

# THE DRINK TANK 383





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## EDITORIAL BY CHRIS

I do not often speak well of my exes, but here I must because without Melissa, I would never have encountered a poem that has changed my life.

That may be a bit strong, but truly, it's a magical piece.

*The Wild Party.*

She got the Original Cast Recording for *The Wild Party*, which had just then debuted on Broadway with Toni Colette and Mandy Patinkin. She lis-

tened to it relentlessly for weeks. This endless repetition was made easier by the fact that I also loved it. I read the liner notes and discovered that it was based on a poem. I've always liked poetry, so I went and found Art Spiegelman's illustrated version from the 90s.

And man, did that hit home.

It quickly became my second favorite poem ever (right after Susan Minot's *Lust*) and it was remarkable. This is what I'd been wanting to do for years – write poetry that told stories, real stories, DARK stories, but ones weren't mired in that personal hell most poets imbue their works with. It was raw, rough, it had not had the serial numbers filed off.

It also perfectly captured what I thought of as the 1920s. At least I thought the 20s were from having grown up reading *Hollywood Babylon*. It was the environment that Fatty Arbuckle's Coke Bottle existed in. What other world could it be where a dancer and a clown could live so lush? It was so rich with stories of murder, rape and suicide! I fell in love with it, and have re-read it every now and again ever since.

Here's the issue dedicated to the masterpiece. I'm looking at it, Chuck Serface, and others are having a go. It's going to be interesting how the story plays!

I also gave myself a task - I was to try and create a poem along the lines of *The Wild Party*, only set in the present that would be the closer to the issue. I wanted to take it out of the entertainment world of New York in the 20s and put it in the Hipster world of 2014 in San Francisco. It seemed so perfect, and I did manage to write parts of a couple of versions, including an SciFi

version which I'll talk about, but none of them were right, and none will show up in this issue.

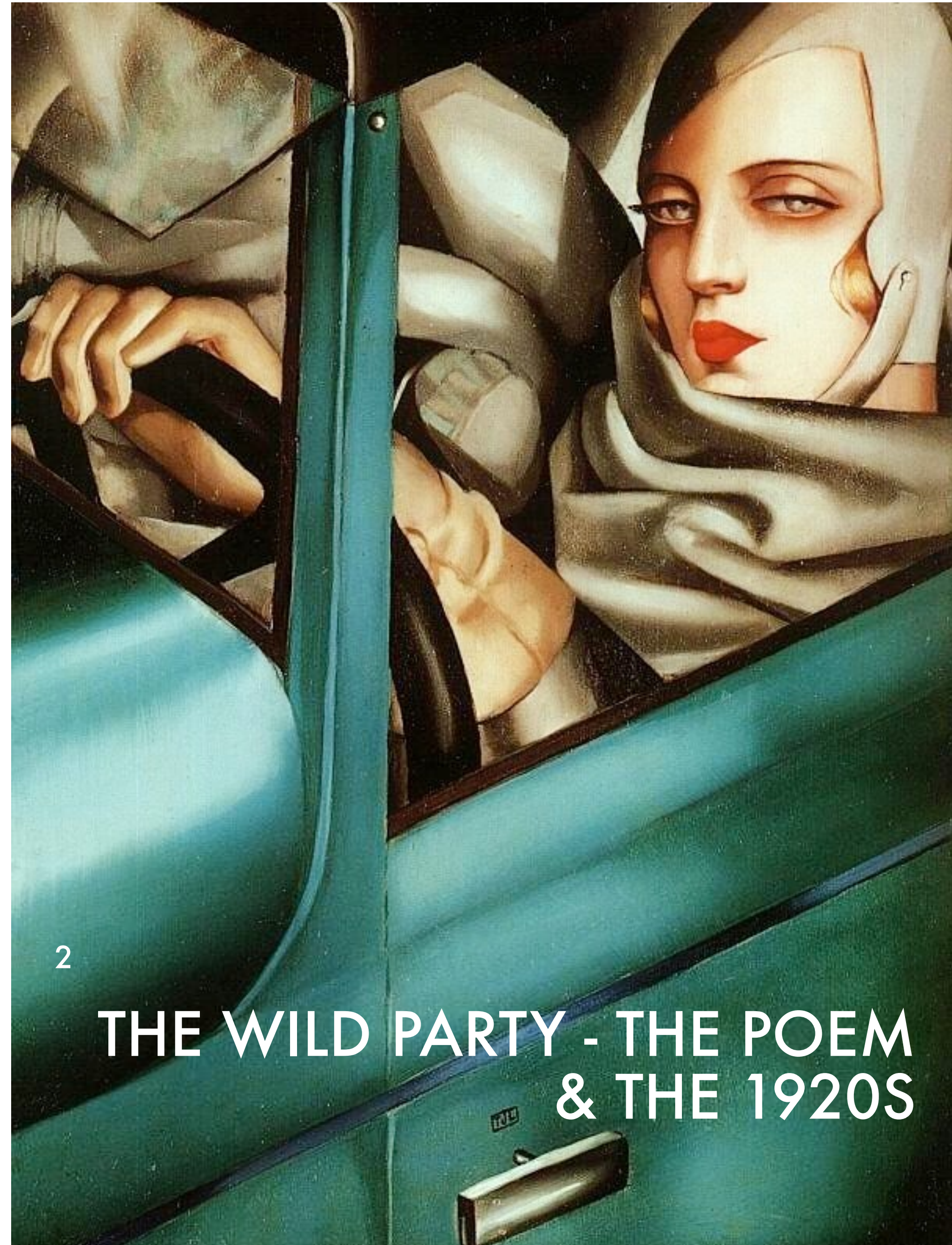
I will talk about my strangest attempt, though...

The first thing that must be obvious is that what's shocking has changed. A large part of the success of *The Wild Party* was that it was going beyond the expected norms, even those of theatre folk. That's hard to do in 2014, but there are ways, right? Can you think of one? A graphic description of an incestuous relationship between performing brothers? Today, that's shocking, but March did it in 1928. Certainly under-aged drinking and sex is a no-no, but it's widely portrayed. Of course, March had that too. Open homosexuality isn't a big deal anymore, and March presented it as a rather regular thing. Drug-use, alcohol, polyfuckery, all manner of wildness was written by March, and all of it was wild! It also got it banned in Boston. The strange thing is that the stuff that was the most shocking would STILL be shocking!

I couldn't write anything that would have ranked with the original.

While we look at the ways in which *The Wild Party* was ground-breaking, but I certainly failed at trying to break ground myself. *The Wild Party* remains the best piece of writing about the human attraction towards wildness!

And now, let us look at Joseph Moncure March's *The Wild Party* and all it hath wrought!



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# THE WILD PARTY - THE POEM & THE 1920S



## JOIN THE PARTY: A REVIEW OF JOSEPH MONCURE MARCH'S THE WILD PARTY

BY CHUCK  
SERFACE

In graduate school, I completed a seminar in twentieth-century poetry in which the professor used the stock market as an extended metaphor for the rise and fall in popularity of the poets we discussed in class. For example, for him T. S. Eliot, Robert Frost, and Ezra Pound represented solid blue chip stocks whose names would appear forever on syllabi throughout academia, much like Adrienne Rich, Robert Lowell, or Allen Ginsburg from the generation that followed. Other poets, alas, would rise and fall depending on how scholars interpreted their validity with regard to the current zeitgeist, or how willing publishers were to issue new editions of their works. My professor adopted this market-based image from an article by John Chapman Ward about Vachel Lindsay, once a “giant of the New Poetry,” and now somewhat akin to Enron in terms of visibility on the Dow Jones of poets. Ward notes: “The stock market rises and falls, but poets who are forgotten rarely rise again; even in the rare book cata-

logs and used book stalls, Lindsay is not seen much these days.”

