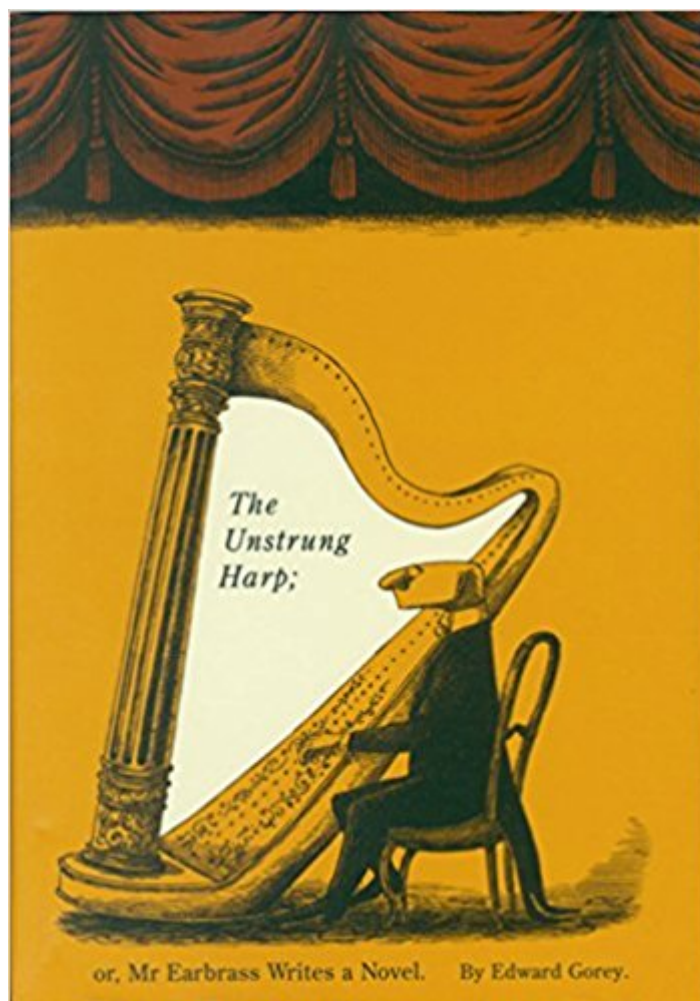


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The Unstrung Harp; Or, Mr. Earbrass Writes A Novel



Synopsis

On November 18th of alternate years Mr Earbrass begins writing 'his new novel.' Weeks ago he chose its title at random from a list of them he keeps in a little green note-book. It being tea-time of the 17th, he is alarmed not to have thought of a plot to which The Unstrung Harp might apply, but his mind will keep reverting to the last biscuit on the plate." So begins what the Times Literary Supplement called "a small masterpiece." TUH is a look at the literary life and its "attendant woes: isolation, writer's block, professional jealousy, and plain boredom." But, as with all of Edward Gorey's books, TUH is also about life in general, with its anguish, turnips, conjunctions, illness, defeat, string, parties, no parties, urns, desuetude, disaffection, claws, loss, trebizond, napkins, shame, stones, distance, fever, antipodes, mush, glaciers, incoherence, labels, miasma, amputation, tides, deceit, mourning, elsewards. You get the point. Finally, TUH is about Edward Gorey the writer, about Edward Gorey writing The Unstrung Harp. It's a cracked mirror of a book, and it's dedicated to RDP or Real Dear Person.

Book Information

Hardcover: 64 pages

Publisher: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; 1st edition (May 18, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0151004358

ISBN-13: 978-0151004355

Product Dimensions: 5 x 0.4 x 7.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (20 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #328,451 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #44 in [Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Art of Comics and Manga](#) #123 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Drawing > Pen & Ink](#) #311 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Drawing > Cartooning](#)

Customer Reviews

This is a reissue of Gorey's first book, which has much more text and a more conventional and linear storyline than many others that followed. However, don't be put off. All the Gorey trademarks are here in full bloom: the illustrations are ravishing in their detail, the text is very funny and absurd, and the story about the agonies of creativity is wonderfully comic in its depictions of the writer's life. This is my favorite Gorey book, bar none.

This book is surely among Edward Gorey's finest. However, I was extremely disappointed to discover that the text of the story, originally hand-lettered by Mr. Gorey, has been set in an utterly non-descript typeface. A poor choice, hopefully on the part of editors. The story itself is marvelous; still and all, some of the charm is diminished when "Collapsed Pudding" is written on a computer and transferred to a page, rather than written out in the author's inimitable style.

The Unstrung Harp, Or, Mr. Earbrass Writes a Novel is a book about writing a book. If you have ever written and published (or tried to publish) a book, you will think every word and picture in The Unstrung Harp is hilarious. Gorey perfectly captures every frustration an author faces as well as most of the odd character quirks every writer seems to share. If you are not a writer, this is still a funny book and will give you insight into the minds of (though I say so myself) a peculiar people.

THE UNSTRUNG HARP was Edward Gorey's first novel, published in 1953. Although full of the droll humour that makes all of his efforts true pleasures to read, it is a little different from later, typical Gorey. There is more text with each illustration, and the characters involved are not as realistic as later, although these illustrations are still pen and ink drawings set in Edwardian times. The story concerns C. F. Earbrass, the "well-known novelist". Earbrass is at work on a new book, and each picture shows a stage. Gorey's book is a wonderful and insightful commentary on the process of literary creation, and I will quote from one page: "The first draft of TUH is more than half finished, and for some weeks its characters have been assuming a fitful and cloudy reality. Now, a minor one named Glassglue has materialized at the head of the stairs as his creator is about to go down to dinner. Mr Earbrass was aware of the peculiarly unpleasant nubs on his greatcoat, but not the blue-tinted spectacles. Glassglue is about to mutter something in a tone too low to be caught and, stepping sideways, vanish." If you could only see the illustration accompanying this you would get the book immediately. THE UNSTRUNG HARP is a very funny book and is worth seeking out by all Gorey fans, although THE OTHER STATUE might make a better introduction.

Length: 1:12 Mins

One of Gorey's wordiest books, it follows the narrative story of Mr. Earbrass, a writer, as he attempts to write a novel. Anyone who has gone through a creative process (such as writing or art) will recognize the entertaining (if not infuriating) stages that Mr. Earbrass experiences. States of procrastination, confusion and eventual satisfaction... If you like this style of book then you might

also enjoy: The Stumps of Flattop Hill

This is the truest-- and most encouraging-- commentary I have ever read on the excitement, pain, embarrassment, distraction, disappointment and eventual repetition of writing a novel. I am revising a novel now, and I return over and over to look at Mr. Earbrass, sitting on the floor with scissors, glue and sherry to fortify himself for the process. It's funny, all right, but if you've ever been there with Mr. Earbrass, bored with your characters and sure that writing is a worthless endeavor, you may find the comedy somewhat smothered under the relief of fellow-feeling.

Some of Edward Gorey's books can be dark but I found this one to be fun and as usual, his art work draws your attention so much that it's hard to concentrate on the story. So I went through the book twice - once for the story and once to study the drawings. I recommend the book.

Honestly, if there is a better illustrated book on how to write a novel, I should certainly like to read it. Since there is not, Edward Gorey's metafiction will do the trick. Whether you're pondering what on earth Poddington's "Te Deum" is, or why the eccentric Mr. Earbrass only writes novels once every other year, you are sure to unravel some of your own uncertainties about the novel's form and how to best attack it. Highly recommended reading for both would-be and current-day novelists.

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