



Born to Be Posthumous: The Eccentric Life and Mysterious Genius of Edward Gorey

Mark Dery, Edward Gorey (contributor)

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The definitive biography of Edward Gorey, the eccentric master of macabre nonsense.

From *The Gashlycrumb Tinies* to *The Doubtful Guest*, Edward Gorey's wickedly funny and deliciously sinister little books have influenced our culture in innumerable ways, from the works of Tim Burton and Neil Gaiman to Lemony Snicket. Some even call him the Grandfather of Goth.

But who was this man, who lived with over twenty thousand books and six cats, who roomed with Frank O'Hara at Harvard, and was known--in the late 1940s, no less--to traipse around in full-length fur coats, clanking bracelets, and an Edwardian beard? An eccentric, a gregarious recluse, an enigmatic auteur of whimsically morbid masterpieces, yes--but who was the real Edward Gorey behind the Oscar Wildean pose? He published over a hundred books and illustrated works by Samuel Beckett, T.S. Eliot, Edward Lear, John Updike, Charles Dickens, Hilaire Belloc, Muriel Spark, Bram Stoker, Gilbert & Sullivan, and others. At the same time, he was a deeply complicated and conflicted individual, a man whose art reflected his obsessions with the disquieting and the darkly hilarious.

Based on newly uncovered correspondence and interviews with personalities as diverse as John Ashbery, Donald Hall, Lemony Snicket, Neil Gaiman, and Anna Sui, **BORN TO BE POSTHUMOUS** draws back the curtain on the eccentric genius and mysterious life of Edward Gorey.

Born to Be Posthumous: The Eccentric Life and Mysterious Genius of Edward Gorey Details

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From Reader Review Born to Be Posthumous: The Eccentric Life and Mysterious Genius of Edward Gorey for online ebook

Lael Braday says

The heartbreak of a good biography is finding out that the artist whose work sings to you is not the person of your imagination. It's almost like a friendship breaking up over irreconcilable differences. The joy of a great biography is reveling in all the nooks and crannies of the artist whose work speaks to you. Mark Dery's representation of Edward Gorey's life is well-researched—including interviews with friends, family, and colleagues—and often feels too intimate, probing as deeply as possible into an ultra private man whose public persona was a purposeful put-on. The brilliant title and chapter headings are Gorey-esque: A Suspiciously Normal Childhood, Sacred Monsters, Epater le Bourgeois, Nursery Crimes, etc. Dery has sectioned Gorey's life into childhood, education, career moves, and his various obsessions, the main ones being literature high and low, silent movies, and the ballet choreography of George Balanchine, with their corresponding closely-knit fan groups. Any Gorey fan can learn something new in this biography, for the man was quite complex, and he apparently needed little sleep, working on something every moment possible, from his little books sold successfully at Gotham Book Mart, through his book cover art and collaborations, to his work in theater and television. Though far from an open book, Gorey's career flowed easily through profound and lasting friendships, Dery presenting the development and arc of such friendships with a light touch. Themes running throughout the biography are Gorey's complex parental relationships, his tendency to keep himself to himself while handing out sardonic opinions like candy, and speculation upon his sexual orientation. Though he'd answered the question of his sexual orientation, speculation continued, with "evidence" pointed out in his work and life. Though Dery may reference the evidence and speculation a bit much, he offers a comprehensive gathering of Gorey's work and a well-thought-out timeline of his life, with a wonderful takeaway that Gorey made his art to please himself. It's a must-read biography of a man as interesting and mysterious as his little books of Victorian / Edwardian children suffering unusual demises. Little, Brown & Company graciously sent me an ARC of this fantabulous biography for an honest review.

Mark Wheaton says

That incredibly rare artist's bio that makes you think you would've liked to know the subject IRL

Miranda Reads says

3.5 stars

But did anyone really know him? Did he even want to be known.

Edward Gorey is famously infamous.

Being nil, Gorey decided, was the safest policy.

His work provided the **scaffolding and inspiration** for Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, for Tim Burton's

creepetacular movies, for Lemony Snicket's Series of Unfortunate Events and so much more.

And yet, **surprisingly little is known about him.**

He wrote many delightfully macabre books, which alternately **impressed and horrified** publishers.

