Reading the pedophile: deconstruction of innocence worship through the work of Henry Darger

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READING THE PEDOPHILE

Deconstruction of innocence worship through the work of Henry Darger

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Introduction

Over the course of this thesis, I will try to craft new theory on the figure of the Pedophile, focusing on the way that he shows up hypothetically, rather than explicitly on real-life child abusers. My entry way is through the work of Outsider Artist Henry Darger; I examine the way in which the near impossibility of reading all of his work (over 30,000 pages and 300 illustrations of up to 30 feet each) has shaped the way in which scholars work with his material. Due to the sheer amount of work created by Darger, as well as the rich openness of his childhood and mental state, his critics and biographers have an immense amount of power in controlling the narrative. Henry Darger is Schrödinger’s Pedophile: it is impossible to know whether his self-proclaimed love for “baby kids”\(^1\) was fully innocent, or fully perverse, or something right in the middle. This does not stop his critics from decisively typifying him, however. From the criticism on Darger, I then ask why we feel so uncomfortable leaving our view of him open-ended. This question, in conjunction with recent scholarship by Michael Moon and Mary Trent that examines the role popular visual culture played in Darger’s work (he was known to have traced poses and bodies straight from comics and magazines), leads to the conclusion that other critics have actively disavowed Darger’s popular influences, as it leads to the unsavory conclusion that the sexualization of children is only slightly veiled in our own visual culture.

From there, using the themes of power structure and disavowal, I deconstruct our popular image of the Pedophile and his relation to both the Young Girl and the Father, who I use to represent the ‘normal’ man with ‘appropriate’ responses to the Young Girl and her innocence.

\(^1\) A phrase used repeatedly in his autobiography *A History of My Life*. 
This results in a theory a la pedophilia scholar James Kincaid on the creation of the capital-P Pedophile as a tool of disavowal of our own cultural innocence worship, as well as further theory laying out an “innocence contract” that this simultaneously creates and pre-requires, that upholds the framework of girlhood.
In October 1949, Jean Dubuffet wrote the catalogue for the exhibition of the Compagnie de l’Art Brut at the Galerie René Drouin; he entitled it “L’Art Brut Préféré aux Arts Culturel,” or “Art Brut in Preference to the Cultural Arts.” In this now canonical text, he defines the new category of art brut, translated from French as “raw art,” to give credence to art created without training; he states that the organicness of art brut resulted in “an art which only manifests invention, not the characteristics of cultural art which are those of the chameleon and the monkey.”

In the essay “Dubuffet, Lévi-Strauss, and the Idea of Art Brut,” Kent Minturn writes about the progression of Jean Dubuffet’s interest in art through three types of the “archetypal art brut artist—the common man, the desert clown, and the ‘savage’ European.” Minturn concludes from Dubuffet’s creation of very specific artist types that:

Dubuffet’s original conception of art brut, then, was not only about the discovery, collection, and display of obsolete, overlooked, or “polemical” objects, it was also an attempt to write their makers into history...In fact, the idea of writing a history of art brut and its creators preceded the actual collection of art brut objects.

Dubuffet’s primary concern, then, was not the art object itself, but the art creator—I hesitate even to use the term artist here, as the category of Outsider Art is so dependent on the absence of the traditional Artist figure. As Dubuffet himself writes in “Art Brut in Preference to the Cultural Arts,” art brut is defined as “works made by people free from all artistic culture...Here we

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4 Mintum 253-4.
witness the artistic process quite pure, raw, reinvented by its author in the entirety of its stages, starting off with only his own impulses.”⁵ When defining art brut, Dubuffet does not give a series of formal elements or visual or aesthetic qualifications; instead, he gives a set of criteria for the artist and his process.

In 1972, art critic Roger Cardinal first coined the term “Outsider Art” in his book of the same title, to replace and expand upon Jean Dubuffet’s term art brut, then in popular use. Cardinal’s definition moved from Dubuffet’s term that centered around very specific outsiders, namely those who suffered from mental illness, to all outsiders. His move from the descriptor of brut, or raw, to the descriptor of Outsider, signals even a linguistic shift in focus from the art to the art maker; raw describes the art, whereas Outsider describes the art maker. David Maclagan touches on this obsession with the art maker over art object in the introduction to his book

_Outsider Art: From the Margins to the Marketplace_, writing

> In the case of Outsider Art, no matter how extraordinary or original the work itself may be, the story behind it is intimately involved in establishing its authenticity. We need some evidence that its creator really was insulated in one way or another from the culture they were born into, and their story, even if it consists only of a few bare facts…provides a basis for this.⁶

Outsider Art is not defined by the _art_ and its elements, but by the _outsider_ and his story. Critical studies thus become inseparable from biographical accounts: The scholarship on Henry Darger, arguably the best-known and most prolific Outsider Artist, is no exception.

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⁶ Maclagan 11.
It does not hurt that Darger’s story is so compelling and so indecipherable. To begin, there is the sheer volume of his work. His best-known work, *In the Realms of the Unreal* (fully titled *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in What is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinian War Storm Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion*), contains over 15,000 pages of narrative, along with an accompanying 3 volumes of illustration containing almost 300 collage and watercolor paintings. His next work, *Crazy House: Further Adventures in Chicago,*
gives us another roughly 10,000 pages on the Vivian Girls and their companions. Finally, his autobiography (another 5,000 or so pages, only 206 of which follow a traditional biographical structure), brings the total number of typed pages to roughly 30,000. Add to that his illustrations, collages, and collected images found alongside the texts in his room, and one is no longer merely confronted with the task of studying a body of work—one faces the challenge of entering an entirely new world, one that is both textual and physical. In Darger’s room (fig. 1), his “Realms of the Unreal” transcends the page—one enters the universe not only through the text, but through the physical space, as the distinction between Darger’s literary construction and reality begins to blur. The collected images from newspapers and magazines found in Darger’s room, plastered on the walls as well as piled up in every corner, serve not just as inspiration or source material for an external work: they become the actual visual and material culture of Darger’s and the Vivian Girls’ constructed universe.

It thus becomes unclear how much of Darger’s writing was deliberate construction, and how much was—to him—a recording of a reality he had created for himself. His autobiography, after all, a work of over 5000 pages, devoted only the first 206 to his memories and life, while the remaining detailed a complicated narrative about a tornado named “Sweetie Pie.” Henry Darger, or some variant of that name, turns up as seventeen different characters in The Realms of the Unreal, and characters from his biography make debuts as characters and places as well. Darger also has seeming difficulty differentiating between the world he has created in the Realms and the world that he lives in. While his autobiography signals he was able to maintain his footing in the real world while at work, the scene in his bedroom suggested this was a place where his fiction seeped into reality. His landlord Nathan Lerner writes on his website that,

It was often hard to believe that Henry was alone in his room. He was remarkable mimic and sometimes there would be an animated quarrel going on between a
deep gruff voice, which was supposed to be he, and a querulous high-pitched voice, which was supposed to be his superior, a nun, at the hospital where he worked as a menial.\

This confusion of reality affected his text as well; Darger’s loss of a photograph of the young murder victim Elsie Paroubek, an event that manifests in the text and in reality in a bizarre series of transformations to be discussed further later, manifests as the main catalyst in *The Realms of the Unreal*, as the demand for the photograph’s return becomes the driving force between the work’s main war.

Even in the pages where he does discuss his life, Darger is not necessarily a reliable autobiographer: after all, in *History of My Life*, he mentions that he is an artist only once, and even then, only in passing. As he was an intensely private man, even his landlords knew little of Darger after his death. Fortunately, due to the ironic fact that, more often than not, Outsider Artists have institutional records, there are some known facts about his life. Henry Darger was born on April 12, 1892. When he was a child, he lost his mother in the childbirth of his sister; this sister was subsequently given up for adoption. When young Henry was eight, his father was placed into the St. Augustine’s Home for the Aged; guardianless, Darger was placed in a Catholic boys’ home. Though good at school as a child—he was moved up from first to third grade for his reading ability—at the boys’ home he was given the nickname “Crazy,” and his

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9 Darger, Henry. *The History of My Life*, 284. Manuscript republished with honesty to pagination in the Biesenbach edited collection *Henry Darger*. Also, for the entirety of this work, I will
behavior began to affect his relationship with his teachers, classmates, and housemates. While at the home, he studied at the Skinner School, a public school in Chicago; Darger writes of his time there:

I was good and studious, but not meaning any harm or wrong, I was a little too funny and made strange noises with my mouth, nose, and throat in my classroom to the great annoyance of all the other boys and girls...Some said if I did not stop it, they’d gang up at me after school, and gave me the dirtiest looks. I defied them. After several months of it, it caused my expulsion from school.

After his expulsion, he returned to the school for some time, but his behavior eventually proved to be too much for his peers and teachers, and he was sent to the Illinois Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children, an environment that worsened his aggressive behaviors toward other children, and effectively ended his schooling. It was here that he heard the news that his father died. Darger tried to escape several times, finally succeeding and heading back to his hometown of Chicago. It was there—barring a brief time in the Army during World War I—that he would spend the rest of his life. He found work at a hospital, settled into his rented room from his landlords, Nathan and Kiyoko Lerner, attended church regularly, and kept mostly to himself. He stayed with the Lerners for over 40 years until leaving for the same institution in which his father had spent his last years: St. Augustine’s Home for the Aged. Following his final institutionalization, Nathan Lerner, a photographer and curator, discovered Darger’s work, and it was he and his wife who worked to make it known.

