding of and take on this traumatic event (Hatfield, 139-40). Spiegelman's second self-referential book, *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004) recreates Art's traumatic witnessing of the fall of the World Trade Centre on 9/11, 2001. In her analysis of the book, Jenn Brandt defines 'graphic autofiction' as 'a visual articulation of the paradoxical relationship between "autobiography" and "fiction" in the visual representation of a particular period in the artist's life' (70). She further suggests that graphic autofiction can be 'a means by which subjectivity is understood and lived as a physical body in a particular moment in history,' where 'the depicted body becomes a site for new forms of personal and political significations' (77). Brandt introduces the

usefulness of graphic autofiction in relation to Spiegelman's traumatic seeing of the fall of the towers, noting that it can 'speak to the discrepancy that Spiegelman sees between the American media's image of the day's events versus those that he, himself, witnessed' (74). Her comment and Spiegelman's works show that graphic autofiction can have a polemical effect by reacting to dominant mainstream narratives. At a time when the circulation of images from scenes of torture and trauma is being policed to promote specific perspectives, graphic autofiction can counter them.[10]

In this chapter, I look at graphic autofiction as countering patriarchal formations of the female subject and *visualizing* feminist perspectives on childhood trauma in Barry and Gloeckner's graphic memoirs.[11] Jan Beatens has examined Belgian cartoonist, Dominique Goblet's graphic autofiction in *Portraits Crachés* (1997) with regards to gender and form, suggesting that her 'style illustrates the resistance to the "father's tongue," and not just in a metaphorical way, given the theme of domestic violence in her work' (79). Beatens situates his analysis of *Portraits Crachés* within a framework that distinguishes between the Franco-Belgian tradition of the *bande dessinée* and the American tradition of the graphic novel in relation to each one's claims to autobiographical writing. He explains that even though the *bande dessinée* has been slower in the past in relation to the creation of 'a counterworld to the "hegemony" of pure fiction [...], [its] major influence has not been the model of the American graphic novel but the "local" model of autofiction' (76). Goblet represents a different tradition to that of Spiegelman, Barry and Gloeckner but, like them, she manipulates graphic autofiction to mediate her experiences of childhood abuse and trauma. In what follows, I propose that in the process of making (up) the autobiographical self, Barry and Gloeckner also perform feminist counter-narratives to patriarchal formations of the female subject, while

their autofictional lies, visually and verbally captured, also enrich the *mise en scène* childhood trauma narrative.

Lynda Barry: Demons and Creative Monsters

Barry's graphic memoirs, *One! Hundred! Demons!* (2002) and *What It Is* (2009) are composed by collage arrangements that precede fragmented autobiographical narratives, composed by childish pictures and calligraphy, drawn on yellow legal paper. These narratives construct episodes from Lynda's childhood and each of them includes a 'demon' that Lynda had to face in different periods of her life. One of the sources of trauma recreated in the two graphic memoirs is her mother's violent and distant approach towards her. *One! Hundred! Demons!* also recreates an incident of an implied abuse with sexual overtones that seems to have taken place when Lynda was still very young, thus unable to remember it clearly. Barry's graphic memoirs foreground the 'gappiness' that El Refaie attributes to comics as an important aspect of memory. As we read through the two books, we are constantly reminded that 'memory is always incomplete and the act of telling one's life story necessarily involves selection and artful construction' (El Refaie, 12). In Chute's words, Barry 'is deeply engaged with theorizing memory' and she 'does not display trauma so much as work in the edges of events, unsettling readers by leaving us to imagine the incidents whose aftereffects she plumbs' (95).

