

Zofia Kolbuszewska

University of Wrocław (Poland)

The Scandal of Edward Gorey's Necrochildhoods and Children's Literature

Edward Gorey (1925-2000) is the author of exquisitely and meticulously edited little books which unite drawings with text in a unique synthesis. Most of them have been since collected in four anthologies: *Amphigorey* (1972), *Amphigorey, Too* (1975), *Amphigorey Also* (1983), and *Amphigorey Again* (2006), published posthumously. Gorey's books are rooted in the tradition of children's hornbooks and invoke didactic, moralistic and edifying literature for children popular in the nineteenth and at the turn of the twentieth century. Gorey famously claimed that his books were meant for children, but his representations of children's violent deaths scandalized twentieth-century parents seeking to provide their children with adequate reading, pleasant or educating picture books or graphic novels, thus contributing to banishing his books from bookshops children shelves and including them in the sections with literature and graphic novels for adults. The controversy surrounding Gorey's oeuvre, which drew on the early history of literature for children full of exemplary deaths, was foregrounded by the artist's visions of childhood that, drawing on Russ Castronovo's conception of necropolitics and Giorgio Agamben's view of the child put forward in *Infancy and History*, could be referred to as necrochildhoods. Gorey's representations of dead children enact the inversion of the process of the child's entry into the Symbolic order which literature for children is, among other things, expected to help smooth out. He also deconstructs the concept of American alphabetization as discussed in the work of Patricia Crain by employing children's demises to write and draw morbidly alluring necrohistories that can— in a transgressive way and often despite the adult reader's intention to the contrary — impress both adults and children as utterly funny.

Keywords: Edward Gorey, alphabetization, picture books, necropolitics, necrochildhood,

Zofia Kolbuszewska is Associate Professor in the Department of English, University of Wrocław, Poland. The author of two books, *The Poetics of Chronotope in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (2000) and *The Purloined Child: American Identity and Representations of Childhood*

in American Literature 1851-2000 (2007), and several articles on American Gothic, children in American literature, Thomas Pynchon and ekphrasis, she also edited a collection of essays *Thomas Pynchon and the (De)vices of Global (Post)modernity* (2012) and co-edited a collection of essays *(Im)perfection Subverted, Reloaded and Networked: Utopian Discourse across Media* (2015). Her current project concerns horrific ekphrasis in American literature.