10 Darger, History of My Life, 284.

Fig. 2. A scene depicting the violent slaughter of Abbieannian child slaves by the Glandelinian soldiers; the Vivian Girls’ troops fight back in an effort to save the child slaves.
And what he found was the colossal text, *Realms of the Unreal*, which tells the story of two warring nations on a colossal planet around which the Earth itself orbits: the Christian Abbieannia and the heathen Glandelinia, the latter of which has kidnapped child slaves from the former (fig. 2). The Vivian Girls, seven beautiful and identical Abbieannians, lead the crusade against the evil Glandelinians, acting as the heroes of Darger’s story (fig. 3). Darger’s sister, whose birth resulted in their mother’s death, was given up for adoption, is very possibly the inspiration for these articulate and powerful girls; in the critical and biographical collection *Henry Darger: In the Realms of the Unreal*, John MacGregor writes of the sister, “This missing child aged very slowly, always remaining a little girl in his imagination.”¹² Additionally, Darger had desperately wanted to adopt a little daughter of his own, very possibly in the unconscious hope that the act of adoption would symbolically return his sister to him. Darger, as a single man

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with a history of institutionalization, however, was unable to fulfill this dream. Writes MacGregor of this denied wish:

He didn’t know how to go about acquiring a wife, indeed he seems to have known almost nothing about sex. He may not even have known how to “have” a child. In the Realms of the Unreal, however, he had seven perfect, blonde little girls: the Vivian sisters—his dream children.\(^{13}\)

The collapsing of Darger’s adopted-off sister and his own never-adopted daughter into one generalized figure of the young girl shows also in the main catalyst of his story: the Aronburg mystery (fig. 4). In The Realms, he writes “Picture of Annie Aronburg gone! Mysteriously missing!”\(^ {14}\) The disappearance of the Annie Aronburg photo makes it way also into

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**Fig. 4**. The image on the left is the photo of little Elsie Paroubek from the Chicago Daily News that Darger would have had, while the image on the right is Darger’s reimagination of Elsie as little Annie Aronburg, from the Vivian Girls, in What is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinian War Storm Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion, vol. 1, pp. 295-304. Sourced from MacGregor 495.
Darger’s diaries and reference ledgers, however; how is this possible? How has the real Darger lost a photo of a fictional character, a loss that has happened as well to one of the fictional Dargers? The consensus of Darger scholars is that Annie Aronburg is based on the real-life Elsie Paroubek, a 5-year-old girl who was abducted and strangled in Darger’s own city of Chicago in 1911. In reality, Darger had a newspaper photograph of Elsie that he lost in July of 1912; this incident worked itself into Darger’s diaries as well as into Realms of the Unreal. The inability of Darger to find the newspaper photograph of Elsie, and the transformed conflict of the Glandelians refusing to return the photograph of Annie Aronburg within the text, is what leads to the war.

MacGregor questions what it is about little Elsie Paroubek that creates such an immense obsession in Darger; he writes, “I was forced to confront the possibility that at the age of nineteen, having just escaped from a psychiatric institution, he could have been the killer of Elsie Paroubek.”15 Though he hesitantly concludes that his “considered opinion is that he probably was not,” he writes that the consideration that it was possible greatly impacted his research.16 However, MacGregor’s theory is that Paroubek “functioned briefly as a symbolic substitute for his lost sister…His obsession with the dead Annie Aronburg and her lost picture was also powered by this real loss, though probably without Darger’s being aware of the connection.”17 His obsession then came from the lost little girl reminding him of how his own sister was “lost” to him. Though I do not think Darger ever consciously believed that Paroubek could have been his little sister, it is worth remembering that in Darger’s mind, it is likely that his little sister

15 MacGregor 23.
16 Ibid.
17 MacGregor 498.
barely aged,\textsuperscript{18} in order to allow her manifestation in the Vivian Girls. It is thus possible that, even for flickering moments, or unconsciously, Darger entertained the idea that Paroubek could be his missing adopted sister. The tenuous boundary between real and fictional, evidenced in Elsie Paroubek’s photo becoming named Annie Aronburg’s photo in Darger’s ledgers (the fictional seeping into the real) and the subsequent loss of the real photograph prompting the written loss of the fictional photograph (the real seeping back into the fictional), shows that it is certainly possible that Darger’s conflation of Paroubek and his own sister could have been conflated.

Despite MacGregor’s rather tenuous statement that Darger was “probably not” the murderer of little Elsie Paroubek, instead offering Darger’s “lost” sister as an alternate theory, his entire study of Darger is still greatly colored by assumptions of psychopathy and violence. He writes with a tone of certainty in the introduction,

\textit{Within Darger monstrous desires lurked, powerful and disturbing sexual fantasies of strangling little girls. He was obsessed with evil defensively projected onto others. Terrible things happen in the Realms of the Unreal, with the torture and murder of innocent child slaves a regular occurrence. Children are stripped and whipped, burned or boiled alive. They are tied to trees and allowed to freeze, buried up to their necks and left to die. Most commonly they are hanged, disemboweled, cut to pieces, or crucified. Nowhere does Henry admit that these violent desires are his own; yet he depicted them in writing and in painting in infinite, agonizing detail.}\textsuperscript{19}

Though MacGregor admits that “nowhere does Henry admit that these violent desires are his own,” he still begins this passage with the very conclusive statement that these desires “lurked” within him. Is there a difference, however subtle, between desires being within someone and belonging to them? MacGregor’s detailed laundry list of the violent injustices done to the Abbieannian child slaves, that he writes Darger depicted “in infinite, agonizing detail,”

\textsuperscript{18} MacGregor 33.

\textsuperscript{19} MacGregor 22.
seems to imply that he does not think so, despite his efforts to appear more unbiased in his analysis of Darger’s mental state. “Would I have undertaken my study of Darger’s life and work if I had believed him to be a murderer of little girls?” he asks: “Yes.”20 While this appears to be offered to the reader in order to show the dedication MacGregor has to the subject, I cannot help but wonder if this belief actually would not have even further encouraged his interest: his book prior to this, after all, was entitled *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane.*

For the sake of this critical undertaking though, I will not disregard the sheer amount of research MacGregor has done on Darger. He has pored over every page of Darger’s work and has devoted over a decade to his study. MacGregor’s comprehensive *Henry Darger: In the Realms of the Unreal,* is, undoubtedly, a *tour de force* in the field of Darger scholarship. But one can admire and yet find biases. It needs to be addressed that John MacGregor, in addition to his position as an art historian, is a former psychotherapist, and as an art historian he specialized in “art of the insane.” Inevitably, he is bringing that dynamic into his analysis. In an article for the *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation* entitled “The Social Construction of Mental Illness and Its Implications for the Recovery Model,” Michael Walker writes that

> Psychology, like psychiatry, has found ways of linguistically contorting, convoluting, and confusing lived experience with essential ‘truths’ of its own…[Problems get] “molded” or interpreted in the language of the therapist…The power of definition is in the hands of the clinician.21

Given his framework and theoretical background, it is unsurprising that MacGregor interprets Darger as he does, and more importantly, that he finds the language to do so. And in true analyst

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20 MacGregor 23.

nature, MacGregor bases his research and scholarship in acute individuation of Darger through a reliance on his personal biography and mental state. In this way, he upholds and relies on the “story” of the Outsider Artist that David Maclagan addresses.

We talk regularly about how an artist’s life must be seen as separate from his work. Even within the past few years, there are the examples of Woody Allen’s alleged molestation of adoptive daughter Dylan Farrow, which came back into the public eye with an open letter published by Farrow on Nicholas Kristof’s New York Times blog in February 2014, and David Bowie’s sexual relations with then 15-year-old Lori Mattix (also spelled Maddox in the press), whose story was told to Thrillist in November 2015 but became widely recirculated following his death in January 2016. These are, of course, vastly different in seriousness, but the range goes to illustrate how seriously the question of the art-artist connection weighs on our collective consciousness. A Google search of “Can we separate the art from the artist?” returns pages of results from the last few years coming down both in favor and against this method of guilt-free cultural consumption, from everywhere from NPR to The Chicago Tribune to Pacific


Standard\textsuperscript{26} and more. What all of these articles, whether for or against forgiving the artist’s work for the artist’s sins, is that they center their arguments on the figure of the capital-a \textit{Artist}. As long as a work can be assigned an artistic lineage, it is easy to divorce a work from its creator, as long as it is then placed into a canon, examined using canonical conventions regarding content and form. But Outsider Art, as its very name implies—using the word \textit{outsider}, a noun adjunct referring to the artist, rather than just \textit{outside}, an adjective that would refer to the art—is intrinsically determined not only by the nature of the art and its qualities but by the nature of the artist. In the introduction to his book \textit{Outsider Art: From the Margins to the Marketplace}, David Maclagan writes,

> What makes [Outsider Art] extraordinary is the fact that it is created by people who have no training and who are so far removed from ‘normal’ expectations that they may not even think of themselves as ‘artists’, let alone as ‘Outsiders’. It is us (sic: we) who find their work remarkable, firstly because it seems to have no precedents in the art world with which we are familiar, and secondly because they seem to have none of the usual motives for making art.\textsuperscript{27}

Maclagan emphasizes two important aspects of Outsider Art: that it is isolated from the canon, and that its fascination stems from the viewer’s consideration of the artist, not of the art itself. What interests us is the Outsider Artist’s ability to create something we are able to deem worthy

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{27} Maclagan 7.
\end{itemize}
of contemplation and appreciation despite “being so far removed from ‘normal.’” Both of these aspects mean that the Outsider Artist is intrinsically linked to his art; his work cannot be contemplated without also considering Darger’s life and story. As long as Henry Darger is seen fully as an Outsider Artist, he will always be placed within a category in which art is life and life is art. MacGregor’s analysis of Darger and his work both relies on and reinforces this.