"There's so little heartless work around," said Gorey. "So I feel I am filling a small but necessary gap."

His books could never fit into one category, which often resulted in his work being shuffled off to the side.

Publishers were reluctant to market them to children, fearing their morbid subject matter and gleeful amorality were inappropriate...

But Gorey never let that stop him - he quietly puttered around with his odd little books and while he has faded from pop culture, his immortal influence lives on.

What a cool biography! (And you don't see me saying that very often!)

I never knew much about Gorey but I was definitely aware of Gaiman, Snicket and Burton - so I had a lot of fun **getting to know the man behind the murders.**

I love how Gorey kept making his horrendously amoral books solely because he felt like it.

I now have this huge itch to pick up everything Gorey has ever written and just read it - cover to cover - especially **his murderous ABC books.**

The book really emphasizes Gorey's commitment to his incredibly fine line art drawings - which have an etching-like feel - and I totally agree.

I loved all of the illustrations that the author included. They were **so intricate and detailed** - truly amazing that those were hand-drawn.

I honestly regretted that there were not more shown in this biography. Dery described the images so well that I kept wishing that he included more!

I really appreciated how much time and effort the author spent researching this novel (the sources section alone took up nearly sixty pages!) but, and this is more of a personal preference, but this book felt too detailed.

There were a few times where it really felt like we were **circling back over and over to rehash the same topic.**

For example, one thing the author never tired of discussing was Gorey's sexuality. The author states several times that:

Gorey's own preference, of course, was that he be seen not as a type - a gay artist or even an artist - but as an individual.

And yet, every few chapters, we would spend **pages analyzing minute crumbs of Gorey's sex life** (or lack

thereof):

Everyone who encountered him assumed he was gay, yet he maintained, to his dying day, that he was a neutral.

It just became a bit wearisome the fourth time we went around the whole was-Gorey-gay-or-asexual shtick...

Overall - I really enjoyed my foray into Goreyland and I am absolutely excited to pick up a few of his novels!

Life, in Goreyland, is a random walk, full of mystery and melancholy, punctuated by the unpredictable and inexplicable.

All quotes are from an uncorrected proof and are subject to change upon publication

Lolly K Dandeneau says

via my blog: <https://bookstalkerblog.wordpress.com/>

'Things impermanent, incomplete: these were the sorts of things Gorey loved best.'

I was excited to learn months ago that there would be a book coming out about Edward Gorey, the man whose genius inspired the likes of Tim Burton and Daniel Handler (Lemony Snicket), among others including Anna Sui. Ahead of his time, the 'too strange and eccentric nature' of his creations later found a wider audience, certainly with my generation and those born after. Gorey is the father of it all, a man who found beauty in 'things withered' as he took 'pleasure in that which is old, faded and lonely.' As to his sexuality, admittedly I am not interested in the speculation so much but can understand his hesitance during his time to claim homosexuality. During his youth, it certainly wasn't a time embracing any peculiarities of arts nor any deviate from the so-called 'norms.' He was flamboyant in his dress, certainly it all seemed to be theater but reading about the way he kept his home, when he finally allowed someone deeper access into it, not everything was about 'show', with his home ever changing almost as if a stage for his entertainmen, a show for one. He seemed a man unto himself, someone who lived for his pleasures without the need to explain himself. I always find it interesting when we try to explore the sexuality of others, that it still makes people uncomfortable if someone doesn't chose a label. Maybe it's because I have family members who are attracted to people but aren't (or weren't for those now deceased) much interested in the complications of relationships, who chose to live their lives freely, to come and go as they pleased and put their time and attention into their passions, be it art, study work, travel. As well as others who once were married and when it ended invested in themselves, didn't chose to have more relationships later in life. In fact, I see it all the time in neighbors, friends. Not everyone wants someone in their life, at their side all the time and would rather visit with friends and then go home to the quiet of their beloved solitude. Don't confuse being sometimes alone with chosing to live as a recluse. Why is that so hard to accept? There are people who don't really feel invested in their sexuality at all, who find their passions in other things beyond the body. Certainly the gay imagery in some of Gorey's work fuels the whisperings that he was homosexual, as well as his own comments in interviews. There was also the earlier crush. In fact, Maurice Sendak (himself gay) met Edward Gorey and understood him, the need to hide his sexuality, as well as the struggle as an artist to be taken seriously, to become successful. Whatever his sexual preference was, Gorey was a wildly creative,

fascinating, private man. Before he went to Harvard, his education was delayed by serving in the Army. It's hard to associate the Edward we all know and love with the clean-cut military picture of one Private Gorey, circa 1943.