John Moncure March is another poet my professor might deem as forgotten and unworthy of reinvigoration. His *The Wild Party* has experienced a curious history, however. In 1928 -- two years after he finished writing this narrative rife with gritty sexuality, blowsy characters, and jazz-age debauchery -- the work was released in a limited run. However, unlike Lindsay who eventually fell with no resurrection in sight, March rose in the market periodically. In 1975, Merchant Ivory Productions composed a film of the same name loosely based on March's text, earning the poem a brief resurgence of notoriety. Decades later, Art Spiegelman of *Maus* fame discovered a copy in a used bookstore and in 1994 set forth unto the world his illustrated edition subtitled of this “lost classic.” In Spiegelman, March had earned a latter-day champion, and his efforts once again are enjoying the light of day, this time perhaps for an extended period thank to how Spiegelman's artwork not only enhances the story, but places the book into a different genre than jazz-age poetry alone. I will say more on this later.

A few critics have hoped to keep Spiegelman's revival of March brief. For example in *Artforum*, Griel Marcus deemed *The Wild Party* as “junk,” and labeled Spiegelman's illustrations as merely “a fan's tribute.” Others, however, such as Margo Jefferson of *The New York Times*, were more graciously open-minded. In her review, Jefferson states: “*The Wild Party* works because its author, Joseph Moncure March, believed in every one of its excesses and brought real skill to versifying them.” This idea of belief and skill going hand in hand is crucial to instructing read-

ers in how to approach this poem. In his introduction to the first edition of the book, Louis Untermeyer declared, “I haven't the faintest idea whether it is good or bad poetry. In fact, I'm not sure it is poetry at all.” Nonetheless, he moves on to express admiration:

*All I am certain of is that this is only of the most rapidly moving, vividly projected, highly exciting manuscripts I have read in years. It is frankly vulgar, but rightly so; for the people and the scene it depicts are the very essence of vulgarity. It is brutal, cynical, ugly, sensational – but so is the milieu with which it deals. And first and last, it lives. This Joseph Moncure March (And who in Goddes name is he?) knows his broads and his Broadway.*

Untermeyer gets it. Perhaps March has not written in the manner of Frost waxing philosophically in the woods or in the style of Eliot rhapsodizing on the decay of contemporary civilization, but why should he? Instead he remains true to his subject and his themes, to what he believes, selecting a poetic form that Griel Marcus sneeringly derides as “doggerel,” because in this context such a base, rapid rhythm rightly accentuates the mood. In the end, then, he produces living art.

As for subject matter even Eliot, the High Priest of Modernism and devoutly Anglican, delves into the tawdry when it suits him. Among his collected oeuvre are poems and one dramatic piece featuring Apeneck Sweeney, a character likely to fit in well with Queenie, Burrs, Mr. Black and the other reprobates attending the party March describes. He sets one poem, *Sweeney Among the Nightingales*, in a restaurant or brothel somewhere in South America:

*Gloomy Orion and the Dog*  
*Are veiled; and hushed the shrunken seas;*  
*The person in the Spanish cape*  
*Tries to sit on Sweeney's knees*

*Slips and pulls the table cloth*  
*Overturns a coffee-cup,*  
*Reorganized upon the floor*  
*She yawns and draws a stocking up;*

*The silent man in mocha brown*  
*Sprawls at the window-sill and gapes;*  
*The waiter brings in oranges*  
*Bananas figs and hothouse grapes;*

*The silent vertebrate in brown*  
*Contracts and concentrates, withdraws;*  
*Rachel née Rabinovitch*  
*Tears at the grapes with murderous paws; (Lines*  
*9 - 24)*

March describes a moment from the party in  
Queenie and Burrs's apartment:

*On the bench before the grand piano*

*Sat Oscar and Phil; the brothers d'Armano.*  
*They played with fury to the crowd about them:*  
*Bang and sang,*  
*And tried to outshout them.*

*They swayed: they bent:*  
*They hammered on the keys,*  
*And shrieked falsetto melodies.*

*Now Jackie stood back of Phil,*  
*And his hands just wouldn't be still!*  
*One clutched Phil's shoulder:*  
*The other was bolder:*  
*It ran white fingers through his long black hair,*  
*Then fondled his throat,*  
*And rested there.*

*Phil's hands played on with an agile grace,*  
*But he leaned back:*  
*Lifted his lily-white face.*  
*Jack took it between pink finger-tips:*  
*He bent down and kissed Phil on the lips. (Part*  
*4, Lines 15 – 34)*

Eliot employs complex metaphors and language to illustrate his demimonde, while March opts for a more direct, plain-spoken style measured into uneven couplets of various line lengths. Additionally, Eliot practices restraint while March strides boldly into his subject. Eliot only alludes to sexuality, as with the “stocking drawn up” image in the passage cited above, while March presents brazen scenes of sexuality of all stripes. But regardless of their different approaches to form and content, both succeed in remaining true to their voices, to their beliefs and by doing so successfully emphasize similar moods and themes: seedy, ribald, and lurching toward disastrous finales. Would Griel Marcus and others who turn up their noses to March’s explorations into scandalous material react as harshly to Eliot when he does the same? I speculate, but I doubt it. I will assert, however, that both gentlemen deserve serious appraisal, completely agreeing with Margo Jefferson and Louis Untermeyer that March displays true skill in versification.

**There was little she hadn’t been through.**

**And she liked her lovers violent, and vicious:**

**Queenie was sexually ambitious.**

But having said that, I insist readers encounter *The Wild Party* only through the edition illustrated by Spiegelman. Earlier I mentioned how Spiegelman’s art not only enhances the narrative, but places the book into a different genre

than jazz-age poetry alone, that of illustrated literature. Children’s books stand as the best examples of illustrated literature, for example the lovely renderings W. W. Denslow crafted to accompany the prose of L. Frank Baum. Honestly, certain friends of mine cannot abide any edition of Baum that does not include Denslow’s visual accompaniments. Similarly, I find March’s poem wonderful, but not as wonderful as with Spiegelman’s renditions of the party’s raucous happenings and bawdy participants. Two short-story collaborations from Charles Bukowski and Robert Crumb elicit the same reaction, both of which also involve earthy, shockingly explicit themes. The first, *Bring Me Your Love*, appeared in 1983, and Bukowski tells the story of a man visiting his wife in an asylum for the mentally ill. The second one, *There’s No Business*, came out the following year and here we have the tale of a down-and-out comedian. Bukowski’s stories shine, and yet Bukowski needs Crumb as much as March needs Spiegelman for additional oomph. If only March and Spiegelman had been contemporaries. Then maybe *The Wild Party* would not have had such a roller-coaster ride in the stock market of poets my former professor and I so adore. The poetry breathes on its own, but the embellishments by Spiegelman intensify its excellence. Thus, Joseph Moncure March is bullish once again, so much so that in 2000 Andrew Lippa adapted *The Wild Party* into a musical that opened off-Broadway. Like Spiegelman, Lippa has succumbed and accepted the invitation of Queenie and Burrs, adding his cachet to that of the other guests: Madelaine True, Jackie, Eddie, the brothers D’Armano, Dolores, and, of course, Mr. Black. You too should stop in for a gin and tonic and a quick dance. Do so quickly, however, before the cops rush in!





