



Steven Senne/Associated Press file

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Kevin McDermott

Edward Gorey's former residence at 8 Strawberry Lane in Yarmouthport is now a museum featuring exhibits that commemorate the life of Gorey, left, who died in 2000 at the age of 75.

This season's special exhibit, containing original artwork and manuscripts, is "The Vinegar Works: Three Volumes of Moral Instruction." All three books, "The Insect God," "The West Wing," and "The Gashlycrumb Tinies," would eventually define Gorey's style.

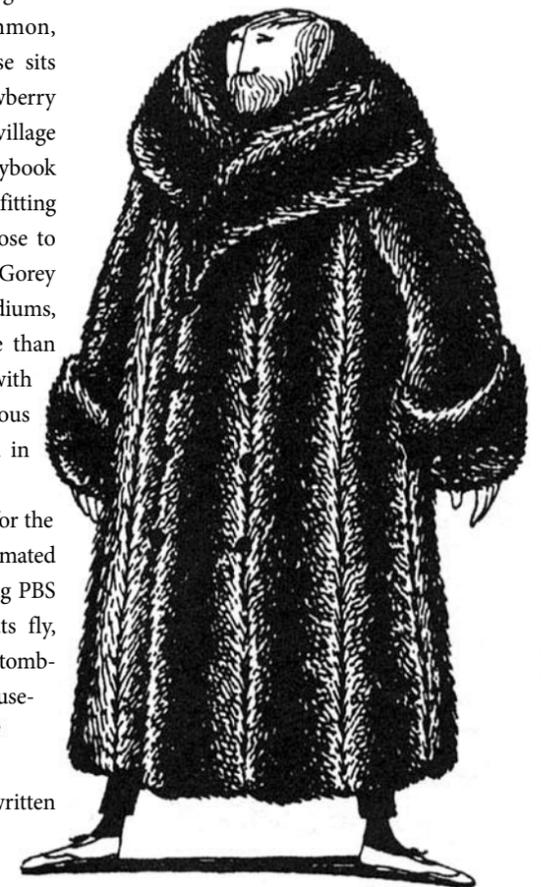
# The glory of GOREY

A special exhibition celebrates the famous artist and author who called Cape Cod home

by Terry Ward Libby

In a particularly pretty bend in the road of the Old King's Highway, overlooking the Yarmouthport Common, Edward Gorey House sits at number eight Strawberry Lane. The antique village setting, and the house with its storybook address, could hardly seem more fitting as the place where the artist chose to spend the last 14 years of his life. Gorey was a prolific artist in many mediums, a writer and illustrator of more than 100 fanciful storybooks filled with enigmatic sketches and mysterious themes that appeal to the child in every adult.

He is probably most famous for the illustrations he created for the animated opening titles of the long-running PBS television series, "Mystery!" Bats fly, villains stalk, damsels moan and tombstones are cleaned by a housemaid with a feather duster, all accompanied by the show's arch and spooky theme music, written

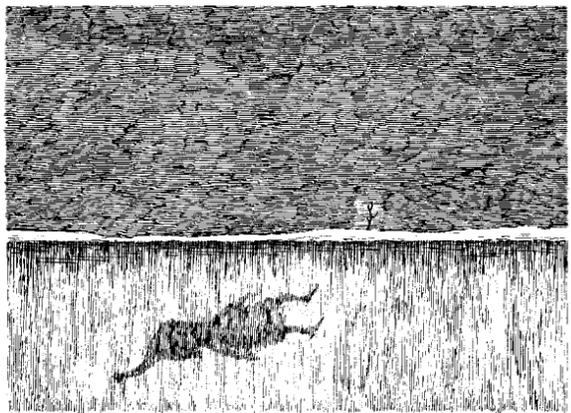




A is for AMY who fell down the stairs



B is for BASIL assaulted by bears



W is for WINNIE embedded in ice



## THE GASHLYCRUMB TINIES

by Canadian composer Normand Roger. The images are classic Gorey. His style is unique, to say the least — so much so, that it sometimes defies description. Gorey presents us with the familiar repertoire of all things scary — the haunted manor house, children in peril, murder most foul — all conveyed in a cartoon parody of English cloak-and-dagger style. Macabre is the word most often used to describe Gorey's work, yet, somehow, that misses the mark.

“Edward was a delightful, intelligent, sweet man whose life had nothing to do with the macabre,” says Rick Jones, a longtime friend of Gorey's, and now the director and curator of the museum at Edward Gorey House. After Gorey's death in 2000, the museum was soon established to showcase his work. Jones estimates that less than half of native Cape Codders, and even fewer tourists, are aware that the house is open to the public.

His primary mission is to change all that.

This year, 2013, promises to be a great one for the museum. On Feb. 22, what would have been Gorey's 88<sup>th</sup> birthday, the famous Google Doodle commemorated the artist and his importance as an iconic American illustrator. (Google issues a surprise doodle on a daily basis, a thought piece with artwork, intended to inform and amuse the company's worldwide network of users.) On that day, says Jones, the museum's website got at least a half-million hits.

This summer the museum will be offering a special exhibition celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of one of Gorey's most enduring books, a triptych of stories called “The Vinegar Works.” Gorey's original artwork, his drafts and final drawings for “The Vinegar Works,” will be on display all season, starting April 18.