His childhood certainly doesn't seem as ordinary as he led people to believe as you will read about in the chapter entitled "A Suspiciously Normal Childhood". As the author asks, is it normal to be 'cutting your eyeteeth on Victorian Novels', learning to read at three? What about a grandmother's madness? Seems he had plenty of gothic drama to fuel his future work, within his own upbringing. As this is a review, I won't go into more, it's in Mark Derry's book, read it! It seems current times would have been perfect for Gorey's talents, but maybe for someone enamored of his privacy fame would have been too itchy a coat for the man. Certainly I can imagine the shallow narcissism of our times would have been fodder for his work, even his later plays that seemed to become a bigger passion than releasing books for his fans. We can all learn so much from the pleasure Edward Gorey revelled in while creating something for the sake of doing it simply because you enjoy it and not worrying so much about the reception. In time, those naysayers will come around, which he learned years before with a certain magazine cover he landed after prior rejection. There was a lot I didn't know about Gorey, and this book isn't so much about revealing deep dark secrets as it's a peek into the life of one heck of a peculiar artist, one whose macabre style was rich in texture, his shading with only a pen is incredible, his meticulousness evident with crosshatching. He had a signature style, creepy little stories that an untold number of artists have mimicked, but will we ever know the man fully? A man of biting wit, melodramatic about the smallest events and yet seemingly indifferent about the big stuff, lover of cats who he allowed free reign, even if it meant messing up work he spent hours on, contrary to his core, highly intelligent, a lover of the ballet, avid collector, a lover of things old, faded and lonely. Can we ever know even ourselves? For fans and people new to Edward Gorey, this is a wonderful read.

Available Tomorrow November 6, 2018

Little, Brown and Company

Tony says

BORN TO BE POSTHUMOUS. (2018). Mark Dery. ****.

This is an excellent study/appreciation of Edward Gorey. The full title runs on: "The Eccentric Life and Mysterious Genius of Edward Gorey." I didn't know much about Gorey before reading this book, but that has changed it all. Gorey has a big following. I can recognize his work, but I am not a collector. The only shortcoming of this book was its paucity of its illustrations. Although there were many reproductions of his work, there were too few. He had an amazing output, most of which are hard to find because they were snapped up by his fans. I suspect that most of us know his work from the PBS series, "Mystery." If you want to more about this talented man, read this book. Although its size is daunting, the pages fly by very quickly.

Samantha says

So, are we just all gonna ignore the fact that Dery posthumously outed Gorey?

Page 136: "If such articles are to be believed, then 'Gorey wasn't necessarily gay, even though he was a

lifelong bachelor who dressed in necklaces and furs....he was just asexual, a kind of lovable eunuch."

Page 138: "Gorey kept perfectly mum about his true nature to the press; he only spoke about it in his art. And in a way, to be honest, the glass closet was appropriate to his artistic persona, which was neither here nor there, but locked in a kind of alienated stasis."

Page 139: "In New York, Gorey came closer to self-identifying as gay--IF ONLY IN HIS MIND AND TO A FEW CLOSE FRIENDS (emphasis mine)--than any other time in his life."

Page 174: "Gorey, of course, would've let out a theatrical groan at the suggestion that he was some sort of agent provocateur for the incipient counter culture." (Oh, cool, Dery admits even Gorey wouldn't have been on board with all this.)

Gorey himself has, fairly famously, publicly stated that he was generally sexless and asexual. From *Ascending Peculiarity*: "I'm neither one thing nor the other particularly. I am fortunate in that I am apparently reasonably undersexed or something ... I've never said that I was gay and I've never said that I wasn't ... what I'm trying to say is that I am a person before I am anything else ... "

Yeah, yeah, if it walks like a duck and talks like a duck, it might be a duck, but isn't that up to the maybe-duck to decide? Gorey might have been gay. Or not. Either way, it wouldn't have mattered, because it was up to him to decide how public he wanted to be with something as private as his sexuality. Dery very clearly overstepped a boundary. Dick move, man. You don't out another person, ever.