## THE WILDEST PARTY – FATTY ARBUCKLE & ROOM 1220 OF THE ST. FRANCIS HOTEL, SAN FRANCISCO BY CHRISTOPHER J GARCIA

There is no way Joseph Moncure March would have ignored the Fatty Arbuckle trial. In fact, it's likely that he was fully aware of a lot of the goings-on in Hollywood. He was tied into the entertainment community, and wrote for the *The New Yorker*, so how could he not have known what was going on? There are no direct references to the Arbuckle Affair in *The Wild Party*, but the feeling that the portrayal of the party evokes basically screams that they come from the same stewpot.

Roscoe Fatty Arbuckle. The man was a giant in silent film. He spent a significant amount of his youth in San Jose, was discovered while singing while he worked at the Unique Theatre. He got into Vaudeville during the early part of the 20th century, and then ended up in the pictures, starring with Buster Keaton early, and then going off on his own. Many considered him the second best of the comedians at the time, behind only Chaplin. He cer-

tainly made a lot of money, one of the five top-earning stars of the time, and his pictures were hugely popular. At the time, it wasn't at all unusual for a star to shoot five pictures, a feature and four short subjects, over the course of a few months. It also wasn't strange for the star to not only act, but direct, write, and sometimes even do the filming! This is a recipe for burn-out, especially for a guy who was at least 300 pounds and was as acrobatic as any other performer of the day not named Douglas Fairbanks. He was sort of a prototype for John Belushi and Chris Farley. After a long run of shooting features and shorts, Fatty left Hollywood and came to San Francisco's famous and luxurious St. Francis Hotel to relax by partying hard. During the party, Fatty disappeared for a while with a rising star named Virginia Rappe. There is no one who can say for certain what happened when they were alone, but she ended up having to go to the hospital and dying four days later of peritonitis. No one took her to the hospital for three days, probably because folks were drinking so heavily no one thought it was weird, or they were just too drunk to notice. The party ended up doing a lot of damage to the rooms.

To this day, no one knows what really happened when Fatty was alone with Rappe, but Fatty's version, that he found her vomiting in the other room and he helped her clean up and get into bed, sounds possible. It also doesn't eliminate the possibility that Fatty may have raped her, but it does make some sense, and more than the legend that he violated her with a Coke bottle or crushed her beneath his impressive girth.

Kenneth Anger's account of the party is dark and rather brutal. It paints Fatty in the worst

possible light, conflicts with some of the testimony, and makes Rappe into something of a martyr. It's an interesting take, at odds with a lot of the recorded material, but it is a coherent, and popular, view of the events.

To me, there is no doubt that March's choice of making Burrs a clown is a reference to Arbuckle. The idea that Burrs is Arbuckle isn't new, of course. When Marchant-Ivory put together their film *The Wild Party*, they instantly conflated the poem with the Arbuckle incident. That said, it doesn't quite fit at the same time. Rappe and Fatty weren't involved in a relationship, or so it seems. Yes, booze flowed in that San Francisco hotel room, but there's little evidence that there was cocaine, or heroin addicts, or bi-sexual party-boys, or a Twincest-loving brothers act, but it was San Francisco, so it wouldn't have surprised me.

**"Everyone elsh's awful tight:**

**Yessir!" Said Jackie.**

**"As f'r me, could drink all night.**

You see, the newspaper coverage, and to a lesser extent the newsreel coverage, was highly focused on the immorality of the partying. In 1921, Prohibition wasn't exactly new, but the idea of the Speakeasy wasn't widely-known nationwide. At that point, it was mostly an Urban phenomena, and largely East Coast. The idea that a Hollywood star would throw a party and supply so much booze was enough to taint him to the public, but the lurid situation that reporters designed out of the facts was even worse.

In 1920s America, nothing was more scandalous than sex coming out into the public eye. That's the reason *The Wild Party* was banned in Boston. Presenting sex in any way other than extremely veiled (as in the films of Mae West a decade later, which were also widely-banned) was exceptionally bad form, and the Arbuckle scandal certainly did just that. In the 30s, Mary Astor's affair with George Kaufman became a giant scandal, pushing sex into the papers again. Excerpts from her diary were published and they were quite revealing. Astor was painted as a 'loose woman' both because she was having sex outside of her marriage, and even more so because she was KNOWN to be having sex period. The possibility that Arbuckle was having sex, and if Virginia Rappe was as drunk as many folks claim, forcing himself on her, meant that he was a monster. Sex was bad enough, but even the hint of rape was worse. The tabloids of the day ran with that, and they made Fatty seem like a monster for even throwing a party like he did.

## **The Sunday Tabloid was well-supplied with Murder, Rape, & Suicide**

~ Michael LaChiusa's *The Wild Party*

Of course, Maude Delmont was a major part of the entire situation.

If it hadn't been for Delmont, there'd have been little to no Arbuckle scandal. She was, by all accounts, a grifter. She was known to lure men into compromising situations and then get photos and use them for blackmail. It is almost certain that Delmont was doing the same thing at the St. Francis. That would have been quite easy at the San Francisco party, no doubt. As pre-

sented in *Hollywood Babylon*, and a couple of other sources, Arbuckle insisted that Delmont come along and bring Rappe. She also supposedly tried to break down the door to the room where Fatty and Virginia were, possibly to get pictures to blackmail Fatty with, though this is disputed, Delmont was working an angle, and later she latched on to the Rappe situation and forced it into the light. In Michael LaChiusa's *The Wild Party*, the character of Delores may have been at least somewhat inspired by Delmont. She's the same kind of conniving.

One of the ideas that came out of the Arbuckle trial, and a secondary theme to *The Wild Party*, is that entertainers are not like the rest of us. They are more reckless, less inhibited, more wild. Actors have always had something of a reputation, but in both the papers of 1921 and in the poem, we encounter the entertainer as the least stable and moral of all the strata of society. The way Fatty was portrayed in the papers and Burrs in the poem are similar; they are funny men who have nearly unquenchable appetites. Both the poem and the scandal led to fundamental changes in the way certain communities operated. In Hollywood, to deal with situations like the Arbuckle scandal or the William Desmond Taylor murder, they turned to Will Hayes to act as the "morality czar". In places like Boston or Philadelphia, Decency Leagues were formed, often specifically to deal with literary works like *The Wild Party*. The idea on both counts is that people need to be defended from the un-conscionable actions of creative entertainment types.

*The Wild Party* may not have been inspired by the Arbuckle trial, but it grew out of the time in which it happened, and could not help but pick up some of the markers of the period.

A painting of a woman with dark hair, wearing a white, sleeveless, draped dress. She is holding a piece of grey fabric against her chest. The background features large, flowing blue fabric elements. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the contours of her face and dress.

