

Producing Erotic Children

James R. Kincaid

This essay is divided into eleven parts, eleven being a prime number. The eleven parts are not equal in length or weight, and they do not carry the same importance; nonetheless, they are exactly symmetrical and harmonious.

These are the parts:

1. Ellie Nesler's Son
2. Michael Jackson's Driveway
3. McMartin-Menendez
4. The Coppertone Child Home Alone
5. Questions We Love to Ask
6. My Thesis
7. Resisting the Obvious
8. Recovered Memory
9. Scandal—That's What We Need
10. Me
11. You

1. Ellie Nesler's Son

Ellie Nesler's son is named Willy, Willy Nesler. He is now [in 1996] about thirteen years old, living, I think, in Jamestown, California, where, in 1993, in April, he was in a courtroom waiting to testify in the preliminary hearing of one Daniel Driver, accused of seven counts of child molesting. The papers say Willy Nesler was one of the alleged victims; they also say that, according to his mother, he was vomiting wildly the morning he was scheduled to tell his story. Anyway, before he got the chance to speak, his mother took control, silencing her boy and the accused forever. When Daniel Driver looked at that mother with what she took to be a smirk, Ellie, goaded beyond her limits, bolted from the courtroom, filched a .22 semiautomatic from her sister's purse, charged back in, and plugged the guarded and manacled Driver in the head and neck five times at close range, proclaiming, "Maybe I'm not God, but I'll tell you what: I'm the closest damn thing to it."¹ I mention Willy Nesler because at this point he becomes invisible, silent and empty, a vacancy at the center of the story—filled up and written on by his mother, and the press, and the nation's outrage, our own included. Willy Nesler becomes our principal citizen, the empty and violated child, whose story we need so badly we take it into ourselves. No one wants Willy Nesler testifying, taking on substance: the erotic child is mute, under our control. Once the accused is out of the way, and the child is rendered speechless and helpless, we can proceed to our usual business: the righteous, guilt-free constructions of violent pornographic fantasies about child sexuality.

In this case, Willy Nesler's mother thrusts herself between us and the speaking child, blocking his words just in time, and giving us the screen we need. In the scores of accounts I read of the trial, Willy appears only as "Ellie's boy," "Nesler's son."² Ellie Nesler herself forms the displaced, disowned, and finally discarded projection we can use for a while to contemplate with impunity her thoroughly sexualized boy. For a moment, Ellie grabs the headlines, becomes a vigilante June Cleaver, the American Mom of the fifties, reborn snarling, protecting her chick. Defense funds spring up, fueled by spaghetti suppers; schoolchildren are forced to write thank-you notes; T-shirts and bumper stickers scream, "Nice Shootin' Ellie"; *Hard Copy* and Charles Kurault descend on Jamestown. All this so we can do as we like with our image of Willy Nesler. We can sentimentalize him erotically, as a townsperson does by saying, "His little soul died the day he was molested";³ we can indulge in the full-scale fantasies scripted by Ellie's attorney, who asked the jury to "pick a child you know and look at their innocence and sweetness," and then imagine it being violated.⁴

This does not last very long. For a while, Ellie gave us a story so compelling in its gothic simplicities that it was irresistible: drive a stake through

the heart of the pedophile and bourgeois America will be safe, along with our illusions about childhood, the family, sexuality, and our own rectitude. But Ellie's story never sold. The crowds of media talent that drew into Jamestown from Los Angeles and New York, like vultures to roadkill, fled even more quickly. All of a sudden, Ellie was abandoned—left to fend for herself in the trial and reduced to claiming that she was insane at the time of the killing. In a last-ditch, double-barreled bid for sympathy, she claimed that she had been molested herself as a child, and also that she had a fatal disease; but the insanity defense failed, and nobody cared by then whether Ellie had cancer or not, or even whether those she named—her father's poker buddies and a state senator⁵—had sexually abused her.