As early as on the copyright page of *One! Hundred! Demons!*, readers are requested to note that what they are about to read 'is a work of autobiofictionalography.' On the contents page, we see the question 'Are these stories true or false?' with both options having a tick next to them, pointing to the incorporation of falsehoods in this life narrative (n.p.). Before the life narrative starts then, Barry self-consciously introduces her

work as *other-than* autobiography; a counter-narrative to accepted canonical (male) autobiographical forms. Next to the note to readers about the 'autobiofictionalographical' status of this narrative, we come across the Sea Ma, a cartoon monster, whose presence is more prevalent in the 'Intro' of *One! Hundred! Demons!* and on many pages of *What It Is*. In Barry's second book, it occasionally functions as an instructor, helping Lynda break through her writer's block and readers stimulate their creativity in the final section, which includes creative writing exercises.[12] As Yaël Schlick points out, in Barry's texts 'reading and writing, fiction and reality, are not naively conceived […]. [Her work] never feels it has to choose between those would-be opposing poles of autobiographical writing – the referential and the fictional' (27). It is precisely on this refusal to choose that the power of her graphic memoirs lies. In the introduction to *One! Hundred! Demons!*, Barry draws her adult self drawing the Sea Ma, which is situated in front of her. The autobiographical avatar is wondering: 'Is it autobiography if parts of it are not true? Is it fiction if parts of it are?' (n.p.). Without being given an answer, readers are left to think about the question and the Sea Ma explains how the cartoonist was inspired to write and draw the book. In the full-page panel on the next page, we see Barry's autobiographical alter-ego with a cup in her hand, drawing at her desk and the Sea Ma emergent out of the sea. The diegetic world formed on the page fuses the domain of Lynda's home with the realm of the sea, where the animated demon lives, boldly asserting the status of the book graphic autofiction.

Elsewhere, I discuss the fusion of the real with the fictional in *What It Is*, as demonstrated through the composition of the graphic memoir as a fairy tale, arguing that the intrusion of fairy-tale elements in Lynda's childhood reality helps her survive her mother's abusive behaviour.[13] Lynda is drawn as a fairy-tale protagonist surviving hardships and fighting monsters, one of which is the Medusa (*What It Is,* 38-40). The

narrator explains that fairy tales helped her survive through difficult times: 'They can't transform your actual situation, but they can transform your experience of it. We don't create a fantasy world to escape reality,' she notes, 'we create it to be able to stay' (40). Later, she describes becoming familiar with the Medusa, otherwise known as the Gorgon, and incorporating her and her myth in her everyday playing processes. The abusive mother in the narrative is introduced as a monstrous figure and Lynda explains: 'That I had a very Gorgon-like mother never occurred to me, and if it had, I would have been lost. Did the Gorgon help me love my mother? I think she helped me very much (66). *What It Is* foregrounds the power of childish imagination and creativity in trauma survival. Barry's calligraphy, her childish, cartoon depictions of human characters and other creatures, which look at readers, say that they see us too and pose questions to us, evoking a childish perspective on the creative formation of the self. Such a perspective allows the verbal/ visual 'autobiofictionalographical' text to emancipate the autobiographical avatar from the restrictions of an attempt to depict extra-diegetic, factual reality in relation to the representation of her working through and moving beyond maternal abuse. Thus, graphic autofiction seems to function positively in the narrative of the problematic mother/ daughter relationship, by allowing monsters in Lynda's reality.

In *One! Hundred! Demons!* graphic autofiction mostly depends on reader participation in the completion of the life narrative. The book triggers readers' imagination by calling them to fill in the gaps emerging from the narrator's inability to fully capture her memories. The chapter entitled 'Resilience' is preceded by a collage that foreshadows its content with the phrases 'can't remember' and 'can't forget' accompanied by a photograph of Lynda Barry as a baby. Nancy Pedri explains that in Barry's work, 'each photograph is tampered with; either words or other framing marks are scrawled over and around the image, common ordinary material is pasted overtop it, or particular facial

features are accentuated and coloured in a caricature fashion' (263). In this case, the photograph has a yellowish semi-transparent fragment of paper attached in front of Lynda's eyes, suggesting the baby's inability to 'see,' or rather, comprehend and clearly remember the event about to be described. As such, the photograph is 'not only transposed into the cartoon universe, but also significantly marked by the craftsmanship of cartooning,' thus underscoring authorial presence (ibid). Pedri further points out that:

> At the hands of Barry's cartooning, [photographs] are forced to relinquish or, at the very least, renegotiate their privileged value as evidential visual traces of that which existed in a particular time and place [...]. The deliberate defacing of the photographic image by a cartooning hand betrays a reaction against photographic portraiture's reputed ethos of objective, unbiased recording that is most readily attributed to it (263-64).