However, it is not only through the figure of the Outsider Artist that scholars are able to typify Henry Darger. Some Darger scholars such as Michael Bonesteel, editor of the collection *Henry Darger: Art and Selected Writings*, have tried to challenge Darger’s assumed classification as an Outsider Artist; while this may seem like a move toward a more nuanced view of his life and work, this is not necessarily true. In Bonesteel’s introductory essay to his collection, he emphasizes that there is precedent to his assertion that Darger does not so easily fit into the role of the Outsider Artist. He writes,

> In many ways, Darger does not fit at all neatly into the paradigm of Outsider Art. He functioned reasonably well in society, held down a series of jobs, and initially passed his medical examination for induction into the army, though it is probable that he suffered from some sort of personality disorder, and this may have been one of the reasons why he was admitted to a mental hospital in his youth. In hindsight, institutionalization may have been a massive overreaction to a legitimate emotional disturbance, given Darger’s maternal and paternal losses. Moreover, many artists who do not fall within the Outsider art purview suffer from some form of mental illness; it is therefore important that we consider Darger within other contexts as well. Otherwise, we run the risk of reinstitutionalizing Darger posthumously.28

In this passage, Bonesteel attacks the restrictive categorization of Darger as an Outsider Artist by *Art Brut* scholars like MacGregor from multiple sides. Starting with Darger’s “reasonable” functioning within society, he goes on to concede that Darger *could* have probably had “some sort of personality disorder.” However, rather than disagreeing fundamentally with former

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scholars on Darger’s sanity, an argument that would be hard to win given the lack of conclusive evidence for either side, Bonesteel casts doubt on the use of sanity as a determinant of an artist’s Outsider or Insider status at all. Bonesteel follows this argument with an evocation of writers and critics before him who had also cast doubt upon the classification of Darger as Outsider Artist, referring to texts by Victor Musgrave, C.L. Morrisson, and Jack Burnham. The evidence Bonesteel offers is convincing, and it does offer more possibility to the criticism surrounding Darger and his work, as he belongs to a less prescriptive category; released from the restrictive category of Outsider Artist, which demands a full removal from artistic influences and a reliance only on internal inspiration, Darger’s work can be looked at more fully in terms of lineage, form, and composition. Bonesteel also offers criticism of the potential harm the narrow classification of Outsider Artist does to Darger and his legacy; he writes,

In the eyes of some, Darger’s preoccupation with little girls and the fantasy violence enacted upon them in his Realms convicted him without a trial. When Art Brut scholar John M. MacGregor wrote that he found in Darger “a potential for mass murder”29 and that Darger “projected onto the Glandelinians…the monstrous drives of a serial killer,”30 he reinforced this unfortunate view.31

This is an important criticism by Bonesteel and shows the way in which he is able to advocate for his own “less-biased” contribution to Darger scholarship. However, in his following sentence to this passage, he reveals his own biases, writing, “However much Darger may have blended his real and fantasy lives, there are absolutely no grounds upon which to judge him for

29 MacGregor, Henry Darger: In the Realms of the Unreal 15. Cited in Bonesteel.


31 Bonesteel, Henry Darger. 15.
the sins of his fictional Glandelinians.” While I will neither allege nor deny that there are grounds upon which to judge Darger by the atrocities he imagines and portrays, it is still certainly bold to state that there are absolutely none, as this ignores a long history of the judgment of artists by their work. Whereas the examples I gave earlier of Woody Allen and David Bowie, artists who allegedly did enact sexual violence upon young girls, utilized the argument of the separation of art and artist in order to salvage the integrity of the work, Bonesteel uses the same argument to its opposite end: to salvage the integrity of the artist. Thus, while MacGregor does Darger’s work injustice by failing to allow any distance between the artist and the art, Bonesteel does it injustice as well by completely divorcing the two. If Bonesteel, whose aim, in contrast to the way he speaks of MacGregor, seems to be to give a fair analysis of Darger’s work and life, why does he then limit his own critical and analytical possibilities by cutting out any consideration that MacGregor could be correct? Though it is not the same type that MacGregor lands on, Bonesteel still typifies Darger: this is evident in the title of his introduction—“Author, Artist, Sorry Saint, Protector of Children”—in which he clearly lays out types for the artist.

Bonesteel continues this typification years later in his contributions to Klaus Biesenbach’s 2009 collection *Henry Darger*. As a Darger scholar, he knows his audience and the environment in which he writes. He opens his essay for Biesenbach, entitled essay “Henry Darger’s Great Crusade, Crisis of Faith, and Last Judgment” with an immediate defense for an

32 Ibid.

33 It should be noted that Lori Mattix did not portray her encounter with Bowie as such, but that others labeled the account as exploitative and nonconsensual as she was under the age of consent at the time.
unspoken but assumed accusation by the reader. “Henry Darger did not like children,” he writes. “Real children, that is. He loved fantasy children.”34 Though he goes on to specify that the “like” here refers to his problems with his peers when he was a child, the implied defense remains; he undoubtedly knows the way “liking children” will first be interpreted by the reader who has just finished looking at Darger’s images of naked and tortured girls. From this assertion, he continues:

In [The Realms of the Unreal], he often based his imaginary youngsters upon real-life playmates he had known growing up. Those real-life children sometimes caused him problems, but his make believe versions of those same kids provided Darger with a second chance to interact with them…He wrote in his autobiography, The History of My Life, that when he grew older he came to love baby children and would do anything to protect them… “I hated to see the day come when I will grow up. I never wanted to. I wished to be young always.”35 And so he remained, at least psychologically, for the rest of his life. [He was] emotionally arrested in prepubescence.”36

From the very start of his essay, Bonesteel stresses multiple forgiving factors for Darger. His “youngsters” (a notably gender-neutral word) are based from memories he created when he, himself, was a youngster; he “would do anything to protect baby children;” and he was, himself, a “baby child”—at least emotionally.

Throughout the entirety of his essay, Bonesteel continues to refer back to Darger’s “prepubescent” emotional state. It is important to note that Darger’s own self-depiction does lend to this analysis. The very second paragraph of History of My Life states, “Also, I do not

34 Bonesteel, “Great Crusade.” 271

35 Bonesteel does not provide a page reference for this quote, but does state that it is from The History of My Life.

36 Bonesteel, “Great Crusade.” 271.
remember the day my mother died, or who adopted my baby sister.”37 From here, he connects to his own relations to children fairly quickly, writing fairly matter-of-factly:

I was a meany one day when, for spite, I know not why, I shoved a two-year-old down, and made it cry…During my youngest days, before I went to school, and not knowing any better, I hated baby kids—those, though, who were old enough to stand or walk. It was caused, I believe, because I had no brother, and lost my sister by adoption. I never knew or seen her, or new her name.38

Darger admits acting cruelly to children when he was, himself, a child, though he states that this is an attitude that did not last long. “A change came in me, though, when I grew somewhat older,” he writes.

Then, babies were more to me than anything, more than the world. I would fondle them and love them. At that time, just any bigger boy or even grownup who dared molest or harm them in any way was my enemy.39

Despite his change as a youth, the adult Darger does not seem completely at ease with his past violence. It is fitting that his autobiography turns into a narrative about a cyclone—particularly one with as infantile a nickname as “Sweetie Pie”—as his writing in the first part of *History of My Life* experiences a similar kind of cycling. He returns again and again to the subjects of fires, some that he set himself, fights he had with other children, and his temper. Though he does style himself as a protector of the children he loved, there is a tension with his own self-recognition of his temper. He writes, shortly before shifting the narrative to “Sweetie Pie:”

All my life, ever since a child, I always had a very willful nature and mean temper, and was very determined always that all thins will and shall come to my satisfaction, or else…If something I’m working on goes wrong, “I am a spitting growling, if not thundering volcano.” Blow my top, too, as you call it, or hit the ceiling. And do I say bad words and blaspheme. Oh my.40

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“Sweetie Pie,” an uncontrollable and destructive natural disaster with a disarming and childish façade, takes on a new dimension with Darger’s description of himself as a volcano when he gives into his temper. He has externalized his anger as well has his violent nature, and made them forces outside of his control. Darger, an avid churchgoer and lover of children, felt at odds with his temper and blasphemous thoughts—this tension can be seen in his constant revisiting of these topics throughout his texts—but he finds a way to absolve himself. There is Henry Darger the kind lover of children, and then there is Henry Darger’s Temper, an external force which transforms him into something inhuman and unrecognizable.

This separation allows for Darger’s self-infantilism, as he finds kinship with children—he fashions himself to be in essence innocent, and it is only his temper that changes that; this is a necessary process in order to resolve his wish for youth. He writes:

One thing I must write is that us children in those days were looked on as beneath the dignity of grownups and did not amount to much, whereas, to my opinion or feeling, all grownups and especially all types of strangers and those I did not like were less than the dust or mud beneath my feet. I also believed that I had read in the Holy Bible that children, especially all good and innocent ones, were more important to God than the grownups… I wished to be young always. I am grown up now and an old lame man, darn it.\(^{41}\)

There is, perhaps, within this, a sublimated belief that his temper and blasphemy could be neutralized if he still had youth, if he had a second chance at innocence as his childhood was rife with tragedy and cruelty; or, at least, they could be forgiven, as it is children that were most important to God. He also looks upon his own infractions as a child with a certain amount of

\(^{40}\) Darger, *History of My Life*, 312.

\(^{41}\) Darger, *History of My Life*, 283.
forgiveness; he recognizes that he could not help his bullying of younger children without having
to resort to the kind of metaphorical disavowal he does with his adult anger.