What had happened was that Ellie turned out to be complicated, not the simple heroine we needed for gothic, but a woman with a history, a history we did not want. She had a minor criminal record; she had taken drugs, perhaps on the morning of the shooting; she had threatened to kill Daniel Driver months earlier. We no longer had the clean-cut simplicity that would allow us the screen of outrage between us and our object of interest, which had never been Ellie or Driver but Willy Nesler, the breached, silent child. Without the screen story, we were left to face the music ourselves, or go and find other stories. Since the stories are not hard to find, we hesitated not a second in getting out of Jamestown and leaving Ellie to her sentencing—ten years—while we hustled to locate more guilt-free eroticism.

2. Michael Jackson's Driveway

In the joke, Michael Jackson's driveway is as erotic as our construction of Willy Nesler. The joke is this: How do you know Michael Jackson is having a party? By all the Big Wheels parked in his driveway. The other Michael Jackson joke has him visiting O. J. Simpson and offering to look after the children, should things go badly for Simpson. It's the same joke. Simpson's children, Willy Nesler, the drivers of all those Big Wheels: they take their parts in the narratives we manufacture, the narratives of innocence protected and pure, that is, lost and sullied. It does not matter much what line we take on the issues we can pretend these cases contain. Issues are there simply to give us, as they say, deniability, psychic deniability.

Take the fun in being outraged with Michael Jackson as boy-lover, and telling our friends how outraged we are. And not just with Jackson either, but with the failure of others to be as loving to children as we are: "Can you imagine anyone letting a son sleep with that man?" Actually, imagining is what we are all good at; otherwise such stories would not find ready listeners such as me and you. Had Michael Jackson not existed, we would have been forced to invent him, which is, of course, what we did.

Or take the way we can use the Jackson story to blow off steam about “the media,” as if “the media” were an independent agent, an outsider whose desires and energies are foisted on us against our will. “The media,” then, becomes a little like “the pedophile,” a handy fabrication and focus for our passions that we can abuse and pretend to disown.

The bounding of Michael Jackson is a spectacular case in point. Michael Jackson, to whose music we have sent our children and our soft-drink companies with record piles of dollars, is superchild and now super-child-molester. Michael Jordan would have done as well, or Barney. Jackson as a construction of our eroticism and our guilt, of our lavish, capitalist fantasies and generosities, and our frightened, repression-driven paranoia: he can hardly be said to exist outside our needs. Once he was a child himself, and it is commonly said that he still is; but we can make him play the part of the guilty child, absolving us from guilt. Jackson is reduced to his bed and his relationships, to the “sharing” of that bed. That’s all he is, as he and dozens of boys (including our star boy, Macaulay Culkin) pose for our collective scrapbooks. Even Jackson’s recent marriage is openly construed as a means for getting not Lisa Marie [Presley] but her children into that bed.

Not mentioned in my eleven-point outline, and offered as an undeserved reward: Woody Allen forms a more troubled, sophisticated version of this national drama. His story and his role shift before our eyes, as he bounces from child to child (younger and younger all the time), from villain to victim, from comedian to ogre. Allen becomes, like Oscar Wilde, the repository of a fair number of hatreds—of artists, Jews, New Yorkers, cosmopolitans generally, short guys, redheads, Knicks fans—but primarily he becomes (as in Chaucer’s “Prioress’s Tale”) the monster who threatens the child, and thus gives us exactly what we want.

3. McMartin-Menendez

The McMartin trial, dealing with allegations of child molesting and ritual sadistic abuse at a Southern California preschool, began with charges in the summer of 1983 and did not end until the summer of 1990, the trial itself running, with one short break, from April 1987 until July 1990. This, the longest criminal trial in American history, ended mostly with acquittals, along with some deadlocks and inconsequential declarations of mistrials, all signaling that we had other spectacles to attend to and could finally let this one go. Along the way, though, we had provided ourselves with seven rich years of titillating narratives about animal sacrifice and demonic possession, about games of Tickle and Naked Movie Star, about Raymond Buckley’s underwear and his collection of *Playboy* magazines, about children and sex.