Dery spends nearly the entire book pushing an agenda that purports Gorey is an underappreciated gay icon, which he might be...if he ever self-identified as gay. WHICH HE NEVER DID. First of all, asexual is a valid identity, and to steamroll over Gorey's declaration as such does a disservice and is incredibly disrespectful to those who also identify as asexual--a identity wholly misunderstood and underrepresented. Secondly, **BIOGRAPHIES SHOULDN'T HAVE AGENDAS**. Biographies are based in fact. A good biographer tells the story of a person's life, all based in truths. Wanna start espousing **theories** about a subject? Write a theoretical art history book. Write cultural criticism. You could literally take this exact book and just change the title to not imply this was a biography. But none of that happened. Dery took information, developed a loose theory his subject was conveniently too dead to refute, and ran with it. That is not a biography. This should never have been called a biography. And frankly, I couldn't get past the outing--I after the first hundred pages, I hate-read the rest of this book, because I love Edward Gorey so damn much, and you, Mark Dery, RUINED IT. Who cares if Gorey was gay?! For a writer like Gorey, his sexuality, or lack thereof if you follow his own comments rather than Dery's, is wholly irrelevant to the collected body of work. Honestly, based on his childhood and his comments about children, I'd say looking at his views on family in relation to his work would be way more interesting, and **relevant**. Gorey clearly wanted to keep his sexuality private, for whatever reason, and that was his prerogative. For someone who claims to admire Gorey as much as he does, Mark Dery sure was disrespectful of him.

A book about a great subject does not make that book great.

As much as I want to give this book one star, I can't. It's still well-written and well-researched, even if it completely disregards what a biography should be. The second star is also to maybe give Dery the benefit of the doubt and hope that maybe, just maybe, he wasn't the one who picked that title. His back-flap bio indicates he has a history of cultural criticism--which would make a Gorey-as-gay-icon treatise make a lot more sense. Just as photographers sometimes get blamed for retouching gaffes they didn't make (spoiler alert: most of the time, the magazines do their own retouching, and it has nothing to do with the

photographer), maybe Dery is the victim of a bad title someone else picked? In any case, Dery outed Gorey, and that's inexcusable.

NinjaMuse says

In brief: The life of Edward Gorey, drawn largely from interviews, letters, and literary analysis, and occasionally illustrated.

Thoughts: I wanted so badly to like this a lot more than I did. I like Gorey's work and I was curious to learn more about him, especially since I've seen stuff floating around that he was ace. And then, while reading, there was so much else about him that resonated: his determined individuality, his gothic leanings, a fair bit of his attitudes in general. He really felt like a kindred spirit in a lot of ways, or at least someone who could and should be a role model for what Dery calls, "the weirdos."

And, like, I don't really read biographies, that's not generally my thing at all, but this one didn't seem ... great? Dery's writing's good and he's done a lot of research and thinking, that's clear. He mentions stuff that was going on concurrently with periods of Gorey's life, like New York gay culture and the crime-ridden Chicago he grew up in, and links that to what Gorey was doing (or not doing, as the case may be), and there's also a lot of space devoted to Gorey's books, what their content can tell us about Gorey's inner life, and the evolution of his work over time. All good things, right?

Except that Dery's stance is very curious and I'm having a hard time parsing the reasons why I feel that. There's the literary analysis, of course, which Dery stretches as far as he can manage and occasionally then some. (Love of detail and precision? Good. Frequent gay subtext? Works for me. Tall bearded men always being self-insert characters? Um.) And there are similar stretches based on actual known details, starting with "Gorey worked in small windowless rooms, which must be psychologically meaningful and not just because he didn't want distraction", moving through, "Gorey didn't want to talk about his private life and history so clearly he had a traumatic childhood", and ending with Gorey as a queer man, which is a whole other paragraph. There's also some weirdness about Gorey's writing and art being so great and so unique and Gorey being such an individual that everyone knew a different side of him, that is so unusual and nobody else has different personalities in different contexts ever.