We see a similar analysis in Bonesteel; he writes further on in his essay for Biesenbach,
“As a youngster, he had attacked other children and gotten in trouble…Now the biggest bully of
them all—God—was abusing him” in reference to his loss of Elsie Paroubek’s photo.\footnote{Bonesteel, “Great Crusade.” 272} What
Bonesteel asserts here is that the loss of the photo, a loss he states “was calamitous for [Darger];
he invested the missing image of the child with intense emotional meaning, as if he had lost a
real child—\textit{perhaps his own sister}.\footnote{Ibid; italics added for emphasis} He continues, “What might be just frustrations or
disappointments to most people were exaggerated far out of proportion in his mind. Once one
has experienced a major trauma—like losing a parent at a young age—every subsequent injury is
an emotional re-experience of that first trauma.”\footnote{Ibid/} Throughout his essay, Bonesteel insists on
reinforcing the fact that Darger is stuck in his childhood trauma; while I do not wish to
undermine that trauma does have the capacity to have such an effect, I cannot help but find
astounding the ways in which John MacGregor and Michael Bonesteel, both prominent Darger
scholars, use psychoanalytic language and profiling to such incredibly different ends. Whereas
MacGregor sees a man traumatized and assumes his potential for future violence himself,
Bonesteel sees a child traumatized and assumes his potential for nothing more than a childlike
engagement with the world. When reading Bonesteel’s work, it is hard not to think also of the
scholarship surrounding Lewis Carroll, in which, until only recently, scholars and biographers
staunchly defended Carroll’s preoccupation with children and the preadolescent form, agreeing

\footnote{Bonesteel, “Great Crusade.” 272}

\footnote{Ibid; italics added for emphasis}

\footnote{Ibid/}
with his friends and contemporaries that, as biographer Morton N. Cohen puts it paradoxically in *Lewis Carroll: A Biography*, “his attachment to the nude female child form was free of any eroticism.”

Carroll, of course, had the benefit of his era: *pedophilia* was not even termed until the turn of the 19th century. Carroll died in 1898, whereas Darger was born in 1892; Carroll was greatly a product of the Victorian era, and he is thus analyzed as such, within the framework of the Victorian Romantic child, whereas Darger, particularly as his work wasn’t even discovered until the 1970s, did not get the same initial benefit of the doubt.

In his introductory text to the collection of Darger’s work he edited, Klaus Biesenbach takes a similar position to Bonesteel, telling the story of several other artists (some that were contemporary to Darger) who started outside the institutions of art as outsider artists but became absorbed by art history, including Joseph Cornell, Yayoi Kusama, and Walt Disney. “When

45 Cohen, Morton N. *Lewis Carroll: A Biography*. (New York: Knopf, 1995): 228. It should be noted that Cohen was among one of the early Carroll scholars to reevaluate Carroll’s position as a mere platonic admirer of children, instead positing his possible practice of, or at least desire to practice, pedophilia.

46 Janssen, Diederik F. “‘Chronophilia’: Entries of Erotic Age Preference into Descriptive Psychopathology.” *Medical History* (2015: 59.4): 575-598. *National Library of Medicine*. This article offers a comprehensive history of the term *pedophilia* as well as other terms used for ‘erotic age preference;’ *paedophilia erotica* was first used by Krafft-Ebing in an article in 1896, but did not make it into *Psychopathia Sexualis* until 1898. The *Oxford English Dictionary* further reports that Henry Havelock-Ellis first used it in 1906, in the fifth volume of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia: Davis). Interestingly enough, however, Havelock-Ellis uses the example of a female schoolmistress as his illustration for pedophilia.
considering the canon of twentieth-century American art,” posits Biesenbach,” one has to ask why the untrained Darger is more often than others considered an outsider.” Biesenbach suggests that it is because Darger was not only an outsider in the eyes of the art world, but in the eyes of all. Though Biesenbach’s goal in this list of kindred outsider-turned-insider artists is to make the case for Darger’s admission into the canon, I find it hard to get fully past his initial question. Why is Darger denied entry to the art institution? Is it his subject matter? Erotic and/or violent depictions of young girls may fuel controversy, but they certainly do not disqualify one from the title of just Artist, rather than Outsider Artist. The female nude is one of the standard symbols of art history, and even the (pre-)pubescent nude finds lineage in Donatello’s David. Artists such as Balthus enjoyed success and acceptance during Darger’s life, and artists such as Stu Mead and Frank Gaard—even more graphic than Balthus—enjoyed recognition (though not controversy-free) following Darger’s work’s discovery. Perhaps the problem is that one can be either perverse or an outsider, but not both. The perverse artist is able to find predecessors within art, a history that has already been academicized and—to an extent—sterilized. His nude is an image even if it starts with a physical body, which it sometimes even does not; classically, art training was done through the copying of previous great masters’ works. The perverse Outsider, however, by definition finds predecessors within his own mind, as the true Outsider is not in contact with society. The Outsider thus deals not with a sterilized study of the human form, but with the decidedly erotic and base physical human body. Darger matches this description of the Outsider, standing outside the artistic canon. However, as Biesenbach points out, Darger was also very much in contact with popular culture. For Darger, then, to use the young girl for this

47 Biesenbach 19.
body, is to take the erotic nude out of the safety of the artistic canon and place it within popular culture, an implication that simply must be disavowed.

Darger’s critics and biographers can’t seem to agree on a classification for either the artist or his work. Their inability to do so, however, is in fact more revealing than if it were the opposite. The vastness and breadth of Darger’s work, the uncertainty of the truthfulness of his autobiography, the inability to prove any of the more personal details about Darger’s life due to his reclusive nature when alive—elements all difficult enough alone add up to a body of work that absolutely defies any absolute judgment. Even Darger himself cannot seem to land on a decision regarding his desires and motives, as seen in his autobiography and his insertion of several different Dargers into Realms of the Unreal. However, as illustrated, the critics do make definitive judgments, placing Darger into already created categories and types: the innocent child-protector, the canonical artist, and the pedophile. We thus must ask ourselves the question of why this is so: Why do scholars of Darger—a man who defies categorization—insist that he be categorized? In order to examine this question, it is necessary to ask a few others.

What would it mean if MacGregor were right, and Darger had in fact been a pedophile, and even possibly a murderer? Would we be able to enjoy his work, featuring violent depictions of torture and sexualized abuse of young girls, in the same way, knowing these scenes to be less allegorical and more masturbatory? And, if MacGregor were right, would our only option be to acknowledge that Darger’s work is fascinating, but not classical art? Is the only way he can be allowed within the institution to deny any possibility of actual violence or pedophilic perversion? It seems, then, that the critic’s need to give a definitive answer to the Pedophile Question is a result of it being a prerequisite to answering the Insider/ Outsider Question. However, I will argue that it is something more. Criticism of Darger depends either on severe individuation of the man,
à la MacGregor, looking deeply into his biography and mental state, or on his elimination, either explicitly so, as in Ashbery’s gradual dissolution of the Darger character in *Girls on the Run*, or through his insertion into the artistic canon, allowing the individual person to become eclipsed by the work and its lineage and context. Though the literature examines the art’s context and influences, as well as Darger’s personal and biographical context and influences, most of the critics fail to fully examine his social and cultural context and influences. Though they acknowledge the presence of images and source material from popular visual culture in his room, this is used mostly as evidence of either his psychological inability to separate the outside world and his constructed world, such as when MacGregor discusses the Annie Aronburg case or his connection to the outside world, used as evidence that he was, in fact, not an Outsider Artist. What is not fully examined, however, is the actual impact and influence of this visual source material. This is because it raises perhaps the most troubling question of all, one whose reach expands far outside of the art world alone: What does it mean if a man who pulled source material from popular culture made pedophilic and violent art about young girls?

In his recent book *Darger’s Resources* (2012), queer theorist Michael Moon, provides a new image of Darger, as a man who responded not only to his own childhood traumas (either through perversion or extreme empathy), but also to his political and cultural surroundings. Moon writes that Darger,

> by virtue of his massive and lifelong project of writing and art, took on the role of witness to the terrible ordinariness of violence in the history of the twentieth century—especially violence against children, and specifically against girls.  

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Though continues Biesenbach’s mission both of placing Darger into the artistic canon, (see fig. 5), and furthers what Biesenbach starts in his assertion that Darger ins in contact with culture: truly challenging what that placement means. He writes:

> Although the bare outlines of Darger’s situation may look almost like a parody of the Romantic idea of the solitary, isolated, tragically misunderstood artist, his work, when one studies it, reveals itself as having been highly relational and even in some ways collaborative.49

Far from intellectually isolated, Darger was an avid consumer of culture; his source materials for *Realms of the Unreal* include devotional pamphlets, children’s books and magazines, popular magazines such as *Life*, comic strips, and many other printed visual materials. He did not create a universe in *The Realms* that was completely outside of reality: He

49 Moon 1.
created a complementary universe through the repurposing and appropriating of materials, signs and images from reality. While he writes that “almost everyone” who studies Darger agrees on his appropriation, Moon analyzes this appropriation in a different way. Instead of just using his consumption of popular culture as evidence that he is not an Outsider Artist in the strictest sense of the category, he does not default then to any of the already prescribed categories of innocent or classical artist detailed before. Instead, Moon paints a picture of a man deeply immersed in popular culture and society; his isolation was social and interpersonal, but not cultural, and the rapport he lacked with other people he found in the responsiveness of his work. Thus, though he does cite some classical lineage, Moon differs from other critics by creating a lineage and history for Darger that is largely popular or kitsch: Darger is an artist, but he is one of mass rather than high culture. By focusing on Darger’s relation to mass culture, rather than on his social isolation, he is thus able to posit Darger as an effective—and even fairly sophisticated—social critic, writing:

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of Darger’s work lies in the way that he continually interweaves his visions of a proletarian utopia with his no less intense visions of the communicating hells of the range of experiences of violence and violation to which the members of the US proletariat of his time were disproportionately vulnerable. From the otherwise incoherently broad array of his sources and resources, Darger fashions over the first seven decades of the twentieth century an extraordinarily full elaboration of the pain and despair, but also hope and pleasure, that he experienced in his own life and that he imagined others feeling who occupied similar cosmic niches in the realms of the real and unreal.50

In Moon’s criticism, Darger is not a man who isolated himself from reality due to insanity, whose unrelatability for readers is furthered through critics’ and biographers’ othering of him, but a man who understandably retreated from a chaotic world, managing even to create a

50 Moon 3.
coherent universe through the appropriation of this universe’s signs and images. Though in an effort to challenge the traditional narrative of Darger as strictly Outsider, it is possible Moon overstates the deliberateness and politicality of Darger’s writing, he still presents a new framework through which to view Darger’s work, and a highly useful one at that. Moon’s criticism allows us to examine Darger as a man responding to visual and cultural cues—it is even, perhaps, helpful if Moon has in fact overstated the deliberateness of this response; if Darger’s work is more immediate, unburdened by heavy artistry, then it is even more revelatory of that which provoked it. Darger’s work thus takes on a new possibility under Moon’s criticism: it is not only a source to examine Darger’s mind, but more importantly Darger’s environment. By negating Darger’s status as an Outsider but also not confining him to the art institution, Moon has made Darger an Everyman; it is possible then that, though they may be exaggerated (or at the very least revealed), his desires and thoughts are our desires and thoughts—the nude young girls and violent acts against them are not the result of his relationship to children, but of ours. This is what makes Darger so crucial to and so ideal for a study of cultural treatment of young girls; though the universe of Abbieannia and Glandelinia is separate from our own, it is a reflection of it, showing our visual culture in a truer light than we allow it to usually be shown.

This becomes especially apparent when considering that the young girls of his paintings and collages, the forefigures of the scenes, were not only inspired from his popular source

Fig. 6. Henry Darger, At Jennie Richee. Heading first for their own camp with their plans for the raid in mind, ca. 1947
material, but traced from clippings. In her essay for the Spring 2012 *American Art* entitled “‘Many Stirring Scenes’: Henry Darger’s Reworking of American Visual Culture,” Mary Trent gives the specific example of a young girl seen in the forefront of a collage entitled *At Jennie Richee*. Heading first for their own camp with their plans for the raid in mind, who looks playfully out of the picture plane and at the viewer, while she inflates a very round, and very taut, balloon (fig. 6). Though the girl is naked, her nudity is obscured, especially in contrast to the full-frontal nudes surrounding her, as she stands in profile to the viewer. Despite this contrast, she stands out as perhaps the most noticeable and even most scandalous; she is the largest figure, closest to the viewer, and she is the only one that looks out of the picture plane as opposed to somewhere within the scene. Whereas we observe the other girls, she observes us, and in doing so, she acknowledges both our presence and gaze, leading us to question why it is she obscures her naked body, what knowledge she has about the power of her visibility, and our
own complicity in watching the scene. It is not only her positioning in the foreground that
captures our attention, however; it is her simultaneous coyness and boldness inherent in her pose
as she lightly yet firmly grasps her blue balloon. The balloon is fully inflated, yet her lips remain
around it, cheeks puffed as she prepares to blow even more air into it. It is unclear if the balloon
could take more air, however, and we wonder if we are seeing it frozen in its final seconds,

![Image of a young girl blowing a balloon alongside a cover of The American Magazine.]

Fig. 7. Henry Darger’s *At Jennie Riche*. *Heading first for their own camp with their plans for the raid in mind* next to the cover of *The American Magazine* from July 1947. The suggestiveness behind the seemingly innocent pose of the young girl on *The American Magazine* becomes revealed once she enters Darger’s universe.

having taken as much as possible before its inevitable burst. The innuendo as the balloon stands
simultaneously as (father’s) phallus and (mother’s) breast is undeniable.

But this pose did not come from Darger’s imagination, but rather from the July 1947
issue of *The American Magazine*, the cover of which was found among Darger’s images and
documents (fig 7). Though the cover appears innocent at first, it is difficult to see it in the same
light after seeing Darger’s version; Trent says of this pose that, “the photograph’s other markers
of purity ultimately recuperate this one suggestive nature, while still allowing a momentary
flirtation with alternative meanings.”\textsuperscript{51} Once the markers of innocence are gone, the hidden suggestive nature of the pose is revealed; looking at the cover again after seeing the Darger appropriation, it is also difficult not to see even the markers of purity in a new light. It is not too much of a stretch to imagine an image identical in pose and dress, but substituting a young woman instead of the girl, as the cover of a sophomoric softcore porn magazine. The cover story, the title of which covers the girl’s shoulder, also gains new meaning; it reads: “How safe is your daughter? By J. Edgar Hoover.” Says Trent of allusions like this:

Such specific correspondences between his art and sources illustrate that Darger’s creations did not simply bubble up from the private depths of a deviant outsider’s psyche but address topics of concern and modes of representation that were prevalent in the visual culture of his time.\textsuperscript{52}

So how safe is your daughter? And more importantly, how safe is she from what? Trent writes that in having the image of Annie Aronburg (Elsie Paroubek) prompt the war within the text, Darger

affirms the double power of the fetish of Romantic Child. Such images intoxicate not simply because they present a blank slate of youthful sensuality desired by adults but also because violations to this emptiness provoke intense, even obsessive, expressions of anxiety, outrage, and aggression against whatever—or whoever—threatens them.\textsuperscript{53}

We put out images like the one on the cover of \textit{The American Magazine} despite its hidden sexualization of the Young Girl, knowing the kind of power an image like that can have. This power, as Trent says, is two-fold: it can incite violence, yes, but it also incites protection.


\textsuperscript{52} Trent 80.

\textsuperscript{53} Trent 83.
However, the protection needs the violence—or at least the threat of violence—in order to exist.

But the fact stands that the power comes from the same source—what leads it to cause two such seemingly separate reactions? In his book *Child-Loving*, on cultures of innocence and pedophilia, James Kincaid writes that:

> By insisting so loudly on the innocence, purity, and asexuality of the child, we have created a subversive echo: experience, corruption, eroticism. More than that, by attributing to the child the central features of desirability in our culture—purity, innocence, emptiness, Otherness—we have made absolutely essential figures who would enact this desire. Such figures are certainly not us, we insist, insist so violently because we must...The pedophile is thus our most important citizen, so long as he stays behind the tree or over in the next yard: without him we would have no agreeable explanation for the attractions of the empty child. We must have the deformed monster in order to assure that our own profiles are proportionate.  

Kincaid focuses on the creation of the child in Victorian times, spurred by economic considerations, and states that the category of the child was created through a sexual differentiation. The child was asexual and pure, as opposed to the sexual and impure adult. The tenuousness of this distinction inevitably led to some confusion, as it tried to naturalize something that was actually socialized—the use of an average puberty age ignores the fact that people develop biologically and sexually at different paces. Thus, through our assignment of innocence and purity to the child, features we find culturally attractive, how could we guarantee that our attraction doesn’t steer into the inappropriate? In the absence of this guarantee, we have done the next best thing: create a figure that so offensively contains the inappropriate that we are able to distance ourselves from him, to disavow our own complicity through the construction of an Other.

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Darger is thus an ideal avenue through which to investigate the sexualization of young girls in popular culture and what this sexualization reveals about our social and structural relationship to young girls. In addition to the motivations of his critics in using him to disavow cultural sexualized worship of innocence, the simultaneous ambiguity and volume of his work allows for the projection of fears and ideas onto him easily. Few have read the entirety of his work, as well; the Lerners, his landlords who discovered his work after he moved into a nursing home, cut apart the volumes after his death to sell as individual pieces. The parts of his work that were already unbound thus became even more muddled in their relation to narrative structure. Illustrations have been bought by various collectors, museums, and galleries across the world. James Kincaid describes the Pedophile as a “complex image of projection and denial;” an image like this requires a blank space to be projected into. Darger is such a blank space; he allows also for other projections, as seen in the scholars here.

The task, then, is to ask why Darger becomes so typified—if he is, indeed, a space for “projection and denial,” then what are we denying? The answer lies in the scholarship put forth by Moon and Trent: we are unable to deal with the fact that Darger’s erotic representations have root in popular visual culture. It is necessary, then, to investigate what representations of young girls in popular culture say about our relationship to them, particularly to their innocence. For this, I will consider also the ever-present Pedophile—not the actual sex offender or child molester, of which there are doubtless many—but the constructed idea of the Pedophile, used to mobilize, legislate, and control, such as in J. Edgar Hoover’s cover story for *The American Magazine* (fig. 8). Even just anecdotally, this Pedophile is far from a foreign concept to people; he is the reason behind our lessons to children about “Stranger Danger,” why the image of a man in a van with candy is a trope used in so many examples of media, why there is nothing more
distressing to us than the image of a child alone. It’s why—in a statistic severely reminiscent of culture and our image of the rapist—we teach children most to fear strangers, despite the fact most childhood sexual abuse occurs from someone the child already knows. Kincaid writes of

55 According to the National Sex Offender Public Website, a public safety resource created by the US Department of Justice, only 10% of child sexual abusers are strangers to their victims. “Facts and Statistics,” NSOPW.
this typification, common both in art—visual and literary—and propaganda—political and social:

That people who in fact do engage in sexual relationships with children virtually never fit these images does not seem to matter. It appears to be a cultural necessity, a requirement of power-discourse, to declare over and over again that these matters are marginal, controllable by power, and thus safely distanced from us, from me: whatever is going on in the heads of pedophiles, my head is clear of it.  