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**MERCHANT IVORY'S FILM  
THE WILD PARTY**



## THE WILD PARTY BY WILLIAM GARVER

### FROM BOOZE MOVIES

USA/C-108m./Dir: James Ivory/Wr: Walter Marks/Cast: James Coco (Jolly Grimm), Raquel Welch (Queenie), David Dukes (James Morrison), Perry King (Dale Sword), Tiffany Bolling (Kate), Royal Dano (Tex), Annette Ferra (Nadine)

Long before the team of Ismail Merchant and James Ivory became famous for period dramas like *A Room With a View* (1985) and *Howard's End* (1992) they produced this dreary, ham-fisted drama about a hedonistic Hollywood party at the end of the 1920's. James Coco stars as Jolly Grimm, a washed-up, alcoholic silent film comedian who throws the soiree to screen his new film, in hopes of selling it to a studio. Unfortunately, his guests are more interested in engaging in boozing, sexual debauchery, and ogling Queenie (Raquel Welch), Jolly's maltreated mistress, than watching the movie on which the comic has

pinned his hopes. As Jolly begins to realize that his plans for a comeback have failed, he dives deeper into drink and despair, which ultimately ends in tragedy.

*The Wild Party* was loosely based upon Joseph Moncure March's narrative poem of the same name, mixed with touches of Hollywood's Fatty Arbuckle scandal. On top of that, the picture was originally envisioned as a musical, and the resulting muddle can't decide whether it's supposed to be a poetry recital, straight drama, or song and dance. It really doesn't matter that the movie never arrives at a decision, because the drama, poetry, and musical numbers are handled with equal ineptitude.

There are a few elements working in the film's favor, namely Coco's excellent performance and Welch's astounding physical attributes (her body looks great wriggling in a nightgown). Still, although the cast tries hard, they can't compensate for bad direction, a poorly written script, and crappy songs. It's hard to imagine how anyone involved in this dismal production thought that anyone would find it entertaining. You'd be smart to decline an invitation to this party.

It should be noted that although Fatty Arbuckle became embroiled in a scandal following a party that he hosted, his case was nothing like what is portrayed in this film. Arbuckle was innocent of the charges waged against him, and he was merely a victim of the Hollywood gossip machine.

**“Oh hush, honey, Queenie knows what she's doing.”**

**Drinks Consumed**--Whiskey, gin, and champagne

**Intoxicating Effects**--Staggering, stumbling, slurred speech, sentimentality, bickering, brawling, physical violence, public disturbance, loosened inhibitions, soused sex, and passing out

**Potent Quotables**--

*MAID*: Here's the list of liquor for the party tonight.

*TEX*: Twenty cases of gin?

*MAID*: Jolly wants you to leave right away for Pasadena. He says, "Remember, Ginsberg sent ya."

*TEX*: Ginsberg?

*MAID*: Ginsberg, the bootlegger.

**Video Availability**--The Wild Party DVD (MGM)

**Similarly Sauced Cinema**--Dick Van Dyke portrayed another alky comedian of the silent era in *The Comic* (1969).



**THE WILD PARTY  
REVIEWED  
BY  
KENNETH  
ANDERSON**

**FIRST APPEARED  
AT  
LA CINEMA  
DREAMS**

It's a common practice in movie star autobiographies to blame one's career stasis on rigid typecasting imposed by myopic producers and a narrow-minded public. Hypothesizing extravagantly (while never having to actually make good on the assertion), said movie star diverts attention away from a monochromatic body of work by insisting that the untapped wellspring of versatility and range that lies deep within them has been grossly overlooked & underutilized.

Which brings us to the topic of the magnificent Raquel Welch. She, of course, was the reigning, uncontested cinema sex siren of the 60s and 70s, but, like many a sex symbol before and after, Welch spent a great deal of her offscreen time publicly venting her frustration at not being taken seriously as an actress. Finally, in 1974, Ms. Welch's long-held ambition was realized when an offer came from the burgeoning art-house team of Merchant/Ivory ("*A Room with A View*", "*Howard's End*") to star in their film adaptation of Joseph Moncure March's 1928 blank-verse poem of jazz-age debauchery: "*The Wild Party*".

# “Jolly, love! Queenie is so tired! Pour out a cup of coffee for me?”

With the film's locale switched from Manhattan to early sound-era Hollywood and the narrative tweaked to suggest the notorious Fatty Arbuckle scandal of 1921, *"The Wild Party"* casts Raquel Welch as Queenie, a former vaudeville dancer who's now the ornamental mistress/punching bag of mercurial silent screen comic, Jolly Grimm (James Coco). Once the king of Hollywood, Grimm is in a career decline brought on by too much booze and too many bad films, so in a pathetic, last-gasp effort to resuscitate his flagging career, Grimm throws a lavish bash at his Hollywood mansion to launch his already-dated comeback vehicle, *"Brother Jasper"* - a misguided comedy biopic about Franciscan Brother Junipero Serra.

*"The Wild Party"* takes place over the course of an increasingly desperate 24-hour period fraught with unheeded dark omens (Hollywood power-couple Mary Pickford & Douglas Fairbanks just happen to be throwing a party that same night) and humiliating setbacks. Tensions ultimately reach the boiling point with the arrival of a Valentino-like matinee idol (Perry King) who catches Queenie's eye...and vice versa.

The film jumps in and out of voiceover narration and straight-to-the-camera, fourth-wall breaking exposition, using the March poem to provide backstory for the events occurring onscreen (the poem, in rhythm and language, lamentably re-

calls the doggerel poetry of Bonnie Parker in *"Bonnie & Clyde"*). In fact, abrupt shifts in tone become something of a leitmotif in *"The Wild Party"* due to the film trying to be too many things (drama, tragedy, comedy, romance, musical) yet failing to arrive at a single stylistic method by which to make any of them work.

Happily, a movie doesn't have to be good for me to like it, it just can't be bad. So what's a bad movie? A bad movie is one bereft of ideas or a point of view. A lazy creation that panders to the obvious & coddles the established. It's a demographic-driven, corporate-committee product designed to fill seats, sell merchandise, and reap profits...period. When a movie has something on its mind or is inspired by some original creative impulse, I find it difficult to dismiss it completely out of hand. If one searches hard enough, one is likely to find even a tiny flash of brilliance within films that (putting it in the most charitable terms) fall short of their ambitions.

## WHAT I LOVE ABOUT THIS FILM:

Though too stylistically discordant to be considered a really good film, *"The Wild Party"* is nonetheless very entertaining simply because the core dramatic construct of its plot (the one they should have focused on) is so effective. A palpable sense of emotional jeopardy and conflict is forged in having a socially innocuous event like a Hollywood party occasion the bringing together of several disparate, desperate characters with at-odds desires.

*"The Wild Party"* is built on a marvelously provocative premise, but the screenplay and a good many of the performances have a naïf qual-



ity about them that prevents the film from saying anything really significant about the moral decay that lie beneath Hollywood's glamorous image of itself. John Byrum's *"Inserts,"* a small, forgotten film about pre-soundHollywood that was also released in 1975, is the decadent, despairing image of lost fame and hopeless desperation that *"The Wild Party"* sought to be.

## **PERFORMANCES:**

By rights, the role of Queenie should have been Raquel Welch's turnaround role, like *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* was for Jane Fonda, or *"Carnal Knowledge"* for Ann-Margret. It's a great part affording the actress several introspective monologues, a broad range of emotions to play, and even an opportunity to sing and dance. And in portraying a wounded character whose great beauty has proved both a blessing and a curse, Welch even gets to mine that "blurs-the-line-between-fantasy-and-reality" quality that audiences usually eat up.

Well, as much as I'd love to report that Welch rises to the occasion in *"The Wild Party"* (it is her best screen performance, but I think that might be faint praise), she elicits from me a response similar to the one I have when I see an Ali MacGraw movie: I get angry and frustrated that they don't try harder.