Barry's intervention on the photograph foregrounds her unique 'authentic,' but at the same time, distorted take on her childhood memories, excluding her work from the category of the autobiographical *grand récit*, deconstructing, at the same time, the association between photographs and factuality.

The events the narrator 'can't remember' but at the same time 'can't forget' recreate as Chute explains issues concerning repressed, fragmented, traumatic memory.[14] When describing her first kiss during her adolescence, the narrator notes that she was 'scared' about it and that she 'already knew too much about sex, found out about it in harsh ways' (65). In the second panel of the same page, the narrator further relates that '[w]hen [she] was still little, bad things had gone on, things too awful to remember but impossible to forget,' wondering where the things you put out of your mind go, describing

these repressed memories as ‘dark ghosts [which she] didn’t know how to fight’ (ibid). Lynda talks around a traumatic event that she does not pinpoint, its repression, and her simultaneous inability to fully forget it. ‘Especially because you don’t remember that time,’ she explains, ‘you can’t forget it but you do remember never to remember it, the time when the shattering into pieces became a way of life’ (72). The image in the final panel of the chapter shows the visual embodiment of Lynda as a baby in a ravine, sitting on the grass, surrounded by flowers, looking at a man who is standing in front of her, depicted from his waist downward. The man is holding a lit cigarette, and a speech balloon emanates from his waist, being situated in front of his pubic area, suggesting, but not explicitly showing sexual abuse. ‘Hey there, sweetheart. Do you and your dolly want to go for a ride?’ he asks the autobiographical avatar (ibid). While the cartoon, childish depictions, the scribbles and calligraphy, and the everyday, colourful materials that compose *One! Hundred! Demons!* could suggest happy childhood memories, the actual content opposes our expectations. Despite not saying much, thus displaying the narrator’s inability to fully re-member this episode, this chapter mediates a very discomforting ‘emotional’ truth, the telling of which is underscored by the gaps existing in comics and in her memory.

One! Hundred! Demons! closes with a chapter that functions as a *Künstlerroman* of sorts, describing the peculiar path which shaped Lynda’s artistic identity. Unlike other authors, who read classic books and stories as children, her favourite reading materials were fairy tales and the classifieds sections of newspapers. While reading the classifieds as a child, Lynda came up with various stories, which would include ‘the freaked-out people, the freaked-out animals, and [herself], always coming to the rescue and never accepting the reward’ (209). A horror story about zombies she made up as a child was stimulated by an ad for selling a crypt and a story about a maiden having to ‘sacrifice’ her

wedding dress was inspired by a wedding-dress ad (210-11). 'When I came forward with the solution to these crimes, at first no one would believe me. I expected that. I watched a lot of movies. No one ever believes kids at first. You have to wait until almost the end,' she explains.[15] In the final panel of the book, the child autobiographical avatar is drawn reading a newspaper and a balloon includes the following information: 'Lost. Somewhere around puberty. The ability to make up stories. Happiness depends on it. Please write' (216). This final invitation to write is followed by the 'Outro,' where Barry, in photographic representations, and the Sea Ma instruct readers on how to write creatively, thus de-centring artistic authority, introducing creative writing as an ordinary easy process.

Theresa M. Tensuan points out that 'comics like *One! Hundred! Demons*! [...] can [...] be seen as a manifestation of "loiterature, [...] a genre which, in opposition to dominant forces of narrative, relies on techniques of digression, interruption, deferral, and episodicity,[aspects seen] as an oppositional comment on [...] the blindness, rigidity, and exclusionary formalism of disciplined and systematic modes of knowledge"' (951). *One! Hundred! Demons!* introduces the gaps of traumatic memory, providing readers with the tools through which to fill them in, investing the narrative and the autobiographical subject with plasticity. *What It Is* takes Barry's 'autobiofictionalography' and the centrality of childish creativity and imagination to a different level, by allowing monsters and other fairy-creatures in Lynda's childhood 'reality.' Children's 'overheated imagination' is not, therefore, excluded from the process of the creation of the autobiographical subject (Tensuan, 954). Rather, it is central both in the cultural significance of Barry's autofiction as a counter-narrative to male canonical autobiography, and in the depiction of the autobiographical avatar's experience and survival of abuse.