The three stories include “The Gashlycrumb Tinies,” “The Insect God,” and “The

West Wing.” In the first, the “Tinies” refers to children, named alphabetically in a series of rhymes, who meet untimely ends: “M is for Maud who was swept out to sea; N is for Neville who died of ennui.” In the second story, young Millicent Frastley is abducted by a strange community of giant insects. In “The West Wing,” Gorey presents 30 sketches, all interior scenes of what is surely a haunted mansion, but with scant clues as to what is really afoot. No captions or stories accompany the sketches, but the images pique the subconscious. Gorey's subtitle for “The Vinegar Works” is “Three Volumes for Moral Instruction.” The reader is left to ponder just what sort of morality the tales mean to promote.

Ken Morton is Edward Gorey's first cousin, once removed, and still resides in Barnstable Village, in a family home that Gorey often visited in summer. Morton has served as a docent at Edward Gorey House and says visitors often looked to him for some kind of explanation of the meaning of Gorey's stories.

“I felt that Edward was disappointed if I asked him what his work meant. He wanted to create the appearance of meaning, to drive people batty trying to figure out ‘meanings’ in his work,” says Morton. “And people didn't always like that answer.”

“His stories were really cautionary tales,” says Rick Jones, “not Grimm fairy tales. They were intended to put your thoughts in a direction they might not otherwise have taken.” As Gorey himself once said about his work, “. . . very little is pinned down, I feel I'm doing a minimum of damage to other possibilities that might arise in the reader's mind.” In this way, his work is like that of other 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernists, especially reminiscent of the work of Samuel Beckett, whom Gorey admired. Gorey's illustrations have been used in publications of Beckett's work, including his iconic play, “Waiting for Godot.”

In the 1970s, the popularity of the introduction to the “Mystery!” series led to an offer from producer John Wulp for Gorey to design the set and costumes for a New York production of “Dracula.” Gorey's work won him a Tony award. According to Rick Jones, the production had its original debut on Nantucket, and this summer, a revival of “Edward Gorey's Dracula” will be presented on the island, using Gorey's original sets and costumes.

Today, visitors to Edward Gorey House will see that it is a sweet-natured place with weathered shingles, dormer windows and a homey, stick-style porch added by some earlier tenant in the course of the house's 200-year history. While Gorey resided here, he kept the place to his minimalist tastes and filled it with his collections of curious objects and many beloved cats. Visitors can see some of Gorey's personal effects, as well as his kitchen, which remains just as Gorey left it. Especially fun is an interactive scavenger hunt, created by curator Rick Jones, which challenges visitors to identify, one by one, all of the 26 “Gashlycrumb Tinies,” as represented by little vignettes and clues subtly placed throughout the house.

For example, says Jones, “R is for Rhoda, consumed by fire,” and there, tucked on a shelf, is a small bowlful of ash.”

The urge to attempt to unravel Gorey's surrealist riddles is what makes his work so engaging and worthy of revisiting, time and time again. “The Vinegar Works” is full of bitter realities — children are mortal and subject to peril — and such unhappy thoughts will, inevitably, cross our minds. Gorey reminds of this and, in ingeniously comic fashion, he manages to lessen our darkest fears and our scariest thoughts, not to exploit them, and that is Gorey's brand of macabre — it is delightfully hair-raising, but never gruesome. ■

## Dracula on Nantucket

John Wulp, the Broadway producer who staged the original “Edward Gorey's Dracula” on Nantucket in 1973, will produce its revival this summer, Aug. 14- Sept. 7. Staged by the Theatre Workshop of Nantucket and directed by actor John Shea, the show will feature reproductions of Gorey's set and costume designs.

It was Wulp who first recruited Gorey to design sets and costumes, then moved the production from Nantucket to the Martin Beck Theater in New York City, where it won Tony Awards for both Gorey and Wulp.



The play starred actor Frank Langella, who was nominated for a Tony for his role.

Shea, an Emmy Award-winning actor with a recurring role on the hit CBS series “The Good Wife,” is artistic director of the Theatre Workshop of Nantucket. As of this writing, the starring role of Dracula has yet to be filled, but several major New York stage talents are under consideration.

Tickets for “Edward Gorey's Dracula” can be purchased online at [www.theatreworkshop.com](http://www.theatreworkshop.com), or by calling the box office at 508-228-4305.

— T.W.L.

## Gorey's Cape Cod Haunts

Prior to becoming curator of Edward Gorey House, Rick Jones was a co-owner of the original Jack's Outback diner in Yarmouthport. Edward Gorey, a creature of habit, ate

both breakfast and lunch there every day. The atmosphere couldn't have been more casual, and members of the public, though they may have known who Gorey was, never disturbed him.

Gorey was a lover of all the Cape's bookstores, but

Parnassus Bookstore, on Route 6A in Yarmouthport, was a personal favorite. In continuous operation since the 1950s, Parnassus is a grand bookstore in the classic sense, a rambling warren of rooms, shelves jam-packed with books old and new, on every imaginable topic.

Gorey was a lover of film and an avid movie-goer. He was a regular at the now-defunct Nickelodeon Cinema on Route 151 in Falmouth, and also at the historic Cape Cinema in East Dennis, with its dramatic ceiling murals by artist Rockwell Kent.

— T.W.L.