

# Henry Darger

by David Byrne



**Henry Darger** is legendary at this point. His work and its discovery form a perfect mythical narrative - mythical in the sense of touching a deep reaction in us, not mythical in the sense of the work or his life being untrue. His work is almost Victorian in the sense of it being an epic illustrated heroic narrative about a group of lovely and brave young girls. We recognize those *borrowed* elements immediately - the Vivian Girls' pinafore dresses, the perfect white billowing clouds and **Darger's** old fashioned convoluted language in the captions. Then, on second glance, we see where he has added his own dark and imaginative twists - in some images the girls have penises and in others they are being tortured or the soldiers are being disemboweled or buried in sand. Weird psychedelic butterfly lizard creatures flutter

about. He reveals that to him at least, the innocence of a young girl's adventure saga and homespun images from American mail order catalogues have a truly sick underbelly. A woman who used to work in my office used to turn one of the **Dargers** face to the wall whenever her daughter came to visit. One of **Darger's** epic texts is called *Realms of the Unreal*, which just about says it all. Another text tracked the weather - what actually happened each day versus what the weatherman predicted. Massively detailed and useless information, obsessively sorted and organized. A joke on science and its banal rigor. A beautiful catalogue of errors.

David Byrne  
b 1952 (Scotland)  
*artist, filmmaker, musician,  
founder Talking Heads/Luaka*