Menendez is McMartin II, an artful variation on what has become our favorite public entertainment: staged dramas of child molesting, masked as exercises in justice. Lyle Menendez, who has been compared to Judy Garland and Montgomery Clift as a “great neurotic actor,”⁶ testifies, with a tough-guy sob we have all become attached to, “He raped me.” Not only that—he testifies the very next day that he had, as an eight-year-old, molested his fellow defendant, Erik, then six, with a toothbrush. “I’m sorry,” Lyle says to his brother, right there in the courtroom, not omitting the sob.

According to most spectators, Erik is not so gifted, despite his acting ambitions, and really pours out too many details without anything like his brother’s mastery of narrative pace and flow. Erik talks, all in a rush, about the taste of his father’s semen, sweetened with cinnamon; he speaks of his mother squeezing blisters on his penis; he mentions categories of incestuous activities and the names each had—Knees, Nice, Rough, and Sex—respectively, oral, hand, needles and tacks, and anal. He is in too much of a bustle to add flourishes from bad novels: his father lighting candles and slowly placing them about the room before saying to the boy, like an X-rated Vincent Price, “One last fuck before I kill you.” Still, even Erik manages to do the job. One alternate juror confesses on the *Donahue* show, “Phil . . . it was sickening. . . . I could visualize this pedophile father—he’s down the hall in the bedroom, he is sodomizing his six-year-old child.”⁷

What is being visualized so clearly is a child, a figure in this drama so important that it seems to replace the actual bodies of the grown-up and athletically bulky Lyle and Erik. Both are referred to, not only by their attorneys but by many of our deputies in the press, as children, kids, boys, sometimes prefixed by “little.” It is this image of the child that we are paying for in the trial, and we use the besweatered young men as transparent agencies, peering back through them to the child within, down the hall in the bedroom.

4. The Coppertone Child Home Alone

But what about Macaulay Culkin? What about the adorable child? The adorable child is not our only child-species, as Lyle and Erik demonstrate, but adoration is still dear to our erotic centering of the child. The vacantly androgynous Culkin on the beach, his swimming trunks being pulled down behind cutely by a cute little dog: that’s the national pinup.⁸ I grant you that Culkin is fast losing his hold on this role, and his ability to present himself to us with no face and no body, as a blankness we can fill in. Still, the desire that once rushed into his emptiness lingers on, and he is still the ghost of a cultural wish-fulfillment dream to find the perfectly evacuated child, isolated and suitably domesticated, at home in bourgeois familiarity.

The film *Home Alone* covers its own appeals just barely, using Three Stooges comedy and loading the child with sadistic potency in the make-believe layering of “fun” that allows us to enjoy the erotic formulations without beginning to acknowledge them: the child alone, defenseless, needing us. The sequel is a lot less smooth about all this, coarsening itself to the point of having Culkin make comments about seeing naked butts, and forcing him to jump into a swimming pool with a suit so many sizes too big that it peels off when he hits the water—surprise, surprise.

As Culkin reluctantly acquires a body of his own, and thus fades from our fantasies, others are found to take his place, in films like *The Client* or *The Little Rascals*, where adorable children inherit Culkin’s position, one he took over in turn from a long line of culturally mandated cuties: Ricky Schroeder, Henry Thomas, Jay North, Tatum O’Neal, Jodie Foster, Brooke Shields, Mark Lester, Shirley Temple, Freddie Bartholomew, and on into the night.