Phoebe Gloeckner: Minnie's Domestic Sexual Trauma

Gloeckner's *A Child's Life and Other Stories* (2000) and *The Diary of a Teenage Girl: An Account in Words and Pictures* (2002) narrate incidents from Minnie Goetze's childhood and adolescence, which concern her sexualization and sexual abuse in the domestic domain by her mother's boyfriends, Pascal and Monroe. Chute describes Gloeckner's first graphic memoir as 'semi-autobiographical' and notes that 'Gloeckner's [dark] images [are] consistently informed by trauma, [and] their combination of meticulous, painstaking realism and their non-realism (the puffed-up heads, eyes and genitals she tends to give her characters) carries an intense foreboding' (61). Unlike Barry, Gloeckner forces readers, through her disturbingly detailed pictures, to face the complexities of Minnie's sexual trauma, which is revisited, re-membered and re-imagined differently in each of her two graphic memoirs introducing its repetition as resignification. Gloeckner's narratively altered memories become central in relation to trauma survival as displayed in her works, and they have political impact because they result in the deconstruction of gendered relations of dominance in sexual abuse.

Judith Butler states that:

> No one has ever worked through an injury without repeating it: its repetition is both the continuation of the trauma and that which marks a self-distance within the very structure of trauma, its constitutive possibility of being otherwise. There is no possibility of not repeating. The only question that remains is: How will that repetition occur, at what site [...] and with what [...] promise?[16]

6 SELF-PORTRAIT WITH PEMPHIGUS VULGARIS, 1987

Figure 1: “Self-Portrait with Pemphigus Vulgaris,” p. 6, from *A Child’s Life and Other Stories* by Phoebe Gloeckner, published by Frog Books/ North Atlantic Books, copyright © 1998, 2000 by Phoebe Gloeckner. Reprinted by permission of publisher.

Pictures in *A Child's Life* are discomforting and harsh to look at because they visualize Minnie's sexual trauma. This trauma is repeated and re-imagined in *The Diary* in ways that, in some instances, no longer present the protagonist as a passive, objectified abuse victim. As such, in Gloeckner's second book, graphic autofiction as the repetition/ reconfiguration of Minnie's experiences seems to enable the formation of the protagonist beyond sexual victimization.

To begin with, Minnie's visual depictions in both books look very much like Gloeckner and *A Child's Life* includes photographs of the artist at the ages of 5, 6, 8 and 38 at its end. *The Diary*'s cover is also a photograph of Glockner as an adolescent girl. The resemblance between the cartoon representation of Minnie and the photographic representations of Gloeckner is striking, pointing, as Chute notes, to 'the evidential truth-value of her work' (66). Nevertheless, unlike the strictures of Philippe Lejeune's autobiographical pact, the name of the artist does not coincide with that of the artistically performed self. In addition, that both graphic memoirs revisit similar events describing them differently, points to their constant filtering and re-imagination through Gloeckner's authorial eye/ I and while they render a very specific case of private trauma public, Minnie can be any girl. To a different extent, by showing a female artist's perspective on her sexual abuse, and her re-imagination of trauma, they provide a space for what Leigh Gilmore has described as 'alternative jurisdiction' (715).[17]