Sure, Welch is let down by a weak script that has her talking about her feelings more than showing them, but after so many years of claiming that she has never had a chance to "show her stuff," dramatically speaking, Welch should have nailed her characterization in spite of the poor writing. Instead of a sustained performance, we see brief flashes that are so good they only leave you wondering what could have been possible had she really let herself go.

One problem is that there's no vulgarity to Raquel Welch's Queenie. Without a touch of crass earthiness to set off her incredible beauty (think Sophia Loren) Welch's Queenie comes across as far too self-assured and lacking in the





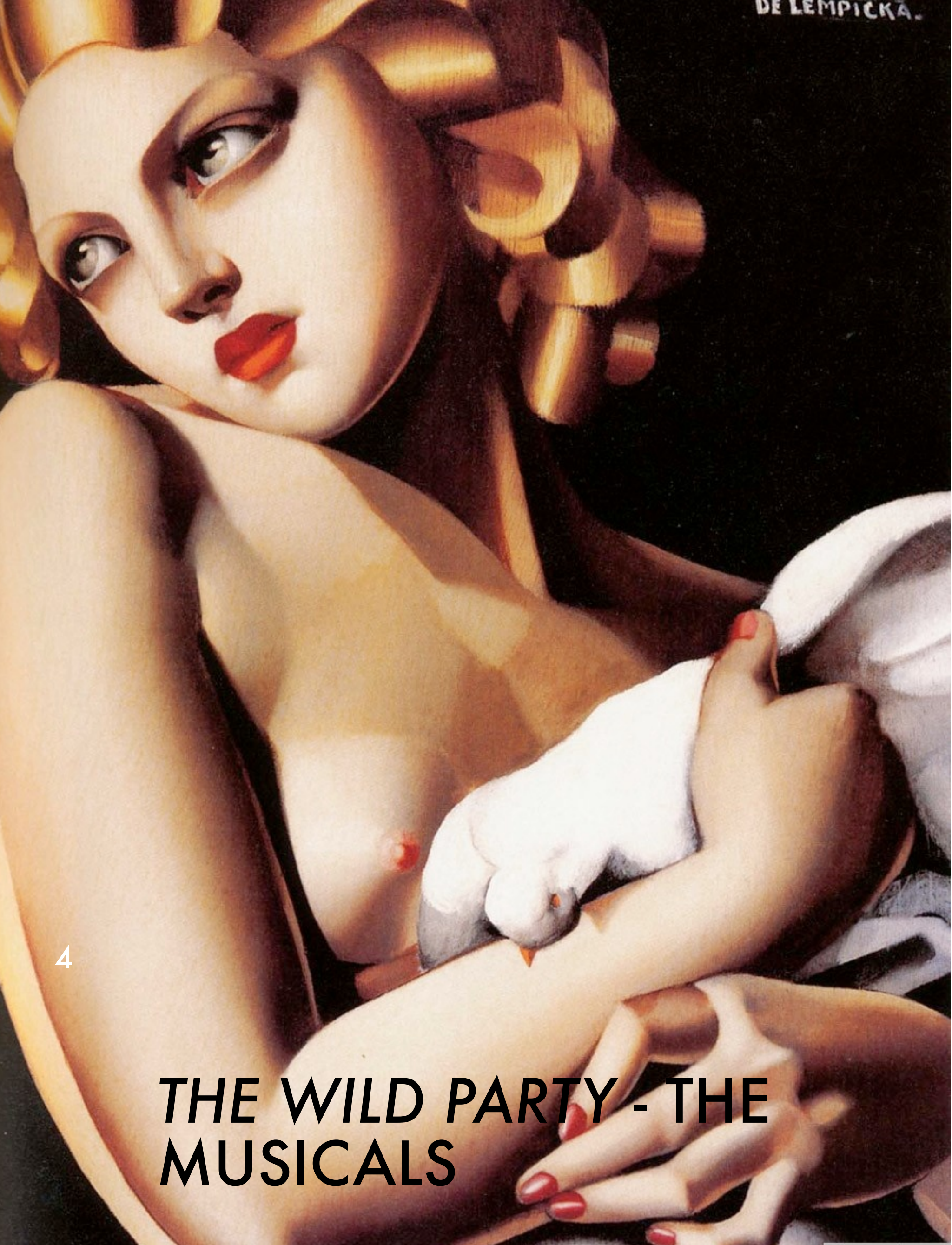
kind of vulnerability that would have made her character touchingly tragic. Instead of being the kind of raucous, life-of-the-party that would captivate a manic-depressive like Jolly, Welch's Queenie is far too regal. There's an awkward self-consciousness to her attempts at appearing care-free or tough (the scene where she threatens to hit Coco over the head with an art-deco clock is so embarrassingly amateurish that it looks like an outtake that somehow made it into the movie) that deprive her character of any real depth. I really wanted to buy Welch in the role and I think she has it in her to be better than she's allowed herself to be onscreen, but here I think she needed either a more talented director or a good kick in the pants.

### **THE STUFF OF FANTASY:**

It's perversely fascinating to me that "*The Wild Party*" (which already has its hands full just being a drama) is also a musical! The songs, by the over-extended Walter Marks (composer of that enduring Sammy Davis, Jr. anthem, "I've Gotta Be Me!", Marks also makes his debut as a

screenwriter with "*The Wild Party*" ) are a mixed bag. Too frequently they kill the mood or render poorly-staged scenes comical, but I have a soft spot for song and dance, so the silly musical numbers are among my favorite parts of the film.

Even in its butchered, American-International Pictures form, I enjoyed the film very much, although it never engaged me very deeply on an emotional level. A better film than the multimillion dollar "*Gatsby*," "*The Wild Party*" is beautifully shot and, if not involving, certainly intriguing in its employment of cringe comedy for dramatic effect. It's fascinating to see the film now, some 36 years later, with the "director's cut" version of "*The Wild Party*" available on DVD. With footage restored and reedited, "*The Wild Party*" is a significantly different and improved film than the one I saw back in 1975.



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***THE WILD PARTY - THE MUSICALS***



## AN INTERVIEW WITH ANDREW LIPPA

*The 2000 theatre season featured two shows with identical titles, based on the same source material. In fact, they both opened with the exact same words – 'Queenie was a blonde and her age stood still.' That said, they were both very different, and in more than just the fact that one, Michael John LaChiusa's *The Wild Party*, opened on Broadway with Mandy Patinkin, Eartha Kitt and Toni Colette, while the other, Andrew Lippa's *The Wild Party*, opened off-Broadway featuring Taye Diggs and Idina Menzel.*

*We were lucky enough to get a chance to interview writer/composer/lyricist Lippa on the phone about his work, about how the original poem effected him, and more!*

**Chris Garcia** – So, let's just dive right in – when did you first come across the poem *The Wild Party*?

**Andrew Lippa** -It was September, 1995, in a Barnes & Noble. The first musical I ever wrote was still running in New York, it was called *John & Jan*, and I was looking for something else to write and I didn't have a project, so I thought I'd go to the bookstore, in the days that one did that, and look at poetry, because I wasn't a lyricist back then, and I thought I would find poems and I would write songs or a song cycle or something. I found the spine, the spine was interesting to me, I pulled it out, and I opened it up and I found the Art Spiegelman drawings, and the book had the red fuzzy interior on the first page, and I thought “hey, this is an amazing book with a red fuzzy interior” and I got to the first page of the poem itself and another incredible drawing and then the first line of the poem itself and it said. “Queenie was a blonde and her age stood still and she danced twice a day in Vaudeville” and I was hooked. That was it.