What Kincaid is saying is that the Pedophile is necessary for us to define ourselves against: the Pedophile is wrong; we are not like the Pedophile, so we are right. By naming the Pedophile, further, we have located and isolated the problem of child sexualization, and in doing so, it is something we are able to neutralize (though we paradoxically also live in fear of it at every moment.)

Key

Arrow Direction
The direction of the arrow implies the direction of the power being exercised. For example, if the arrow is pointing from Father to Young Girl, this means it is describing a power the Father is exercising over the Young Girl.

Arrow Color
- Passive Power
  Power that is always already inherent rather than actively exercised; it inspires action rather than be exercised through action

- Active Power
  Power that is exercised through action; it does not exist inherently but needs the action to exist

Arrow Type
A broken, dotted arrow implies attempted or desired action that is not necessarily fulfilled, while an unbroken arrow implies fulfilled action.

Fig. 9. Key to understanding the following diagrams.

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56 Kincaid 25.
The ubiquity of the Pedophile as something we must guard ourselves against also has the important effect of centering this figure; he is touted as the catalyst for action—desire begins with him, and we act accordingly. In order to analyze this, I have crafted the foil to the Pedophile of the Father: the Father, like the Pedophile, is a type, rather than an amalgamation of all fathers. If the Pedophile represents the inappropriate response to the Young Girl, the Father represents the ideal response: he protects and cares. In discussing these three figures, it is clear that power inevitably comes into play: there is, after all, a power-play between the Father and the Pedophile, over who will win out in their fight for the Girl. The diagram entitled “Popular Power Structure” (fig. 10), named for its popular acceptance as the workings of pedophilia, legible through the use of the given Key (fig. 9), details the structure of the relationship of power between the Father, the Pedophile, and the Young Girl. In the Popular Power Structure, the Pedophile is named as the

**Popular Power Structure**

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Pedophile       Father
   \_________________________/
   |                        |
   | Condemns                |
   | Violates                |
   | Protects                |
   | Young Girl              |
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Fig. 10.
catalyst for the pedophilic scene: it is his own sick, individual perversion that prompts action. His desire to violate the Young Girl begins the drama; this desire prompts the Father to act in protection. The Pedophile is thwarted by the Father’s simultaneous condemnation of the Pedophile and protection of the Girl. In this structure, the Father has ultimate power over both parties, while the Young Girl as none; the Pedophile has power only over the Young Girl because of her powerlessness, but she is protected by the goodness of the Father.

In the Popular Power Structure, the only power at play is active power, or power that is exercised through action or the threat of action; it is not inherent but requires something more. For the Pedophile it is the action of molestation that matters in the motif (though as illustrated by the broken power arrow, it is not necessary for this action to be fulfilled), and for the Father, it is the active protection of the Child and condemnation of the Pedophile. As evidenced in Kincaid’s writing, however, the Pedophile does not start from nowhere: he is prompted by something himself, meaning he cannot be the catalyst. Kincaid states that it is our insistence on the “innocence, purity, and asexuality of the child”\(^57\) that creates the figure of the Pedophile; in our collective decentering of this fact and replacement-centering of the Pedophile, we thus obscure the power of purity in its ability to create the Young Girl as the catalyst of the pedophilic scene.

\(^{57}\) Kincaid 4.
Figure 11, entitled the “Examined Hidden Power Structure” inverts the triangle of the Popular Power Structure. It is no longer the Pedophile as catalyst, with the Young Girl adjacent to the action without being directly involved; the Girl serves as the new catalyst as we introduce the idea of passive power. Passive power is always already power, power that is inherent to the subject. What is obscured in the Popular Power Structure is the Young Girl’s passive power; she is unable to escape her power which is located in her innocence. This power is twofold and contradictory: in the Pedophile, her innocence has the power to inspire and incite violence; in the
Father, it is this same innocence that inspires the necessary protection against the aforementioned violence.

We witness the idea of the powerful Young Girl in the French leftist collective Tiqqun’s seminal work *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*. One of the first theoretical materials they list is such:

> It is altogether concretely that she has eluded those whose fantasies she populates in order to face and dominate them. As the Young-Girl emancipates herself, blossoms, and multiplies, the dream turns into an all-consuming nightmare. It’s at this point that her former slave returns to tyrannize yesterday’s master. In the end, we witness an ironic epilogue in which the “male sex” becomes both the victim and object of its own alienated desire.\(^{58}\)

In this passage, Tiqqun elucidates the hidden structure of the Young Girl as painted in power. The similarity between this description and the relationship between “master and slave” in the masochistic relationship is striking. A comparison to the masochistic contract thus gives us a way to illustrate the double bind of the Young Girl. She requires innocence to get protection; failure to perform innocence results in the removal of her passive power exercised over the Father, which in turn leads to a removal of the responding power of protection from the Father. Without the Father’s power, the Pedophile’s power is no longer thwarted—his broken arrow becomes a filled arrow as his active power becomes able to be exercised.

In the masochistic contract, the masochist enlists a woman to act as his torturer who, through the contract, “is given every right over him,” writes Gilles Deleuze in *Coldness and Cruelty*, his work on masochism that accompanies Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus in Furs*.

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in the collection *Masochism*.\(^{59}\) The illusion is that the woman—the torturer—is in power, when in actuality it is the masochist who has written the terms of the contract, who has decided upon the actions of his mistress. He is ventriloquizing her, exerting power over her through the symbolic—but far from actual—giving up of power to her. Writes Deleuze, “The masochistic contract implies…[the masochist’s] ability to persuade, and his pedagogical and judicial efforts to train his torturer.”\(^{60}\) The Young Girl is similarly persuaded; she is told that the contract is good as it offers her the power to inspire protection. However, the power’s negative implication—that it also inspires the violence she needs protection from—only comes as par for the course in the contract. Unlike the masochistic contract, however, the Young Girl does not have an option to sign in or out of the innocence contract: instead, she has only the option to gain as much as possible from it. She is incentivized to perform innocence as properly as possible; however, as innocence is inevitably tied to youth, and a perfect performance of innocence and purity is unachievable, the Young Girl is bound to fail to perform properly, thus failing to uphold her end of the forced contract, and leaving her to reap the punishment of her double bind.

The analogy of the masochistic contract gives us also a new framework from which to judge Darger and attempt to determine the exact extent of his pedophilic desire and whether or not that desire ever crossed into action. In *Coldness and Cruelty*, Deleuze gives us some important distinctions between sadism—which for the purpose of analogy, we can associate with the Pedophile—and masochism, which we can associate with the Father. An important aspect of literary masochism is that, due to its extended process of disavowal, the masochist never actually


\(^{60}\) Deleuze 75.
acts, instead settling into the power and control offered by the contract; it is this sexual inaction that allows us to associate the Father with the masochistic figure.\textsuperscript{61} Another important difference is in the way the Marquis de Sade and Masoch use language and how that language reflects the acts of their protagonists. Deleuze writes of the two:

In Sade we discover a surprising affinity with Spinoza—a naturalistic and mechanistic approach imbued with the mathematical spirit. This accounts for the endless repetitions, the reiterated quantitative process of multiplying illustrations and adding victim upon victim, again and again retracing the thousand circles of an irreducibly solitary argument.\textsuperscript{62}

and

The aesthetic and dramatic suspense of Masoch contrasts with the mechanical, cumulative repetition of Sade…Repetition does occur in masochism, but it is totally different from sadistic repetition: in Sade it is a function of acceleration and condensation and in Masoch it is characterized by the "frozen" quality and the suspense.\textsuperscript{63}

Though there is an almost mathematical repetition in Darger’s depictions of violence in the \emph{Realms of the Unreal}, this repetition is done at the hands of the Glandelinians. Darger’s own heroes, on the other hand, the Vivian Girls, embody the more masochistic kind of repetition. The figure of the Vivian Girl—most likely, as stated earlier, modeled after his sister—is repeated not as a “function of acceleration,” but rather as moment of freezing and suspense. It may be helpful to think of sadistic repetition as one that extends forward and masochistic repetition as one that extends outward. The Vivian Girls do not move forward; they instead, help suspend both Darger and the reader in one instance, in one figure, and in one moment. MacGregor did, after all,

\textsuperscript{61} Deleuze 33.
\textsuperscript{62} Deleuze 20.
\textsuperscript{63} Deleuze 34.
describe the sister that inspired the Vivian Girls as having “aged very slowly, always remaining a little girl in his imagination.”

Further, the Vivian sisters are never molested within Darger’s text, and are instead approached with almost bated breath by the adult men and older boys in the text. Consider the two following passages, in which one of Darger’s manifestations interacts with one of the Vivian girls.

“Will you carry me across?” she asked. He did not answer, for he was trembling as he drew near her. She raised her arms a little while she waited. And then he picked her up, she being against his breast. Her two hands went to his shoulders as he waded into the stream, he slipped, and they clung a little tighter. The soft note of laughter was in her throat when the current came to his knees out in the stream. He held her much tighter, and then, stupidly, he slipped again, and the movement brought her much lower in his arms, so for a space her head was against his breast, and his face was crushed in the soft masses of her golden hair. He came with her the rest of the way to the opposite shore, and then stood her on her feet again, standing back quickly so that she would not hear the pounding of his heart. Her face was radiantly beautiful, and she did not look at Walter but away from him as she said, “Thank you.”