Last year’s Clint Eastwood film, *A Perfect World*, offers a darker, less obviously “cute” version of Culkin: a small boy played by T. J. Lowther, in a role that is actually given some substance, thus reducing his potential as a target for our usual erotic adoring. All the same, he plays out explicitly a variety of our most distressing and titillating narratives about child sexuality, in scenes that either reproduce or parody (depending on one’s position) the child as object of sexual attention. He spends the first half of the movie in his briefs and the last half in a Halloween costume that gets torn so as, again, to expose his underpants. At one point, the vicious convict, commenting on the boy’s “cute underwears,” inserts his hand into them to examine the penis, pronouncing it “puny.” Later the good convict (Kevin Costner), sensing that the boy is reluctant to undress before him, and learning that it is all because he is ashamed of his “puny” penis, says, “Let me see it,” takes a long look, and tells him it’s okay, thus reassuring us that our own voyeurism here is also absolutely okay. The film works over again the erotic pedagogical territory tromped on in *The Earthling*, *Treasure Island*, *Searching for Bobby Fischer*, *Kidnapped*, *Redneck*, *Willy Wonka*, *The Man without a Face*, *The Champ*, *Shane*, and *The Client*.

5. Questions We Love to Ask

But first: questions we don’t love to ask. Let us take the stories of Ellie Nesler, Menendez, Woody Allen, Michael Jackson, the day-care trial du jour, and ask about the source, the nature, and the size of the pleasures we take from such stories. What are these stories, where do they come from, and why do we tell them with such relish? What kind of relish is it? Why do we want to hear these feverish tales about the sexuality of children, and why

do we listen to them so eagerly? What is it about the child and its eroticism that so magnetizes us? In short, Why do we tell the stories we tell? Why do we need to hear them? These are plain sorts of questions, but we don’t often attend to them. We prefer others:

1. How can we spot the pedophiles and get rid of them?
2. Meanwhile, how can we protect our children?
3. How can we induce our children to tell us the truth, and all of it, about their sexual lives?
4. How can we get the courts to believe children who say they have been sexually molested?
5. How can we get the courts to believe adults who suddenly remember they were sexually molested as children?
6. How can we get ourselves to believe others when they say they remember being sexually molested years ago?
7. How can we know if maybe some people are not making these things up, misremembering?
8. How can we know if bumbling parents, cops, and (especially) therapists are not implanting false memories?

Though some of these questions seem to take revenge on other questions, they all have one thing in common: they demand the same answer, “We can’t.”

I think that is why both the standard and the backlash stories are so popular: they have about them an urgency and a self-flattering righteous oomph. Asking them, I can get the feeling that I care very much, and that I am really on the right side in these vital issues of our time. Even better, these open-ended, unanswerable questions generate variations on themselves, and allow us to keep them going, circulating them among ourselves without ever experiencing fatigue, never getting enough of what they are offering.

And what they are offering is a nicely protected way of talking about the subject of child sexuality. I do not deny that we are also talking about detection and danger. Certainly we care about the poor, hurt children. But we care also about maintaining the particular erotic vision of children that is putting them in this position in the first place.

6. My Thesis

You have already beat me to it, but here it is anyway, blunt and persuasive. My argument is that erotic children are manufactured—in the sense that we produce them in our cultural factories, the ones that make meanings for us. They tell us what “the child” is, and also what “the erotic” is. I argue

that for the last two hundred years or so, they have confused us, have failed to distinguish the two categories, have allowed them dangerously to overlap. And the result of all that is the examples I've mentioned to this point. All these are public spectacles of child eroticism, an eroticism that can be flaunted and also screened, exploited and denied, enjoyed and cast off, made central and made criminal.

This new thing, the postromantic child, has been deployed as, among other things, a political and philosophical agent, a weapon used to assault substance and substitute in its place a set of negative inversions: innocence, purity, emptiness. Childhood in our culture has come to be largely a coordinate set of *have nots*: the child is that which *does not have*. Its liberty, however much prized, is a negative attribute, as is its innocence and purity. Moreover, all these, throughout the nineteenth century, became more and more firmly attached to what was characterized as sexually desirable, innocence in particular becoming a fulcrum for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' ambiguous construction of sexuality and sexual behavior. Innocence was what came to you in heaven, or in marriage, as a kind of prize. Innocence was that which we have been trained to adore and covet, to preserve and despoil, to speak of in hushed tones and in bawdy songs.

