

Inspirations Uncovered, Mysteries Resolved?

Malcolm Whyte. 2021. *Gorey Secrets: Artistic and Literary Inspirations behind Divers Books by Edward Gorey*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. 176 pp. ISBN 978-14-9683-155-2.

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Tracing the sources for the multitude of not infrequently obscure intertextual allusions that characterise much of the oeuvre of the American author and illustrator Edward Gorey (1925–2000) can be a daunting task. While many scholars (for example, Shortsleeve 2002; Wilkin 2009; Lackner 2015; Petermann 2018; Arluke 2018; Dery 2018; Monroe 2018; Shortsleeve 2018) have performed valuable work in identifying and interpreting the rich array of inspirations Gorey drew on, Malcolm Whyte's *Gorey Secrets* shows that there is still much to uncover in Gorey's "mildly unsettling" books, to borrow Karen Wilkin's phrase, used by Gorey himself (2009: 35). And although Wilkin points out that Gorey's allusions to other books, illustrations, paintings, picturebooks, films, and operas "are never ends in themselves", "[d]ecoding any of his references can simultaneously confer a sense of having been admitted to an inner sanctum and an awareness of how much else you are undoubtedly missing" (12). Whyte takes the reader on an enthusiastic journey across a wide range of Gorey's work, providing not a few fascinating possible answers to questions about the encoded connections with other works. As Whyte asserts early on in the book, his threefold goal is to "convey the fun and excitement in searching for Gorey's influences; contribute fresh insights into his works to Gorey devotees; and introduce to new Gorey readers the infinite pleasure that his books deliver" (6). If the second of these goals occasionally provides mixed results, leaving the reader wishing Whyte had taken his explorations further, the first and the third are achieved with total success.

Given the scope of Gorey's work (one hundred books both written and illustrated, with many more written by other authors and illustrated by Gorey), Whyte limits himself to a reasonable number of twenty-five titles across twenty-two chapters, including both Gorey's more conventional books (if any of his works can be described as such) as well as those that experiment with the forms of the flipbook (*The Floating Elephant/The Dancing Rock*, 1993) and flag book (*Le Mélange Funeste*, 1981; *The Dripping Faucet*, 1989), toy products (*Dracula: A Toy Theatre*, 1977), and the peep show (*The Tunnel Calamity*, 1984). Whyte draws attention to Gorey's fascination with ballet (*The Gilded Bat*, 1966; *The Lavender Leotard*, 1973) and the novels of Agatha Christie (*The Awdrey-Gore Legacy*, 1972); eighteenth century primers and nineteenth century cautionary tales (*The Eclectic Abecedarium*, 1983; *The Pious Infant*, 1966); artists such as René Magritte, Odilon Redon, and Henri Matisse (*The Iron Tonic*, 1969); and even Zen meditation (*The Object-Lesson*, 1958). Whyte's explorations, his "peek behind Gorey's inspirational curtain" (145), are perhaps most valuable when examining those of Gorey's books that have received comparatively little scholarly attention, such as *The Stupid Joke* (1990) or *The Lost Lions or, Having Opened the Wrong Envelope* (1973), with the latter providing perhaps the most unexpected and fascinating revelations about the background

of Gorey's creative process. However, in several chapters Whyte's explorations end just as he touches on an exciting possibility (such as his exceedingly brief but stimulating look at the motif of grapes in *The Curious Sofa*, 1961), abandoning his investigation at precisely the point where the reader might expect further scrutiny.

Despite such frustrations, Whyte's book urges Gorey's admirers to engage in new readings of familiar titles while equipped with fresh insights, reminding us that much of Gorey's power resides in that most "mildly unsettling" aspect of his work: the sense that there is always more to uncover in his books. Whyte is effective in fulfilling his goal of exploring the "luminous originality and profound creativity of Edward Gorey" while simultaneously revealing "sources on which [Gorey's] ideas are built" and thus sharing "his creative processes with the reader" (4), but he is especially successful in conveying the pleasure of navigating the labyrinths of Gorey's allusions. And for those who have yet to delve deeper into Gorey's mystifying worlds and their many and varied influences, Whyte's book should offer a good introduction to his endlessly stimulating elusiveness.

References

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Gaming as Textual Expansion

Paul Booth. 2015. *Game Play: Paratextuality in Contemporary Board Games*. New York, London, New Delhi, Sidney: Bloomsbury Academic. 252 pp. ISBN 978-1-6289-2744-3.

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As the opening statement of Paul Booth's introduction to his analysis of paratextuality in modern board games informs us, "We are in the midst of a board game renaissance" (1). And Booth is indeed correct in his assessment. The market is booming, with thousands of new titles published every year and where annual board game sales increased by \$60 million