He then leaned still nearer to her, he being a man of child worship, holding his breath, until his lips softly touched the back of her head. And then he stepped back, while a strange elated feeling came over him. At least his heart rose, and apparently choked him, and his fists clenched at his side. However, she apparently had not noticed what he had done, and now she seemed like a bird yearning to fly out the window, throbbing with the ardent desire to answer him in his questioning look, and then she was smiling up again into his face, hardened with the desperate struggle he was just then making with himself.

In both passages, the Darger figure acknowledges his desire for the Vivian Girl, but does not act; he instead turns to a language of description that has the effect of freezing the moment.

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64 MacGregor 33.

65 Darger, *In the Realms of the Unreal*, vol. 7, pp. 7-383; sourced from MacGregor 259-60.

66 Darger, *In the Realms of the Unreal*, vol. 7, ch. 19, p. 374; sourced from MacGregor 261.
The intensity of the description of a short moment in the first passage has the effect of elongating it; as Walter slips, we find ourselves slipping with him, getting quagmiried in the stream, staying there in his unfulfilled desire. The latter passage turns to a kind of distracted description, moving from the boy’s brief slip-up as he barely brushes his lips against the back of her head to a dehumanizing description of her (“she seemed like a bird yearning to fly out the window”); Darger’s language here is reminiscent of Masoch’s, of Severin’s artful and awe-inspire descriptions of Wanda in Venus in Furs. This is reflected even further in the following description of the Vivian girls:

It was evidently perfect to General Darger⁶⁷ that there was nothing whatever that could daunt the little girls and he did not know what to make of their bravery at all. To him, the little girls were not mere children…He almost feared the little girls himself. Pretty indeed as the prettiest angels, graceful in every form, but their looks showed indeed what they really were, and there was a peculiar light in their eyes which showed danger lurking there.⁶⁸

Compare the language here of fear and divine awe to that of Severin’s when he first meets Wanda: “The goddess is draped in fur: a dark sable cloak flows from her marble shoulders down to her feet. I stand bewildered, transfixed; again I am gripped by an indescribable panic.”⁶⁹ The men of In the Realms of the Unreal share a similar sublime terror and awe of the Vivian Girls; they hold their breath, view them as more than “mere children.” There is a very explicit fear of the power they hold over them; in this we see the makings of the innocence contract in full effect. Severin’s last words to Wanda in their first meeting are, “Now I am beginning to be truly

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⁶⁷ The good general of the Christian army and friend of the Vivian girls.

⁶⁸ Darger, In the Realms of the Unreal, vol, 13, p. 3343; sourced from MacGregor 247.

terrified of you.”

The phenomenon of the cyclone “Sweetie Pie” in the latter majority of his autobiography, along with his technique of compulsively cycling back to his youth in the first 200 pages, also demonstrate his kind of masochistic repetition. From a psychoanalytic view, one could assert that this is because Darger himself is “frozen,” suspended in his youth, evidenced also in the kind of extended-outward inundation of material in the constructed universe within his Chicago room.

![Image of artwork](image-url)

**Fig. 12. At Calmanrinia. Strangling and beating children to death.**

Not only does Darger himself use masochistic language and description, but he also utilizes the figure of the othered Pedophile himself; there is, absolutely, repetitious violence, indiscriminate in its child victims, of the sadistic variety in his text. However, this violence is enacted by the Glandelinians; in real life as well, Darger had wanted to start an organization called the “Children’s Protective Society,” and his grave is inscribed with the epithetical epitaph, “Protector of Children.” As Trent notes, it is not only young girls that are at the heart of

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70 Masoch 163.
Darger’s work: also present are the men who attack them. Citing the image *At Calmanrinia.*

*Strangling and beating children to death* (fig. 12), she writes that,

> Standard-bearers of wholesome, heroic American masculinity traced from mass-print clippings become sadistic violators of children... The brutality of the men is also on display... One can hardly imagine a more dramatic revision of images of heroic American masculinity and cute girlhood.\(^{71}\)

Trent attributes this inclusion of the predator as a way to respond to popular images of male predators at the time, namely clean-cut white men—the changing trope of “child attackers as psychopaths, not evil foreigners,” she writes\(^{72}\)—but it is also that, like his critics have done to him, Darger is trying to create a concrete external figure of the predator/Pedophile. Unlike the critics, however, he does not completely remove himself from the figure. Instead, he works himself into the story—and he does so in abundance. Darger writes himself into his work, but not as the protagonist, nor in the first-person, instead inserting himself in numerous variations on his name. Darger’s named characters fight for both Glandelinia and Abbieannia, and the nearness of their names make it hard sometimes for the reader to know whether the Henry Darger approaching the Vivian Girls is friend or foe. The same is true for Darger himself, not only to the reader but to himself as well, I believe. The story is a way for him to explore and enact his own feelings, while absolving himself of guilt, or having to actually hurt a living child. The multiplicity of Darger’s character(s), the literal battle of Darger v. Darger as they stand as generals on opposing sides, captures the ambiguity and uncertainty of Darger’s own internal battle regarding his feelings toward children. It is possible, however, that it is not so ambiguous—that the illustration of Darger against Darger reveals that he is *consciously* fighting

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\(^{71}\) Trent 84-5.  
\(^{72}\) Trent 85.
his own feelings; that it is, then, id Darger v. ego Darger, and that this may show a glimpse into Darger’s psyche more deliberate than previous heavily psychological analyses. This is all speculation, of course: the real effect of Darger’s multiplicity is that it is impossible to fully locate the author within the text. In a way, this preempts John Ashbery’s poetic retelling of the Vivian Girls, *Girls on the Run* (1999). In this poem, the Vivian Girls get names, where Henry Darger instead gets phased out of the text, making his exit within the first few pages of the poem. Ashbery explicitly removes Darger from the text, whereas Darger inserts himself so pervasively into his text that his actual feelings and motives are obscured.

Of course, if Darger is engaging in disavowal and Other creation, he is aligning himself more with the masochist, or the Father, rather than the sadistic Pedophile. He thus is crucial to study of the Young Girl because he not only elucidates our social innocence worship, but also that this innocence worship *always already* implies a very extreme kind of sexual violence that we try to reckon with. While I really do not mean at all to imply that every man experiences the struggle with pedophilic attraction that Darger works out on the pages of his text—I truly do not believe this to be the case—looking at an extreme helps us identify patterns, structures, and frameworks that exist to a lesser extent in our own cultural and social contracts.

Further, it is necessary to keep in mind that we are working very explicitly with literary types, rather than actual instances, and these types, as well as the literary descriptions of pedophilia, like literary descriptions of masochism and sadism, differ greatly from their actual counterparts. While a comparison to the literary techniques of Sade and Masoch do provide a framework through which to examine cultural attitudes toward innocence, as well as—and even especially—Darger’s literature and own proclivities, we must acknowledge that it is not an exact comparison. This is seen most with the assignment of the contract to masochism and the
institution to sadism, the implication of which is that masochism occurs personally and sadism systemically. While this matches with the masochistic literary innocence worship and sadistic literary sexual violence of *In the Realms*, where power is located within the Vivian Girl(s) and violence is enacted repetitively, to faceless and indistinguishable child slaves, the comparison breaks apart when applied to real life. While innocence worship does, like masochism, act through a contract, as laid out here, it also happens systemically and institutionally. It is actual acts of sexual violence and pedophilia that act individually, and officially condemned institutionally, though the institutionalization of innocence worship influences these individual occurrences. However, it is worth noting that the discrepancy between the literary (what can be also be considered pure or theoretical) and the actualized exists as well in masochism and sadism, especially in sadism and its more individualized reality. When discussing and acknowledging the “geographic and mathematical patterns” of Sade, Krafft-Ebing admits that “in most individuals of this type the feelings of power are experienced in relation to specific persons.”

The other thing a comparison to the masochistic contract offers us is the knowledge of a disavowal—the masochistic contract operates on the disavowal of the masochist’s control and power. In order to locate the disavowal in the innocence contract, we must look again toward Kincaid. Kincaid locates the construction of the Child in the Victorian era, as a response to changing economic and social conditions in the wake of technological advances in industry. As he writes in his section on “The Child” in *Child-Loving*, “we have, slowly but certainly agreed on a collective illusion that the child is a biological category…defined biologically, even better,

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sexually (or non-sexually).”\textsuperscript{74} The problem with this naturalization of childhood, recognized prior as a social category, was that in defining it through sex, we have inevitably brought in questions of desire. Purity at the time of Victorianism was closely associated with desire: in his section on “Child-Love” in the Victorian era, Kincaid writes about the importance of

how closely purity was associated with children (and, of course, women), and how vital, if partly submerged, was the connection between this purity and the sexually prohibited, desirable, sanctioned, and necessary: violating purity was perhaps the major crime; but the enjoyment of purity was also the reward held out to the faithful, both in marriage and in heaven. Purity was, in any case, defined by and thus riddled through with sexual desire in Victorian England.\textsuperscript{75}

The result of this, he writes, is an association of the Child with desire, and “if the child is desirable,” he writes, “then to desire it can hardly be freakish. To maintain otherwise is to put into operation pretty hefty engines of denial and self-deception.”\textsuperscript{76} The implication of this is that

\begin{center}
\textbf{Disavowed Power Structure}
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\textsuperscript{75} Kincaid 198.

\textsuperscript{76} Kincaid 4.
there is, somewhere, a disavowed desire; let us examine, then, the way that purity and desire interact in the relationship between the Girl, the Father, and the Pedophile.