The same goes for purity, of course, another empty figure that allows the admirer to read just about anything he likes into that vacancy, including a flattering image of his very self. The construction of the modern "child" is very largely an evacuation, the ruthless sending out of eviction notices. Correspondingly, the instructions we receive on what to regard as sexually arousing tell us to look for (and often create) this emptiness, to discover the erotic in that which is most susceptible to inscription, the blank page. On that page we can write what we like, write it and then long for it, love it, have it. Children are defined, and longed for, according to what *they* do not have.

Bodies are made to conform to this set of cultural demands. Heathcliff and Cathy (aged twelve) are symbols of titanic passion; Shirley Temple was enticing until puberty, when she instantly became a Republican frump; Rick Schroeder lost our interest when he stopped calling himself "Ricky"; Macaulay Culkin teeters on the brink of unerotic oblivion; Tom Sawyer's later adventures do not interest us. Baby-smooth skin is capable of making us pant with desire, while unsmooth, or contoured, skin is not: Is this because flatness is innately more titillating than texture, or because flatness signifies nothing at all and thus does not interfere with our projections? In the same way, desirable faces must be blank, washed out of color, eyes big and round and expressionless, hair blond or colorless altogether, waists, hips, feet, and minds small. The physical makeup of the child has been translated into mainstream images of the sexually and materially alluring.

We are told to look like children, if we can and for as long as we can, to pine for that look. (These cultural directives equating the erotic with eternal youth operate, perhaps, with special ferocity on women, but not only on women: think of Tom Cruise, Markey Mark, John Kennedy Jr., Matthew Broderick, Prince Charles, David Letterman, Jimmy Connors, Tom Brokaw, Mick Jagger, Jack Nicholson, George Burns—all cute little boys forever.)

It is worth noting that these various narratives of the child not only focus and allow desire, but also erase various social and political complications, performing essential cultural work that is not simply erotic. By formulating the image of the alluring child as inevitably bleached, bourgeois, and androgynous, these stories mystify material reality and render nearly invisible, certainly irrelevant, questions we might raise about race, class, and even gender. Such categories are scrubbed away in this state, laved and snuggled into the grade-A homogeneity we might call Shirley Shroeder Culkin/Macaulay Ricky Temple. When poor children are allowed, as they sometimes are, to play this part, they are elevated (helped) into the class above them; boys and girls leave gender markers behind and meld together; children of color find themselves blanched to ungodly sallowness, Moby-Dicked, we might say. In all our stories, there is but one erotic child, and his name is Purity: neither rich nor poor, neither male nor female, neither black nor brown (yellow and red being out of the question). These swirling tales of desire allow nothing that would distract us from the primary fantasy.

In any case, the major point and dilemma is that we are instructed to crave that which is forbidden, a crisis we face by not facing it, by becoming hysterical, and by writing a kind of pious pornography, a self-righteous doublespeak that demands both lavish public spectacle and constant guilt-denying projections onto scapegoats. Child molesting becomes the virus that nourishes us, that empty point of ignorance about which we are most knowing. It is the semiotic shorthand that explains everything, that tells us to look no further: having been on either side of the child-molesting scene defines us completely. Lawyers know this, as do politicians and storytellers. In *Forrest Gump*, for instance, as in a hundred other recent narratives, the fact that the heroine was abused by her father, who was also drunk and lower-class, explains to our full satisfaction why she is suicidal, drug-infested, looking for love in all the wrong places, and willing to settle for the dim-witted hero.

It is not a pretty landscape we have constructed, nor one with clearly marked exits. We think we know a great deal about this subject of child molesting; we are told that many things connected with it are obvious. But it is possible that this obviousness is the glue that cements the double bind.