For Gilmore, 'thinking of autobiographical self-representation as a jurisdiction helps to clarify the kind of agency such a text can claim and the quasi-legal authority it possesses' (696). The agency that an underage victim of abuse has in legal contexts is limited but 'memoir and *testimonio* themselves offer a forum of judgment in which the subject may achieve a control over her story that she would not hold in court' (ibid). Gloeckner's

control over the representation of her sexual trauma has resulted in her mother threatening to sue her over *A Child's Life*.[18] Thus, it underscores the power of the memoir to make 'a claim on history even if, in the assertion of subjective privilege, it shifts from its sinecure as nonfiction toward something more like fiction.'[19] In her discussion on the scandal caused by Kathryn Harrison's *The Kiss*, a memoir about an adult daughter's incestuous relationship with her father, and its failure to introduce the protagonist as a proper victim, Gilmore explains that 'victims confess; memoirists, and this is disturbing, can effect a different kind of agency: they can get revenge; they can be narcissistic; they can obliterate comfortable assumptions about childhood, kinship, violence, and love; and they can offer a nonconfessional, extrajudicial testimonial "I" that calls a "we" to witness' (ibid). In *A Child's Life* readers come across very explicit, disturbing, obscene scenes of Minnie's sexual trauma and violation, which reduce her to a mere silenced sexual object.[20]

In a separate discussion on female adolescent beauty and its association with sexual availability in Gloeckner's graphic memoirs, I have suggested that Phoebe's self-portrait with *pemphigus vulgaris* (Fig. 1), which precedes the cartoonist's 'Foreword' to *A Child's Life*, visually captures her pain and trauma.[21] *Pemphigus vulgaris* is an auto-immune illness that attacks one's skin, turning it into a grotesque spectacle. Gloeckner, a professional medical illustrator, brings forth the diseased body to metaphorically represent the experience of sexual abuse and to pathologize the autobiographical subject's suffering.[22] If, as Elaine Scarry proposes, in becoming a shared discourse the expression of pain can be a political gesture, then Gloeckner's self-portrait becomes so because it forms a feminist counter-narrative to the silencing of the victims of domestic sexual abuse.[23] The metaphorical inscription of Phoebe's psychic injuries on her body 'expand[s] the limits of truth and justice [...] testify[ing] to the capacities of imaginative

self-representation for informing the production of political subjectivities.'[24] Closing her 'Foreword' to the book, after describing her journey through embarrassment and self-hate, Gloeckner writes: 'One more thing – I didn't *really* ever have pemphigus vulgaris' (7). With this statement, similarly to Barry who asserted the status of her work as 'autobiofictionalography' at the beginning of *One! Hundred! Demons!*, Gloeckner also admits to having lied in her self-portrait, continuing to reconstruct Minnie's sexual suffering through childhood and adolescence in the following chapters.

One of the panels in 'Minnie's 3rd Love, Or: "Nightmare on Polk Street,"' shows the autobiographical avatar in a dark laundry room, kneeling on the floor, crying and pleading with Monroe to tell her that he loves her, while he is forcing her towards fellatio. The narrator's caption explains that 'Minnie had troubles, too – an absent father and an alcoholic mother with a boyfriend that was all too present (73). Monroe's exaggerated presence and its injurious impact for the girl and the viewers can be seen by the way he is drawn, naked from his waist up, his trousers down, his figure pushing the frame of the panel outward in its inability to fit in it. Gloeckner's authorial presence here is also indicated by the way she draws Minnie, with facial features that foreground her childishness as opposed to her other depictions from the same period in her life which render her features more womanly than girly (69). In addition, the autobiographical avatar is holding a bottle of wine in her right arm with a label informing readers of 'The kind of cheap California wine that makes girls cry and give blowjobs to jerks' (ibid). The caption provides the cartoonist's commentary on Minnie's under-age consumption of alcohol, foregrounding its consequences. Next to Minnie's feet we see her 'Hello Kitty' diary, which 'shows up again on the end papers of *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* (as does the scene), remind[ing] us both how young she is and demonstrat[ing] that even at this young age she was invested in recording her own life.'[25]

