

**"Sweetheart, that's all very nice, but if you're not going to eat pussy, you're not a dyke": The Missing Sex in *Annie on My Mind***

In a 2013 article, Caroline E. Jones examines progressive YA novels with lesbian main characters, conveying optimism about the genre, but she concludes: "Presence is not enough. Inclusion is not enough. Adolescent readers deserve the highest standards of depth, realism, and complexity in all of their fiction, including LGBTQ texts" (91). Nancy Garden was aiming at this high mark in 1982 when she wrote *Annie on My Mind*, but in the things *Annie* does not say one can recognize a loud silence, a barren desert caused by the strictures of repressive ideology still in effect today.

Criticism overwhelmingly defines *Annie on My Mind* as an affirming and empowering text for young lesbians. Roberta Seelinger Trites writes that "Garden appropriates the [romance novel] genre in an act that is at once revisionary and reconciliatory" (*Waking Sleeping Beauty* 93). Even a bittersweet happily-ever-after with young adult lesbian protagonists was a groundbreaking first step that established young lesbians as deserving readers. Still, analysis of the text using Trites's work on sex and power confirms her disappointing conclusion that "it seems virtually impossible for YA authors—even those with the best intentions—to escape from the hegemony of heterosexist discourse" (*Disturbing the Universe* 109). The lack of explicit sexual description in *Annie*, and the obfuscation of the description that does exist, reveals an enduring suppression of the *sexual* part of lesbian sexual identity that far outstrips suppression of heterosexual sexual content and continues to limit even progressive literature.

Trites holds that "[Queer] characters' physical pleasure [in YA] is often undermined by their knowledge of homophobia, so their ability to enjoy their sexual power is limited" (103). This effect manifests itself on authors and readers, too. Liza and Annie's love story might well have given great comfort to lesbians growing up in the past, but their story might increasingly withhold that comfort from lesbians growing up in the future. Budding lesbians deserve a complete narrative, and a complete narrative of lesbian sexuality includes explicit sexual content. In the current desert of hegemonic heterosexist oppression, we need an oasis of such narratives.