7. Resisting the Obvious

So we might try to avoid the stupefyingly obvious: common and natural assumptions that seem to be continuous with the problem of child molesting. We might even resist the most compelling ritual gesture of all: acknowledging that, of course, sexual child abuse does exist, and exists on a very large scale. We need not deny it; we just do not want to begin the discussion in the territory left to us once we offer that disclaimer. I suspect that this disclaimer is a vital part of the discourse that eroticizes the child and keeps us blind to what we are doing. It forces the discussion into channels of diagnosis and cure, mandates certain assumptions about what is and is not important, allows us to see some things and blinds us to others. It traps us into offering one more set of tips on how to determine whether or not child molesting “happened.” But what if we explored another set of happenings: What is happening to us and to our children as we tell our customary stories of the child and of sexuality?

It is not rewarding to keep acknowledging that “molestation happens.” One notices that every debunker of every salacious popular myth (even brilliant debunkers like Elizabeth Loftus and Paul McHugh) begins by saying, in effect, “Now, don’t misunderstand me; I know that millions of children are sexually abused.” I think we need to fly past that net. That we are compelled to say that molestation happens is an insistence that it must. Where would we be without it? Its material presence is guaranteed by our usual stories, stories of displacement and denial, stories that act to keep alive the images that guarantee the molesting itself or at least our belief in it. Now, it is true that the stories themselves are based on a cultural inheritance that is very deep and complex. I do not claim that if we outlawed the stories, then the attraction to children would end. Censorship would not help us. It is just that the molesting and the stories protesting the molesting walk the same beat. When we seek to adjust the protesting stories by saying, “Yeah, but let’s take recovered memory out of the plot,” we do nothing to disrupt the circuitry, only to further remove from investigation its generating sources. Why do we talk about sex with children as if it were an isolated physical catastrophe, divorced from our talk? Maybe the child-molesting problem is married to the way we think about “the child-molesting problem.”

8. Recovered Memory

But haven’t we already recognized our position, and aren’t we moving even now to correct it? The pendulum is swinging, we might say, and we now are starting to see that things are more complicated than we supposed, that not absolutely everyone mentioned in connection with child molesting may be guilty. We are now willing to grant that there are neurotics out there, and

misrememberers, and clumsy therapists, and even liars. In our zeal, we may have falsely convicted some and driven others to suicide; we may have been so eager to hear children make accusations that we were not critical enough of what they were saying; we may even have implanted those accusations by being so insistent; we may have victimized ourselves, some of us, by asking ourselves to remember molesting scenes of years ago, asking in such an expectant way that we remembered in detail things that never happened.

We like to think we see all this now, with a clarity that is perhaps not unflinching, but growing in sharpness and focus. And the result of this creditable advance, we suppose, is that we have abandoned the old, melodramatic, gothic way of seeing intergenerational sex, the simple plot wherein there were grotesque villains, easy to spot, attacking a pure, uncomplicated virtue.

Or *maybe* all this complicating in reference to the dubiousness of recovered memory and of children’s testimony about sexual issues is really just a matter of keeping the talk going by slightly rejigging the terms. Maybe it’s not so much a complication as a reversal, a way of maintaining the same structure of titillating talk and effective self-protection. Turning the accuser into the accused, swapping villain and victim, does not, when you look at it, seem like that much of a change. Demonizing Freud and psychoanalysis can be done without a paradigm leap. It is still a gothic melodrama, filled with self-protective name-calling. The game stays as it was; we all just switch sides: the accused now deserves sympathy and the accuser condemnation. But the primary discourse stays. In fact, these new twists are so intriguing they demand even more talk, serving the same old needs.

9. Scandal—That’s What We Need

Scandal: the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* says it is, at root, a trap; it is believed to be from the Indo-Germanic *skand*, to spring or leap. Early on, *scandal* meant to cause perplexity of conscience, to hinder the reception of faith or obedience to Divine Law, to present a stumbling block. Ignoring all the alternate meanings given by the *OED*, let us settle on this cluster. Scandal is a trap sprung on the main bullies of any culture: faith, law, and submission to them. Scandal is the enemy of cultural hegemony; it is the offense that frees us from piety; it is the gross material fact that thumbs its nose at all metaphysical policemen. We are drawn to scandal by a hope to trip up the cultural censors, by a dream of escaping culture or transforming it. Compliance, we sense, will get us nowhere, great as the rewards for compliance may be. Let me prove all this to everyone’s satisfaction.