**CG** – Yeah, that's the quintessential opening. It immediately tells you where everything stands.

**AL** – My intention was to write something like *Cats*, I was going to set a poem to music, and when I started working on the piece, I quickly realised that there was very little in the first person. So, I quickly shifted my focus 'cause that's what I wanted when someone said “I want” or “I feel” or “I do” or “I will”. So I started writing lyrics, and that's how I became a lyricist.

**CG** – Wow, so these were the first lyrics you wrote ever?

**AL** - Yeah, they were. I had written a few parody lyrics, you know for parties or late night revels at the theatre kind of thing, but had never written any kind of songs.

**CG** – No one's ever managed to adapt *The Wild Party* exactly like the poem went. How'd you deal with the adaption to fit your vision?

**AL** – Well, these things sorta happen over time. You know, one of the truisms of writing a musical is that you fall in love with source material, you write your musical, and then bit by bit, you destroy the source material that inspired you in the first place, because source material is usually not, well it would n't be another musical, and usually not a stage piece, it was usually something else. So, in order to make it something that works on the stage with music and lyrics, you end up having to lose much of the essence of what the thing was originally and find its own voice, its own way of telling the story. My original impulse was to just, literally, I would just crack the poem open and write themes and I'd just read the next section of the poem and decide what I thought was the most interesting and what I wanted to write about and I would d just write it, which is not the way I'd recommend anybody go about creating a musical because it took us a lot of development after that. Now, a lot of the musicals are produced in a lot of different ways and some go through incredible amounts of change, and most go through incredible amounts of change, and this was no exception, and I ended up writing probably twenty songs that aren't in the show, that are in a drawer somewhere, but that's not uncommon. Most shows have quite a bit of extra material because you go down this road and you find out it doesn't work, you go down

that road and find out it doesn't work, you eventually figure it out.

**CG** - How long was the workshop process?

**AI** - From beginning to end, from the the time I discovered the poem to the time we went into rehearsal for the Manhattan Theatre Club production, it was just over four years, it was four-and-a-half years from the time I started writing 'to the time we opened in New York. And four-and-a-half years for a new musical, particularly by an unknown writer, which I was at the time, is extraordinarily fast. It takes a while to make these things.

**CG** - Of course, the same season, Michael John LaChiusa's *The Wild Party* opened. Did you see it?

**AL** - I did, because my show closed before their's did.

**CG** - Oh, really? What did you think of the differences between the two?

**AL** - Well, you know, I only saw it once, and it was right in the aftermath of my show closing and not transferring to Broadway. So I can't even begin to suggest that I have an unbiased response to it, and because of that, I don't really know. My answer would be neither coherent nor accurate. The only thing I gathered from their



piece, what I felt while I was watching it, was that they were very interested in the period and its effects on the people in it, and I was very interested in the love quadrangle and the period was merely a backdrop for me. I wasn't interested in writing about the period as much as I was in writing about the incredibly obsessive feelings that the people were having. I think the other piece was more interested in writing about a lot of different things, so we both wrote different musicals.

**CG** – Did you ever see the Merchant-Ivory film *The Wild Party*?

**AL** – No, I never did. I didn't want to be influenced by any of these things that existed out in the world and then have someone come back and say 'you stole from us'. I could always claim I never saw it.

**CG** – You probably made a good choice. If you had to take one song from the show and have it represent the show, which song would it be?

**AL** – For me, it was probably “The Juggernaut”, which I wrote late in the process. You know what, now I'm doubling back. I suppose it's probably “Make Me Happy”, which is the climax of the play. What I love very much about that scene is that it fulfills all of the things I like about musical theatre. It created as much tension as possible in a moment where we knew everything that was going to happen but for one obvious thing, which was who was going to be the one who gets killed. We knew someone was going to get killed but we just didn't know who. I thought that was something I could sustain for five minutes, I could keep that tension. Like, in real life, when someone points a gun at you, what does it feel like and how do you keep the ball in the air and keep the tension in the room. So that was the

goal I had for that scene. And though it's led by Burrs, it's very much a trio for the three major players in the play, Kate is major but she doesn't really take part in that climax. And I'm very proud of that because it delivers a certain entertainment value of people just singing the hell out of something, and yet nothing really happens, there's not a lot of activity in the song, but it's merely three people fighting for their lives, but that's what I love about it too, that the stakes are so high.



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**MICHAEL  
LACHIUSA'S *THE  
WILD PARTY*  
ORIGINAL CAST  
RECORDING  
BY  
CHRISTOPHER J  
GARCIA**

There is a blaring trumpet at the open, followed by a neo-1920s orchestration that sounds a bit like a 1920s 6 piece combo. It hits. It does not lull you into the show – it announces itself to you in a way that is unmistakable. You are aware of the setting of the piece you are about to encounter. You are waiting for it, the 1920s. There is no foolin' the listener. Not at all. This is going to be a ride through that vaunted decade. The Original Cast Recording of Michael John LaChiusa's *The Wild Party* opens without ambiguity, which is endlessly appropriate for the subject matter, and especially the delivery of that material.

*The Wild Party* is the kind of material that demands your attention. As Peter Griffin of *Family Guy* would say, it insists on itself. The music has to compete with the characters, creeps, blackguards, and motherfuckers one and all. It plays out through the story of Burrs and Queenie and the party/fiasco orgy they host, and thus it requires an explosion to start, to capture you, to force your surrender. That's what Michael LaChiusa delivers with his score, and later with his lyrics.



You see, that horn blare gives way to lyrics. Those lyrics just happen to be “Queenie was a blonde and her age stood still/and she danced twice a day in the Vaud-e-ville.” which is one word (and a strange delivery of the word 'Vaudeville') off from the original opening of Joseph Moncure March's poem *The Wild Party*. The entire first song is almost word for word from the poem, and where LaChiusa goes off-book, it works as he captures the time period so well in his additions.

But it is the music, the orchestration, that provides so much of the attitude and impact to the lyrics.

You see, it gives the 1920s. If we were sitting in the audience of a performance of *The Wild Party*, it would be instantaneous recognition of the sets, the costumes. Within the instrumentation itself, even if not a single word crossed the lips of any singer, there would be no question that this was a work set in the 1920s. From the use of hat-muted trumpets and trombones, to the bit of raucous jangle, it all gives off that impression. In particular, piano is well-presented particularly in songs like Uptown and Dry. In both those cases, there is an almost staccato rhythm at work, though each goes in a different direction. “Dry”, in particular, shows the drive of the entire show. It is a riotous song that features about half the cast chiming in. It's a lovely din, at times, but it also comes together to form a song that hammers the sense of a manic party that is headed for a disastrous crash. It may be the single song that sums up the Party aspect of *The Wild Party*.

While the rollicking songs give the setting and mood to the party, it is LaChiusa's ballads that most imbue the piece with an emotional reso-

nance. Queenie, sung with a soulful mix of abandon and grief by Toni Colette, delivers heart in several songs, notably “Lowdown, Down”, and the duet “People Like Us” with Yancy Arias singing the role of Black, where she gives us the sense of a woman who is so damaged that she has taken to damaging herself, or more accurately, to finding those who would damage her. She powers the vocal when she needs to, and lays back a bit when it's called for. This is especially apparent on “People Like Us” when she powers the phrasing in tandem with Arias. When she hits, she hits hard.