Among the reactions the disturbing nature of this panel has caused were its characterization as child pornography and the confiscation of *A Child's Life* in France in 2000.[26] While autofictional and clearly displaying Gloeckner's artistic intervention in the verbal/ visual depiction of this scene, that the particular panel has caused such reactions indicates societal discomfort with and unwillingness to face the realities of domestic sexual abuse, underscoring the effect of visually embodying them and bringing them into the public domain. Alicia Chase observes that Gloeckner's graphic memoirs, together with those by Debbie Drechsler and Julie Doucet have 'achieved public notoriety for their stories of young women's lives, and their resultant black and white "diaries," as well as individual comics, stand as an "alternative" vision of growing up female, one far more telling than the glittering pink and sparkling purple, highly sanitized fantasy proffered by most mainstream media' (211). These cartoonists, struggle 'to make visible that which is normally obscured, to give voice to that which society would prefer remain unspoken about growing up as a girl in late twentieth-century North America' (ibid). As such, like Spiegeman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, they counter mainstream media narratives, specific, however, to the discursive formation of women and girls' subjectivities. This happens also in *The Diary*, which focuses on Minnie's adolescence but mediates the stories around it somewhat differently. Its visual depictions are much milder for marketing purposes and its structure is peculiar because it is composed by diary entries, interrupted by black and white comic strips and portraits.[27]

The Diary 'is structurally both a "real" and a "fake" diary […]. About one-half of Gloeckner's own real diary from 1976-1977 is reproduced intact – word for word – in the book […]. The other half […] – while events may match her actual teenage experience – Gloeckner wrote as an adult author, reforming the former diary's narrative structure'

(Chute, 74). There are, therefore, two different perspectives on the events it narrates: that of the adolescent girl who was living through the affair and that of the adult, who is a wiser and detached artist. Consequently, on the one hand, we often come across young Minnie's feelings and thoughts about Monroe, a combination of love towards him, vulnerability and confusion. [28] On the other, we face a girl who desires to have sex and has agency over how she will be sexually satisfied, describing her sexual partners as mere objects and reducing them to their genitalia (56). A striking difference with *A Child's Life* is that in *The Diary*, a laundry-room incident of sexual contact between Monroe and Minnie is described as a one of passionate love making, unlike the disturbing laundry-room panel in 'Minnie's 3rd Love' (137).

Elsewhere, Minnie takes up pornographic language to describe her sexual partners and her sexual desires as a teenager (55-56). As such, she performs a kind of violence towards the abusive father figure of *A Child's Life*, whose dominance was visually captured through obscene, disturbing scenes of her sexual violation. In addition, her language use counters heterosexual pornographic scripts that silence and objectify women. For Susan Rubin Suleiman pornographic language in women's fiction has subversive potential. When women artists take up the language of male pornographers to construct their own sexual desires, the possibility for a feminist statement against the position of the woman in pornography is created:

> What is involved here is a reversal of roles and of language, in which the docile and/ or bestial but always silent, objectified woman of male pornographic fiction suddenly usurps both the pornographer's language and his way of looking at the opposite sex [...]. [The] significance [of such work lies] in the usurpation of four-letter words to talk about a woman's sexual desires and fantasies [...]. Women

> writers [become] *les voleuses de langue* – the thieves of language, or more exactly, the usurpers and subverters of a certain kind of male language (Suleiman, 9-10).

What Gloeckner's book does, in its multi-layered, diaristic and visual representation of Minnie's adolescence, is precisely this kind of theft that undoes the status of the woman and the girl as silenced, passive objectified victims, which was exaggeratingly displayed in *A Child's Life*. Hence, it has the potential to introduce Minnie beyond the trauma of rape through the gender role reversal that allows her to belittle and use Monroe.[29] Abuse and rape are re-imagined so as to foreground the power of the graphic memoir as an 'alternative jurisdiction' and the potential of emotional truth to turn the tables on the abuser within its non-legal context. The victim in this case seems to have taken revenge. As such, unlike Barry's implied incident of sexual abuse that depended on the 'gappiness' of memory and of the comics medium, Gloeckner's excessive, uncomfortably detailed depictions show that memories, repeated, reconfigured and re-translated introduce graphic autofiction as a feminist counter-narrative to the violent, pornographic silencing of the woman and the girl.

Conclusion

Through my analysis of Barry and Gloeckner's works, I hope to have shown that graphic autofiction accommodates in unique ways the representation of emotional truths, of memory as fragmented and of experiences as unattainable, re-configured and re-translated in light of later experiences and knowledge. Shifting attention away from public forms of trauma, I have attempted to shed light on the ways in which private childhood psychic injuries can be negotiated in contemporary women's graphic autofiction. Specifically, my aim has been to foreground the potential of the genre to

visually and verbally capture the often silenced narrative of girls' working through and surviving different forms of abuse.