And now, the queer stuff. This is the most curious part of a curious stance. I don't know if Dery's gay and doing something similar to me here, wanting a cultural figure to share your orientation so much you'll overlook other valid options*, or if he's straight and slightly clueless, but, um. Well. There's no denying that Gorey was romantically interested in men, embraced camp, had gay friends and queer characters, and had some stereotypically gay interests**. He also described himself as "asexual" and "undersexed" and there's no evidence he ever had more than one bout of unpleasant adolescent sex and maybe made out a few times. To me that reads as homoromantic ace/demi. To Dery at various points, that's "closeted gay man who just won't talk about sex because he's of a certain generation", "gay man so traumatized by bad sex he swore off it", and "probably asexual gay man", and yes, that's not consistent and yes, there are lots of uses of "asexual" that do not jive with current usage. Which is weird because Dery's done his research into gay culture during Gorey's lifetime but he seems not to have cared much about what asexuality even is? He just discounts that it's even possible for Gorey to have been ace—until the last chapter, where he backtracks.

Sigh.

To be fair, Dery's still pretty level and factual and doesn't make totally unsubstantiated claims. It's just that he doesn't totally support them either and there are definitely instances where his reading of the facts and my reading of them didn't line up. (I'm inclined to take Gorey at face value. Dery's inclined to say, "but that could be an act, maybe he didn't mean it".) And yes, I get that it's hard to write a bio of someone who was very private and I think Dery's done a good job considering, it's just ... between the assumptions and the odd tone and his treatment of Gorey's sexuality and presentation I found it lacking. And off-putting. And disappointing and sometimes frustrating.

I'm glad I read it and I did learn a good deal, and I'd even still rec this to people who're interested but with a very strong suggestion to read it critically and make up your own mind about who Gorey was. Don't necessarily stick to Dery's version of him.

*and yes, I fully admit that I really, really want Gorey to have been ace

** I also find it off-putting that Dery bases a lot of his evidence for Gorey being gay on "well, he fits the stereotype" and "if he wasn't gay, why was he drawing homoerotic subtext?"

Warnings: If you're gay or gay-friendly, be prepared for stereotyping. If you're aspec or aspec-friendly, be prepared for mild erasure. Use of the f-slur in quotes, and of phrases like "the gays" and "the homosexual" in ways that suggest Dery's tried to capture historical mindsets. I think the n-word popped up in a quote at one point too, but I don't have the book with me to check.

6/10

John says

I'm less than thrilled with the idea of readers receiving a book from a publisher in exchange for a review. I'm unsure why that is permitted at all, but at least it is noted when it occurs.

I found this book neither good nor bad. Does it capture Gorey's unique genius? No. Does it focus too much on his sexuality? Yes.

Meh. Stick to Gorey himself.

Nickie says

This has turned out to be one of the most dog-eared books I've read since "Jerusalem," by Alan Moore. In the early 1980's I worked as the psychedelic buyer of used vinyl at a record store in Santa Cruz and one of my regular customers was a young man named Russell. Russell quickly discovered my dark sense of humour and one night we met to walk through a graveyard and then through the redwood forest at Henry Cowell State Park, which was entirely pitch black, we didn't make it very far, since we didn't think to bring flashlights. Anyway, Russell gifted me with "Amphigorey," which he felt I needed, I guess at some point he'd asked me if I was familiar with Edward Gorey, which I wasn't at the time (amazingly enough). I hope one of these days to find Russell again to thank him for that gift, for as most who know me are aware, I am a great fan of Mr. Gorey's creations. This was a fun in depth read for me, revisiting many of the books that are

in my collection and learning more about the enigmatic and ever fascinating Gorey. The dog ears were caused by extraordinary insights and some personal observations of highly creative people being echoed by the author. Highly recommended.

Montzalee Wittmann says

Born to Be Posthumous: The Eccentric Life and Mysterious Genius of Edward Gorey by Mark Dery is a book I requested and the review is voluntary.

I didn't even know who Edward Gorey was when I started this book, is that bad? Well I sure do now! I love how this book is written. It is full of character and is very colorful just like the subject! Each chapter heading is unique, and the interviews, the subjects, the content, and the personal details are totally remarkably!