The dynamics of power within the innocence contract are confusing: there are multiple levels of obscuration and disavowal. While the first revelation of the obscured passive power of the Young Girl does reveal a deliberate obscuration, it is still an obscuration of a constructed power structure: what is hidden is the contractual performance of the Young Girl, the performance that she has power through her innocence. What is still further obscured, however, is the reality behind that contractual performance—which is that it is actually both the Father and Pedophile that have power over her, especially as she cannot opt out of enacting her passive power. The reality behind the performance thus reconnects the Father and the Pedophile in their power over her—looking at Fig. 13, entitled here the “Disavowed Power Structure,” we can combine them in the figure of the Man. The basis of the Father and the Pedophile in the category of the Man forces us to ask how they are connected: in other words, what is the common ground between the Pedophile’s attraction and the Father’s protective urges? In both instances, the Man is given dominion and control over the Girl, and even more specifically, her innocence. The Pedophile exerts control through his destruction of it through sexual corruption, while the Father exerts control by making the preservation of innocence dependent upon him. Thus, the two can be united in their desire for control over and possession of innocence. The Man, now defined by his desire for innocence, can be examined for how he stands in relation to the Girl; once one gets past the rhetoric of the “power of innocence,” and turns to a consideration of political, social, legal, and physical power, it becomes clear that the Man has power over the Girl in all arenas—except in her ability to possess innocence. It is unsettling, however, for the powerful Man to
desire that from the powerless Girl—though, as Kincaid points out, innocence and purity are “central features of desirability” in our culture—and he thus must disavow this desire.

**Desire Displacement**

This disavowal causes the Man to psychically split in an act of splintering through self-othering, into the familiar figures of the Father, the role he will now inhabit, and the Pedophile, the role that he will a) define himself in diametric opposition to, and b) displace his desire onto (fig. 14). We are thus left with the Father who protects and the Pedophile who lysts. Even if the Man’s

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Fig. 14

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77 Kincaid 5.
initial desire may not have been inherently sexual in nature, even the suggestion his desire could be is enough to cause this disavowal. However, upon further investigation, in the displacement and disavowal process, a new form of desire manifests: that of the desire to conquer (Fig. 15). The Father wishes to conquer the Pedophile through an overpowering force; the Pedophile, in turn, desires to conquer the Young Girl through lust. What happens, then, is a triangulation of desire: the Pedophile acts as an interlocutor for the Father’s desire; this allows us to disavow that
path of desire, but a broken arrow from Father to Girl through the Pedophile, is still an arrow from Father to Girl.

Darger’s literature and languages places him more akin to the masochist—whose counterpart in the innocence contract is not, in fact, the Pedophile but the Father—even though his thoughts are certainly more extreme than the Father’s; this pulls the veil off of the constructed diametric opposition between the two figures. In essence, Darger is the Man, split within himself into the Father and the Pedophile, and working out that tension within the pages of his text.

The question stands, then, why the canon has absorbed *Lolita*, which contains explicit mentions of pedophilic acts, but keeps Darger’s work at its margins. It is undoubtedly in part because as an outsider artist Darger is already outside of the canon, it is harder to absolve him his crimes due to artistry as we do with Nabokov, Balthus, etc. It is also undoubtedly because Nabokov places himself as very separate from Humbert Humbert; it is easier for us to accept the crimes of a fictional character who we know does not represent his writer, than those of a character who shares both the tastes and name of his writer. Humbert Humbert also lives within our world; we are able to know that what he does is wrong even within the context of the novel. Darger’s universe both embodies and enacts the violence against the girls; whereas Lolita is naked only in Humbert’s moments alone with her, the Vivian girls and child slaves of Abysinnia are naked without reason and almost without fail. Further, because Lolita lives within our world, she, too, is subject to the contract I propose here, and—like all women—is inevitably doomed to violate the contract, thus losing the protection otherwise promised to her. In one of his biographies of Nabokov, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, foremost Nabokov scholar Brian Boyd posits that, “By making it possible to see Humbert’s story so much from Humbert’s
point of view, Nabokov warns us to recognize the power of the mind to rationalize away the harm it can cause—"I am not so sure Boyd himself fully recognizes it. Though he condemns other critics for being convinced by Humbert’s persuasive defensive tactics—confessing to his crimes so that he may readily show himself to be a sympathetic and complex character—he seems to carry some biases of his own. Boyd writes:

But we know that he did not rape Lolita in any ordinary sense. At twelve she had lost her virginity at summer camp, and when she and Humbert meet again after her mother’s death it is she who suggests that they try out the naughty trick she has just learned at camp. Handing down to himself that sentence for rape, Humbert seems far more self-accusatory than the case warrants.

While Boyd does do a good job of naming all the defenses Humbert appeals to within the context of the novel (“every argument that the child-abuser could want, and more”), he does not emphasize the most important aspect of these arguments—that they work on the reader—and from there does not make the most important conclusion—that this is because these arguments work in real life. It does not take too much from here to realize that Boyd, then, is subject to the same biases as the very critics he denounces for buying into Humbert’s defense. What else could he mean, other than an appeal to the contract I lay out here, by the statement that Humbert “did not rape Lolita in any ordinary sense?”

It can be easy to write off the accusation of victim-blaming of a child as outlandish, or argue it happens within literary criticism because the stakes aren’t the same with fictional


79 Italics added for emphasis.

80 Boyd 230.

81 Boyd 231.
characters. But this language occurs widely in journalism. An article by *Hollywood Reporter* from April 2015 details the sexual assault of a 13 year old girl by her acting coach, five years after the fact.\(^2\) Scott Johnson, the reporter, writes, “Many people have asked Jordyn why, after the first uncomfortable encounter, she said nothing. ‘What was I going to say?’ she says.” The article uses photographs of Jordyn, the survivor, from when she was thirteen, specifying in one caption that asserts, “Jordyn says the photo on this junior high ID reflects how she looked when the alleged attack occurred.” The reason this caption is necessary? Because the reader must actively be visually reminded of why her rapist’s crime is a heinous one—but also, more darkly, because the reader subconsciously wants to see if she looked older even at 13. It should also be noted that other news outlets reporting the same story used only photos of Jordyn at 18 taken from her social media accounts.

The *Hollywood Reporter* example is far from unique. Jessica Valenti reports in *The Nation* that in 2012, an 11-year-old gang rape victim was called a “‘spider’ luring men into her web” by a defense attorney. The *New York Times*, she writes, reported that the same 11-year-old girl wore makeup, hung out with boys, and acted older than her age.\(^3\) In the same article, Valenti details the judge of one rape case who sentenced Stacey Dean Rambold, the 49-year-old assailant of his 14-year-old student, to only 30 days in prison because his victim looked “older than her chronological age,” and was thus “as much in control of the situation” as her teacher and rapist. Soraya Chemaly, in an article for *Salon* lays out “The six ways we talk about a teenage


\(^3\) Valenti, Jessica. “Acting Older Isn’t Being Older: How We Fail Young Rape Victims. *The Nation.* 2 September 2013.
girl’s age.” They are, she writes 1) her chronological age; 2) the age her body looks; 3) her emotional age; 4) her “commercially profitable age,” or the age at which young girls begin to be targeted as a sexual market; 5) her media age, or the age at which girls begin to be represented as sexual in media; and 6) “the age at which a girl is portrayed as ‘fair game’ for older men.”

Chemaly gives more examples of the ways in which we see rape culture played out in news coverage of teenage girls; she describes the case of a 13-year-old assaulted by a 41-year-old in England, in which the rapist received a two-year suspension for his already short eight-month sentence because, according to Judge Nigel Peters, the victim was “predatory and was egging [the assailant] on.” Also included in Chemaly’s article is the 2000 case in which a South Carolina youth pastor received a shorter sentence after raping a 14-year-old girl in his class because she was abnormally tall for her age. As can be seen, it does not take the literary stylings of Nabokov to convince an audience that a pedophilic rape is a crime against the rapist, rather than the victim.

The main way in which cases such as these have been spoken, however, is as the effects of rape culture trickling down to impact even young girls. I would argue, however, that it is not that what we could call “pedophilia culture” is a consequential effect of a spreading rape culture, but that it is, rather, the other way around. Rape culture is an aftereffect of our sexualization of young girls, our simultaneous erotic and protective obsession of innocence and purity, the contractual framework we impose on young girls to uphold and protect. Rape culture is the allowance of the punishment of women through sexual violation for inevitably failing to uphold values of innocence and purity, either through action or simply the loss of youth. Rape culture is the demanding of damages for women’s breach of a contract they never agreed to sign as girls.

84 Chemaly, Soraya. “The six was we talk about a teenage girl’s age.” Salon. 4 September 2013.
It is then, not that our fathers, as is often purported and portrayed that are the “protectors of innocence,” but girls themselves. The Young Girl is punished for the male’s failing to protect what he holds most dear; he wants nothing more than to possess it, but is neither granted it as something “intrinsic” to him, and is unable to possess it sexually without simultaneously destroying it. The ostracism of the Pedophile is then not out of a necessity to create an Outsider who embodies pedophilic desire in order to disavow public complicity, nor only due to anger for the premature destruction of innocence. There is, at the hidden core of it, an anger that the Pedophile has violated the contract, too, and as such, has been able to exert an amount of power and control over innocence that normally only the Young Girl or Time would have. The father overboasts of his role as Protector of Purity to cover up the fact that he actually has the least control over it within the contract. In this way, Darger, who stayed in his small Chicago apartment for almost all his life, was making work that reached far beyond his far walls, and even beyond the Chicago city limits. His work illuminates the position we put Young Girls into, and that until we change this, they will continue to lose.

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