Take the most banal of all scandals, political scandal—and ask yourself what draws you to it. Why are the erotic doings of, say, Bill Clinton so much more interesting than his policies? Not, let me suggest, because he is himself

erotic; like most politicians, where he is, eros is not. Most of us would do a great deal to avoid imagining the actual doings of Clinton's body. Let me assume, then, that what draws us to scandal is the energy and promise of scandal itself, not the particulars of any one scandal. It is the offense that matters, that holds out promise, that gives us hope.

10. Me

I caused a scandal myself, but it was a comic miniscandal, altogether insufficient for the job I have in mind. Still, how would you like it if you got a review, a prominent review, by an Oxford don in the *London Times* (albeit the *Sunday Times*) and the best thing in that review was the following: "It is astonishing that a Professor of English could be so poorly informed." The review goes on to call my book, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*,⁹ "fatally flawed," but that amounts almost to praise compared to the allegation that, although I do not exactly "recommend the practice or admit to it myself," being annoyingly "evasive" on what I really do in my spare time, the book I have written makes it clear that I am "a passionate champion of pedophilia."¹⁰ In a separate article in the same edition, the *Sunday Times* said, "Kincaid's theories support those of the infamous Paedophile Information Exchange, or PIE," banned in Britain several years ago for allegedly dealing in child pornography. To cement the connection between me and PIE, the *Sunday Times* contacted Lord Bernard Braine, Tory MP for Castle Point and crusader for sexual decency, who said he was sending a copy of my book to the home secretary so he could ban it. "I simply cannot believe," said Lord Braine, "a reputable publisher could consider printing a book with such views. For any rational human being to give currency to what the vast majority of people regard as the vilest crime possible is deeply shocking." This article was headlined, "Anger over US Don's Support for Paedophiles."¹¹

This was nothing compared to the coverage in the *Daily Mail*, which was more forthright in its headline: "Paedophile Book 'Should Be Banned.'" The *Daily Mail* said my book portrays pedophiles as "kindly people who cause no ill-effects," and they sought out Lord Braine again, who says, "We have enough social problems in this country without encouraging publications of this kind." Ann Winterton, Conservative MP for Congleton, agrees—"I am appalled that this book is being published in Britain"—and so does Dame Jill Knight, Tory MP for Edgbaston: "It is crucial for the normal development of children that their innocence be preserved." The *Daily Mail* also quoted some experts in the field as saying that "child sexual abuse can have very damaging effects," suggesting, I guess, that I was the passionate champion of the reverse view. Michael Hames, head of Scotland Yard's Obscene Publications Squad, gave the judicious overview: "People will be

rightly outraged. This book won't offend against the law, but it will give comfort to paedophiles."¹²

11. You

But my book only tapped, predictably, a small feeder line of outrage and caused hardly more than a belch. For the truly scandalous, I look to you readers, the leaders of our profession. The *OED* tells us that being scandalous means being willing to take on big-time opprobrium, and that takes big shoulders, and many of them. The only way, though, to rewrite the script is, I think, first to jar loose the present one, to drain its power by drawing it into the trap that scandal can set and then spring.

Disgrace can do that, can revise the narrative, perhaps into one kinder to us and to children as well. For one thing is clear: our present gothic scapegoating stories, our stories of denial and projected desire, are doing few of us any good. Perhaps we can write ourselves into the plot directly, give up our immunity. We might then be anxious to find narratives other than the gothic, to cast about for other genres so we can avoid playing the monster part. Such alternate genres, I think, would be mixed, modulated, abandoning, for instance, stark essentialist notions of sexuality and sexual behavior in favor of the idea of a range of erotic feelings even within and toward children. Such scandalous narratives, finally, might see more calmly the way children and eroticism have been constructed for us, and might help us decide that the problems involved in facing these things are much smaller than those that come down on us when we evade them. We know that a child's memory is developed not simply from data but from learning a canonical narrative; we know that what we are and have been comes to us from narrative forms that take on so much authority they start looking like nature. We suspect that events themselves are complicit with the narrative authority that forms and licenses them. Why not snub the authority and change the stories? We might find that, all along, we have been afraid of the wrong things. We might even find stories that are not fueled by fear.

