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Michael Moon. *Darger's Resources*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.  
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Michael Moon's book about pop culture influences on the work of Henry Darger (1892-1973), a janitor by day and prolific writer and visual artist by night, is an important addition to the rapidly growing field of Darger Studies. It offers a retort to the standard view of Darger (as gleaned from his work) as a pedophile and possible psychopath, which in Moon's telling is most often epitomized by John M. MacGregor's *Henry Darger: In the Realms of the Unreal* (2002). Instead, *Darger's Resources* argues that Darger's work is preoccupied with the violent aspects of American society that were also the subject matter of numerous pop culture genres throughout his creative lifetime, including religious pamphlets, comic strips, comic books, and pulp fiction. According to Moon, "if Darger and his desires seem bizarre to many people, that may be not so much because the desires are in themselves especially weird but because Darger (inadvertently or not) left an extraordinarily elaborate and extensive record of his intimate desires and fantasies" (86). Unlike much previous scholarship, *Darger's Resources* contextualizes Darger's work within the pop culture of his time instead of simply focusing on the work itself. More broadly, the book contends that "outsider artists" such as Darger do not work in an intellectual vacuum despite their lack of formal training, and it also implicitly places Darger's work within a queer matrix. Moon's arguments are convincing, and the book is thus a valuable one, though not without its flaws.

The first chapter of *Darger's Resources* examines the obsession with young religious martyrs in Darger's work and shows that this fixation was shared throughout the Catholic milieu of which Darger was a part during the first half of the twentieth century. Moon discusses the many devotional books and mass-produced portraits of saints in Darger's personal library to assert that the (at times gruesome) violence toward children in his writing and painting is motivated by a fascination with martyrdom, not simply violence. Darger's work is therefore a part of the long tradition of religious art and literature rather than the self-made pornography of a lunatic.

Similarly, chapter three investigates early twentieth century America's fascination with orphans, which manifested itself in a number of comic strips. As an orphan himself, Darger collected these comic strips in scrapbooks and often pasted them into his paintings or traced their figures directly onto his landscapes. Moon writes convincingly that the extreme focus on children in Darger's work is an expression of both the desire for children to be safe and the knowledge that, as in Darger's own experiences, children are often exploited rather than protected.

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Chapter four examines two related genres which Darger read often, pulp fiction magazines and comic books. These publications help illuminate Darger's work because they also openly acknowledge the violence suffered by marginalized groups instead of attempting to ignore it for propriety's sake. The chapter focuses on the sadomasochistic elements of Darger's work, again showing that they are not unique, but were present in mass-market publications such as *Weird Tales* and *Wonder Woman*. Portrayals of Darger as sick because of these elements are therefore unfair.

The major weakness of *Darger's Resources* is chapter two, which treats the similarities between Darger's writing and Branwell Brontë's juvenilia. While Moon successfully shows that the two bodies of work share a fascination with military battles which serves as a form of mourning for early childhood traumas in the writers' lives, he presents no evidence that Darger ever encountered work by Branwell or his sisters (in part because Branwell's work did not come into print until after Darger's death). The chapter works well as an exercise in comparative literature, and will be of interest to Brontë scholars, but it does not fit with the book's overall goal of examining Darger's "resources" to show how his work was influenced by them. Moon also compares Darger to another author, H.P. Lovecraft, in chapter four, but this comparison is more successful than the previous one because there is evidence that Darger read magazines that frequently published Lovecraft's stories.

*Darger's Resources* is illustrated with eight high-quality reproductions of Darger's work and several of his visual influences, which are accompanied by Moon's insightful analysis. It also offers a helpful summary of where Darger's work may be accessed at the end of the Introduction, though it would be more helpful at the beginning of this section rather than the end, as would a brief general biography of Darger for those readers not familiar with his story. The book is smoothly written in a jargon-free style that makes it accessible to general readers, students, and scholars alike, thus it would be helpful if the book did more to welcome the former group of readers. However, despite its imperfections, *Darger's Resources* is worthwhile reading. ✱