The lyrics, often drawn from the original poem, are powerful, and the non-March lyrics are every bit as good. They give lots of room for interpretation by the performers, which is something often over-looked in the writing process. If you look at the complexity of a song like “Queenie Was A Blonde”, the opening number, you'll see how much room there is for playing with the words. In that particular song, the voices of the cast become instruments of emotional table-setting. The way some phrases, like “Queenie was sex-u-ally ambitious” positively drip influence onto the scenario and give the entire work a sense of slimy sexuality that almost makes you want to take a shower.

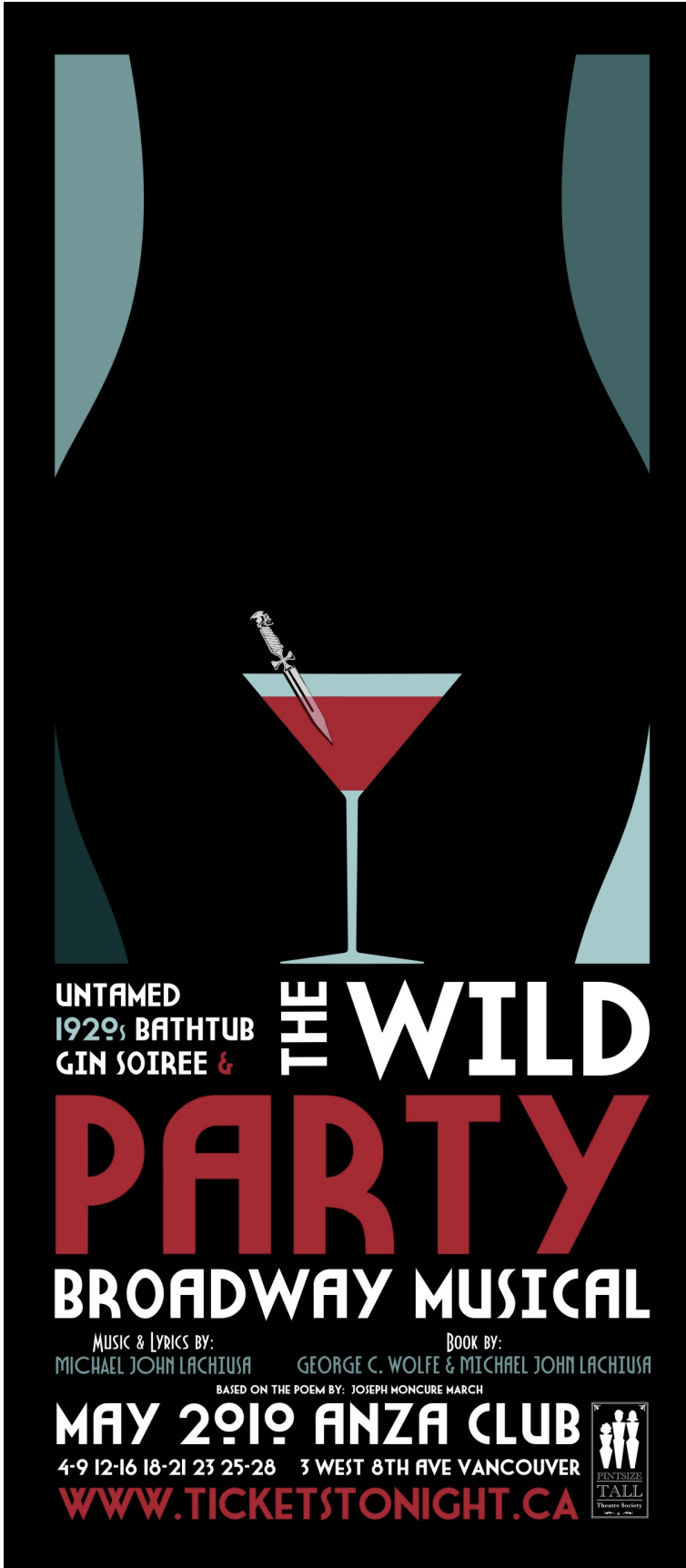
Of course, the performers sing every song with all the force and emotion they can muster, but it is Marc Kudisch and the legendary Mandy Patinkin. Kudisch's Jackie, the ambisexual ne'er-do-well, gives so much joy to every song he inhabits. His soft delivery in More is deliciously leading, almost taunting, but at the same time, it fully shows his character's motivations. On “Breezin' Through Another Day”, he's full-voice popping through his need to relax and lay


his head among the lower classes. I really think that his performance in those two songs make him a major star of the soundtrack.

Patinkin is a genius, and his version of Burrs, Queenie's lover and clown, is dead-on. He rolls between very high hills. The peak of his jaundiced joy in conspicuous consumption has to be in the song "Gin", while he hits the deepest root of his sorrows in "How Many Women in the World?". There, while he is still the powerful Burrs, he has swung from libertine to cuckold without a hitch. His explosive number, "Wouldn't It Be Nice", sees him call out Queenie's adultery at the same time as exposing everyone's secrets. It is a difficult task to play that many different emotional notes without hitting a sour one, but Mandy does it, bless him.

And then there's Eartha Kitt.

She plays Delores, an aging former star who is desperate to get back into the spotlight. She's great, with that smoky voice that purrs and growls as opposed to speaks or sings. "Moving



UNTAMED  
1920s BATHTUB  
GIN SOIREE & **THE WILD**  
**PARTY**  
BROADWAY MUSICAL  
MUSIC & LYRICS BY: MICHAEL JOHN LACHIUSA    BOOK BY: GEORGE C. WOLFE & MICHAEL JOHN LACHIUSA  
BASED ON THE POEM BY: JOSEPH MONCURE MARCH  
**MAY 2010 ANZA CLUB**  
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Uptown", an up-tempo number that really gives us her story, is a solid number and a decent showcase for Kitt. It's not a show-stopper, but it is at least not a filler moment.

Her big number at the end, "When It Ends", is as powerful a piece as you'll ever find. It's slow start and rising tempo, mixed with Kitt's delivery, and the way she hammers "So you better pray to Jesus, or Mohammad, or what-ever!" gives us the idea that this character is not only not done yet, but that the audience in the world of *The Wild Party* are lesser for not continuing to be impressed with her talents. She may deliver the most impressive single song, though she is not positioned to carry much of the story beyond being presented as a shit-stirrer who happens to be right.

The problem with a lot of Original Cast Recordings is that they don't quite give you the story of what's happening. Not so in this one. Yes, we're not given anything in the way of context for the songs, but like in the poem itself, it is a self-contained unit and you do not have to go outside it to find the destination it is leading you to. The story is all right there, right in the songs, and that is beautiful.



5

# THE WILD PARTY TODAY



## THE NEXT WILD PARTY – HOW I TRIED TO UPDATE THE STORY BY CHRISTOPHER J GARCIA

Let's face it – everything needs to be re-done at least once every fifty years. If not, well, the material just won't appeal to an audience who was raised on a different paradigm. Now, often these re-boots are awful, even when viewed as if they were new ideas. The problem is often the ideas are so thoroughly rooted in the times of the original that they can't be translated.

Now, with something like *The Wild Party*, you have themes that are universal, and I'd argue timeless. The idea that Entertainers are a wild bunch, that sex is as much a drug as cocaine, that when a couple is falling apart, the introduction of an outside source of comfort is the worst possible solution, that a party is

the place where people are the most destructive. Those things translate well to any era. So it makes sense that one would work to bring *The Wild Party* into new light, right? That makes sense. You can take those themes and apply them anywhere, to any time period.