But none of this is going to happen without a fuss, without a most distressing and ignominious set of scandals—which is where you come in.

Notes

1. Quoted in *Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 1993, A26.

2. It was not until *Redbook* published Beverly Lowry's account of the imprisoned Ellie Nesler's struggle with cancer, "Should Ellie Nesler Go Free?" (August 1994, 82–85, 114–17), that Willy's name surfaced. It is possible, of course, that his name was withheld from the newspaper accounts out of consideration for his age (though this is by no means a universal practice); but such erasures still have the effect of eroticizing the emptiness. They also fold the child into the adult, as a possession or

an extension: “Ellie’s boy” is really a part of Ellie (Ellie’s foot), a function of Ellie (Ellie’s job), and an object (Ellie’s afghan).

3. Frankie Tinkle, “mother of three” and lifelong resident, quoted in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 13, 1993, A17.

4. Tony Serra, San Francisco attorney and Nesler’s lawyer, quoted in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 12, 1993, A18.

5. According to the *Los Angeles Times* (September 10, 1993, A32), Nesler blurted out this accusation during the sanity phase of her trial, charging that psychiatrists covered up for a probation officer she says molested her when she was fourteen, the cover-up being arranged, she yelled, “because he’s a state senator.” She named no names, but State Senator Patrick Johnston issued a statement acknowledging that he had been Nesler’s probation officer and denying the allegation.

6. Dominick Dunne, “Menendez Justice,” *Vanity Fair*, March 1994, 111. Other details are drawn from this article, from television news coverage and Court TV, and from newspaper accounts that ran in the *Los Angeles Times*.

7. Transcript from *The Phil Donahue Show*, February 2, 1994, 9; concerning the statements of Judy Zamos, identified as “Jury Alternate in Lyle’s Trial.”

8. Interestingly (I guess), a prominent child actor, Culkin’s costar in *The Good Son* and his rival for the big bucks, Elijah Wood, serves as the model for a Copper-tone kid in Rob Reiner’s *North*. The child is used in a scene as the model for a tourist billboard, where his trunks are pulled down repeatedly by a dog, causing Wood to protest, repeatedly, about having his “crack,” “the most private crevice on my body,” shown. Nonetheless, shown it is, albeit as a representation (graphic).

9. James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

10. John Carey, “The Age of Innocents,” *Sunday Times* (London), March 7, 1993, “Features,” 9–11.

11. James Dalrymple, “Anger over US Don’s Support for Paedophiles,” *Sunday Times* (London), March 7, 1993, n.p.

12. Edward Verity, “Paedophile Book ‘Should Be Banned,’” *Daily Mail* (London), March 8, 1994, n.p.

The Pedophilia of Everyday Life

Richard D. Mohr

Nearly every week for more than a decade, the Partnership for a Drug-Free America has placed a full-page display ad in the business section of the *New York Times*. The often gorgeous designs of the ads are as subtle as their overt messages are blunt: Drugs Scramble Your Brain. Fire Employees Suspected of Drug Use—It’s for Their Own Good. Drug Use Cuts Corporate Profits. That sort of thing. In their iconography, however, the ads roam over a much wider social field and frequently convey insidious messages—messages no less powerful for their indirection.

An easy case: a disproportionately high percentage of these ads picture professional women as the drug users in need of social disciplining. Frequently these women are the only women to be seen anywhere in the *Times* business section. The ads freight these pages with the message that women do not belong in business—they belong somewhere else. The ad campaign uses America’s demonization of drugs as both an energy source and vehicle for advancing an agenda of “traditional family values.”