In a letter addressing her readers regarding the impossibility of autobiography, Gloeckner explains:

> This is not history or documentary or a confession, and memories will be altered or sacrificed, for factual truth has little significance in the pursuit of emotional truth.
>
> It's not my story. It's our story.
>
> Love,
>
> Minnie
>
> I AM AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CARTOONIST.
>
> No I'm not.'[30]

Similarly to Barry's 'autobiofictionalography,' which allows the presence of monsters in Lynda's childhood, with the simultaneous negation and affirmation of her status as an autobiographical cartoonist, and by signing off the letter with the name 'Minnie,' Gloeckner asserts the political power of her *non*-autobiographical comics in their expression of 'emotional truth.' Contemporary women cartoonists' graphic autofiction is therefore a fertile domain in which to re-member the past, re-configuring it so as to shed light on the secret, dark, traumatic aspects of women and girls' lives and on the power of voicing them and moving beyond them.

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[1] Aline Kominsky-Crumb is considered as the initiator of the genre. For a collection of her autobiographical comics previously published in *The Twisted Sisters* and *Wimmen's Comix*, see Aline Kominsky-Crumb (1990).

[2] For descriptions of canonical male autobiography, see Georges Gusdorf (1980); and Philippe Lejeune (1989).

[3] For discussions on memory as an active and contextualized re-interpretation of the past, see Annette Kuhn (2002) 147-69; and Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010), 92.

[4] See Sigmund Freud, *Early Psychoanalytic Publications*, Vol. 3, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, 321-322. Should this remain as it is or should we just give the year as in the previous footnotes and delete the details (title, vol etc)?

[5] See also Hillary L. Chute and Marianne DeKoven (2006): 769.

[6] Hatfield defines this process as 'ironic authentification.' See Hatfield, 128-29. For similar discussions on what constitutes autobiographical truth and the inescapability of fiction in self-referential narratives, see Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 17-19.

[7] See Hatfield (2007): n.p.

[8] See Hillary L. Chute, *Graphic Women*, 176. See my previous comment on Freud.

[9] See Jared Gardner (2008): 16. Not sure if we should add the name for consistency with previous footnotes

[10] See Marianne Hirsch (2004): 1211.

[11] The reason I use the terms 'graphic autofiction' and 'graphic memoir' interchangeably is because the genre of the memoir has been associated with marginal, fragmented and even incomplete, informal life narratives, thus allowing space for fiction. For the differences between canonical male autobiography and contemporary 'outlaw genres' of life narrative like the memoir, see Julie Rak (2005); and Smith and Watson (2010).

[12] See for example, Lynda Barry (2009), 137, 138, 142, 150, 154, 155.

[13] See Olga Michael (2017): n.p.

[14] See Chute, *Graphic Women*, 114-15. Should we add the year (without the book title here)?

[15] Ibid., 211.

[16] Judith Butler, 'Sovereign Performatives,' in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997), 102. Should this be an in-text citation? See my previous comment

[17] For *The Diary* as jurisdiction see also Chute, *Graphic Women*, 85.

[18] Chute, *Graphic Women*, 66.

[19] Gilmore, 'Jurisdictions,' 714.

[20] See Gloeckner, *A Child's Life*, 70-81.

[21] See Olga Michael (2014), 38-66.

[22] See Chute, *Graphic Women*, 64.

[23] See Elaine Scarry (1985), 9-13.

[24] Gilmore, 'Jurisdictions,' 716.

[25] Chute, *Graphic Women*, 75.

[26] Chute, ibid.

[27] Chute, *Graphic Women*, 68. is this ibid?

[28] For example Minnie is often worried that Monroe will abandon her because he is bored by her and often wonders if he knows how much she loves him. See Gloeckner, *The Diary*, 162,186.

[29] For Monroe's deprecating depictions in *The Diary*, see also Chute, *Graphic Women*, 81.

[30] Gloeckner (2011), 179.