I started out knowing nothing about this man and ended up knowing more than I ever expected to! Brilliantly written about quite an interesting person.

I thank Little, Brown and Company for letting me learn so much from this talented author!

Anmiryam says

As a fan of Edward Gorey's work since I discovered a copy of The Curious Sofa on my parents shelves at about age ten, I have often wanted to know more about the enigmatic flamboyant artist behind the work. Mark Dery brilliantly examines the complexities of both the man and his work -- the philosophical underpinnings that make the art and the man so enticing and so difficult to pin down in some concise essential way. Given Gorey's elusiveness as a subject, it's no wonder it's taken nearly two decades following his death for a full length biography to be published.

If you aren't deeply familiar with Gorey's books it is well worth having copies of the anthologies (Amphigorey, Amphigorey Too, Amphigorey Also, and Amphigorey Again) to hand to look at while reading this biography. Where Dery excels is in his interrogation of Gorey's art which will be meaningless to readers without the visual reference points in memory.

Betsy Decillis says

This is a book that reveals more about the author than it does the subject matter.

Based on the cover and the description, I expected to be swept up into an incredible journey about an incredible man. That did not happen.

Whenever I did lock into the book and writing, that would be about when the author's extreme interest in whether Gorey was homosexual or asexual would rear its ugly head. It became uncomfortable and downright disrespectful to the man he was writing about.

In the end, the author would do well to learn a few lessons from Gorey: Just be and be comfortable with the empty spaces.

Thomas Pluck says

It illuminates without washing out the wonder of the works or the man himself. A worthwhile read, like discovering Gorey's unique world again.

Jeffrey Keeten says

"Only now are art critics, scholars of children's literature, historians of book-cover design and commercial illustration, and chroniclers of the gay experience in postwar America waking up to the fact that Gorey is a critically neglected genius. His consummately original vision--expressed in virtuosic illustrations and poetic texts but articulated with equal verve in book-jacket design, verse plays, puppet shows, and costumes and sets for ballets and Broadway productions--has earned him a place in the history of American art and letters."

I first experienced Edward Gorey without even knowing I was in his world. The introduction to PBS's long running series *MYSTERY!* was where I first brushed up against the uniqueness of Gorey's imagination. I was in 8th grade. I can remember sitting there completely taken aback, unsure of what I'd just seen, but I knew I'd never seen anything like it before. Every week I watched the opening very carefully looking for anything that I missed the week before. It never occurred to me to find out who the creator was of this wonderful opening or pursue other work by him. I wasn't a fully developed researcher and collector of those things that pleased me...yet.

So when Little, Brown contacted me to see if I was interested in reviewing a biography of Edward Gorey, I felt a whole host of emotions. A) Even though I had occasionally browsed his books, I had never really allowed myself to be seduced by his work. B) I'd been in a Victorian phase for many years now and still had never delved into the carefully cross-hatched Victorian figures that Gorey created. C) This book could be the impetus to encourage me to finally launch a full out investigation of all things Gorey. D) I was thrilled with the opportunity to maybe finally close a circle begun when I was 13 years old.

Gorey was all that I hoped he would be. He was a voracious reader. He took a book with him everywhere so that any time he found himself waiting in line or stuck in a boring situation he could pull out his book and take himself elsewhere. He had over 21,000 books in his library at his death. He watched over 1,000 movies a year. Think that is impossible? Not if you don't sleep. He was a huge fan of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, cats, and, most of all, Balanchine's ballet performances. To list all the things he enjoyed would maybe be contained in a scroll ten feet long if one wrote them in small, spidery script.

Gorey considered himself asexual. **"Thomas Garvey coins the useful term *glass closet* to describe 'that strange cultural zone' inhabited by people in the public eye who 'simultaneously operate as both gay and straight. Gorey kept perfectly mum about his true nature to the press; he only spoke about it in his art.'"** I think that Gorey did not want to be pigeonholed as anything really. He was fussy about just being

considered an artist when he really saw himself as a writer first. He was flamboyant in his appearance with wearing floor length fur coats year round and sporting rings on every finger. Supposedly, there was a lot of gay coding into his artwork for book covers that he designed for writers such as Herman Melville for Anchor Books. Looking at any form of art with an eye for overt or hidden symbols always makes me a bit nervous. Sometimes you find what you are looking for because that is what you want to find.

That all said, every crush that Gorey had throughout his life was some form of unrequited love for a member of the same sex. I wonder when we will reach a time when we are not categorized by our sexual preferences. Gay musicians/artists/politicians, etc. are still pressured by interest groups to declare their sexual preference, but by doing so they are generally suddenly defined first by their sexual preference, and everything else they do almost becomes a footnote to that revelation.

The melancholy deaths of Gorey's children.

His books were dominated by infanticides. They caused parents to be uneasy and made it hard for booksellers to categorize his work. The awkward size of his books was also difficult and forced many publisher's to design counter displays for his books at the register. Kids, in general, I have found, love his books. The creative deaths of the children in his books could be scary, but we do like to be frightened, especially when Gorey leads us onward to an ending that leaves us smiling.

He didn't mind confusing us either. *"N is for Neville who died of ennui."* Or how about this one: *"Still later Gerald did a terrible thing to Elsie with a saucepan."* What terrible thing could anyone do to another person with a saucepan? The mind of the reader was forced to ponder and ponder some more. Usually, I ended up laughing at the scattershot directions that my mind went, trying to pluck the right thread that would lead me to where Gorey intended me to go. Or maybe he wanted the readers to lead himself to his own meaning.

Clavius Frederick Earbrass

One of my favorite stories of his was *"The Unstrung Harp"*, which was about a writer named (C)lavius (F)rederick Earbrass. **"The best novel ever written about a novelist,' Graham Greene called it in all apparent seriousness."** The book covered all the hazards of a writer's life: *"disappointing sales, inadequate publicity, worse than inadequate royalties, idiotic or criminal reviews, terrors of the deadline and the blank page."*

The idea to have Gorey design the sets for the Broadway production of *Dracula* was simply a moment of brilliance. He threw himself completely into the project with *"every leather-bound volume lovingly rendered of the books in Dr. Deward's sanatorium library"*. The bats, skeletons, death's-head pansies, coffins, mummified corpses, Dracula's watch chain strung with teeth, the drapes, and the exquisite wallpaper were all drawn with delicate care. This showed the world that Gorey was much more than just a cartoonist or "children's" book author or really categorized any which way except that he was capable of showing exceptional talent in whatever medium he chose to express it. The show ran for 925 performances over three years and made Gorey a wealthy man.

I was constantly, gleefully googling arcane references while reading this book. Gorey's interests were wide and varied. By reading about his interests, I expanded my own passions, and really anyone who cares about the creative process should read this book. He was a Renaissance man, not only in talent but also in the way he found the world so fascinating. People might have been disappointing, but then he could always create more acceptable characters with the nib of pen. I will certainly be pursuing many more lines of inquiry inspired by this book. Mark Dery will take you on a journey into the development of a creative mind and introduce you to a man who figured out a way to live his life the way he wanted to. So few of us get that opportunity.

My thanks to Little, Brown who supplied me with a free copy in exchange for an honest review.

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I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Eric Kennedy says

This book is getting rave reviews all over the internet, so there isn't a whole lot for me to add. I loved it, but I honestly don't know how quickly I would recommend it to others. Some biographies are written with a mass audience in mind. This is not one of them. This is a biography written for readers already enamored (or even a little obsessed) with Edward Gorey's work, who have perhaps read other books about him. It includes very few excerpts from Gorey's works, often relying on the reader to have deep familiarity or easy access to Gorey's 100+ books and expansive output of cover art. That said, it's a fantastic book for fans of Edward Gorey who have been looking for a thorough investigation into his life, relationships, and artistic motivations.

If you're new to Gorey, I'd highly recommend first reading *Amphigorey*, *Amphigorey Too*, *Amphigorey Also*, and *Amphigorey Again*. Skimming *Edward Gorey: His Book Cover Art and Design* would also provide much-needed context for the chapters about Gorey's early professional career as an illustrator and book designer. Lastly, Dery extensively quotes Gorey's words from *Ascending Peculiarity: Edward Gorey on Edward Gorey*. His selections suit the narrative nicely, but reading the interviews in their entirety will give you a better idea of Gorey's public persona and manner of speaking, which is referenced often.