Or location...

And thus, I started work outlining, and even writing a new version, but instead of Manhattan in the 1920s, or even San Francisco in the *Two Thousand Teens*, I went with *A Generation Ship* on the way to some far-off moon where Humanity will live out the rest of its days.

And yes, I can hear your eyes rolling from here.

The first step was to come up with a line to introduce the reader to both the setting, the focus character, and the kind of story they'll be encountering.

Queenie was a blonde and her age stood still

and she danced twice a day in Vaudeville.

BAM! You know where you are. I struggled with something until I came up with a very simple line that paid homage to the original, but also set a completely different table.

Queenie was in charge of the sector's machines

and somehow her hands remained sparkling clean

To me, that tells you several things. First, she's in a regimented society, one in which she has a role of significant power. She's 'in charge',

which means people answer to her. That's a key. By mentioning 'sectors', I was giving the clue that this was not a typical setting, that there was an order there as well. While not specifically screaming 'SPACESHIP!', it did give the idea that this is not a natural space, but one divided, and likely created, by humans.

The hands, I admit, were a touch out there. To give the idea of a machine along with hands being clean would seem to indicate that she wasn't hands on, perhaps a bureaucrat or some sort of over-seen. Queenie in this story, is first identified with the position she holds, and not with her physical attributes, at least other than her hands.

I started to draw Queenie in this story as a significant figure on a ship heading to a distant moon. She was not rich, but she held a position that allowed her a lot of opportunities to interact with folks from other sectors, and thus was a traveller within the ship. She wasn't an entertainer in my vision, but more a schmoozer, a politician. These are the kind of things that have to change. Oh, she still liked her lovers, violent and vicious, for Queenie remains sexually ambitious.

And that brings me to Burrs.

When you're looking at things like updating a character who is a clown for another time and place, you have to consider what the role meant in the original setting and what kind of person filled the same role in the next setting. In the case of my attempted time-skipping film version (I wrote about it in *Challenger* a couple of years ago), I equated a Vaudeville clown in the 20s with a TV comedian in the 50s (think Frank Gorshin when he appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show*), and to a prop comic in the 1980s. Today,

I'd say he's have to be a YouTube celebrity, but what would the role be on a Generation ship?

My guess is it'd be a clown.

This one might take a bit of convincing. You see, clowning is one of the oldest forms of entertainment. It's at least as old as Babylon, and probably much, much older, and it's so old because it's so simple. At its core, clowning is basically the use of the face and the body for comic effect. That's it, and while that covers a lot of ground, it's so vital. Clowning can be seen as the basis for all comedic performance. The Clowns we know, and fear, today are a specific flavor that developed more recently. Clowning is the perfect form of entertainment for a generation ship. Lets say you develop a generation ship using a large number of people from different cultures, perhaps speaking different languages and traditions. Clowning can easily be silent, or at least without words, and that would make it a useful skill. In addition, clowns are also able to perform with any level of props. That's a key thing. On a long-flight ship, you're gonna have a limit on non-essential items. Yes, singing, dance, and gymnastics will all be popular activities on such a ship, but I really see clowning as a major growth industry!

Now, for Burrs himself, I envisioned him as a 40-ish and the 'smilin' on the inside kind of clown'. Just like in March's poem, he's violent, but he keeps it under wraps. He presents a public face that is joyous and light, while he is dark and brooding and angry when not in the lime-light. He's obsessed with Queenie, and in the position that Queenie holds, she's often away and that makes him fear she's cheating on him.

Of course, she is.

In this one, he holds a position not quite of honor, but also not one of usefulness. He's respected at his craft, and he's able to mix with decent society... though he usually doesn't.

The relationship between Burrs and Queenie is much like that in the original. It's dicey, they're always at each others' throats, and Queenie is at the end of her rope. Burrs is hypersensitive.

Now, everything hangs off these two. You've got to establish that they need the party, that it's both a distraction and an opportunity. A distraction from each other; an opportunity to make a new connection.

Now, while we've got those two, there are a ton of other characters, and that's one of the things that defines *The Wild Party*. The large number of characters is an important part of the story, and the first important character is Kate. Kate is Queenie's best friend, and rival. Perhaps she's the best example in history of a Frenemy. She brings her beau, Black. Kate is tough, and she would make a perfect politician rival for Queenie in the Space-faring version.

Black, who comes to the party with Kate, is young, strong, and handsome. He would be the kind of guy who would be noticed, and on a huge ship, it would be hard for Kate to have such a boyfriend and not have him seen. Well, say he's from another sector, and maybe he's of a different class, and that would explain it. I would write him as a hyper-confident guy who is caught in Queenie's spell. That's easy, but in my version I'd also make him completely pointless outside of being pretty. On a Generation Ship, it would be next to impossible to live without being put into a

role. If a healthy young person was without portfolio, it would certainly be something.

Now, the story would go that Queenie arranged the party after a fight with Burrs, and when she saw Black, and drew him in, that they paired off and when Burrs got wind of it, he went nuts and started coming up with a plan to get rid of Black.

After those, there's Eddie and Mae. Mae is a former dancer friend of Queenie's in March's poem, and she's just someone from the Sector in mine, but Eddie, who March designed as a boxer, is an MMA fighter. There's no way that boxing would be allowed, medical resources would be far too tight for such a thing, but MMA, at least when done with strong rules, is far less dangerous. So, make him from one of the non-dominant races of the ship, and you've got that character nailed.

Jackie is a bon-vivant, and it's easy to portray him as a sort of Good Time Boy. He's ambisexual, and he goes after one of the Brothers D'Armano, an incestuous pair of brothers who are also singers. In this one, make him some sort of prodigy who has ridden the coattails of a famous father and you've got him. For the Brothers, well incestuous singers is perfect.

The big problem I had while developing it wasn't the story, that was pretty easy. It was living up to *The Wild Party's* shocking nature. With a few exceptions, there's nothing in *The Wild Party* that would be all that shocking today. That incestuous brother pairing notwithstanding. An excellent example is Madeline True. In the original was a... gasp!... lesbian. Not shocking.

So, how do you create shocking content today?

Well, you can't. Even if you presented it as a BDSM party held with everyone being stripped naked, given a tub of Crisco and a straight razor, it won't register as shocking to a fair portion of the audience. Instead, imagine that the shock doesn't come from the things people do, but instead from who the characters are. Yes, incest and under-aged sex will make eyebrows raise, but not much. Setting things in the science fiction context will help, as genre readers, while not overly prudish, are the type who can still be shocked. Now, put each of the characters into some sort of respectable family tradition. I used traditional Earth family names and such to make points. I also did what I consider cheap tricks, such as giving an incredibly WASPy character the name Singh. That sort of thing happens. Imagine political figures talking plainly about the choices they made in the course of their work, matter-of-factly, or even bragadociously, describing how they sent people to their death without a thought about it, as if each worker was just another ant in the hill. Imagine characters engaging in sexual acts while conversing with others casually. Yeah, that's not overly shocking anymore (and has been used in films like *Walk Hard*) but that level of disregard for the sex act may still have some level of discomfort for readers, and thus may technically still be shocking.

I also worked a bit tighter, and more profane, with the language. While March held little or nothing back in his topics, he was less forward with his phrasing. Here's a sample portion -

*"Fuck."* Jackie uttered

*And gently shuddered*

*kissing him again*

*the Festival of Hands began*

*along their backs and in their pants*

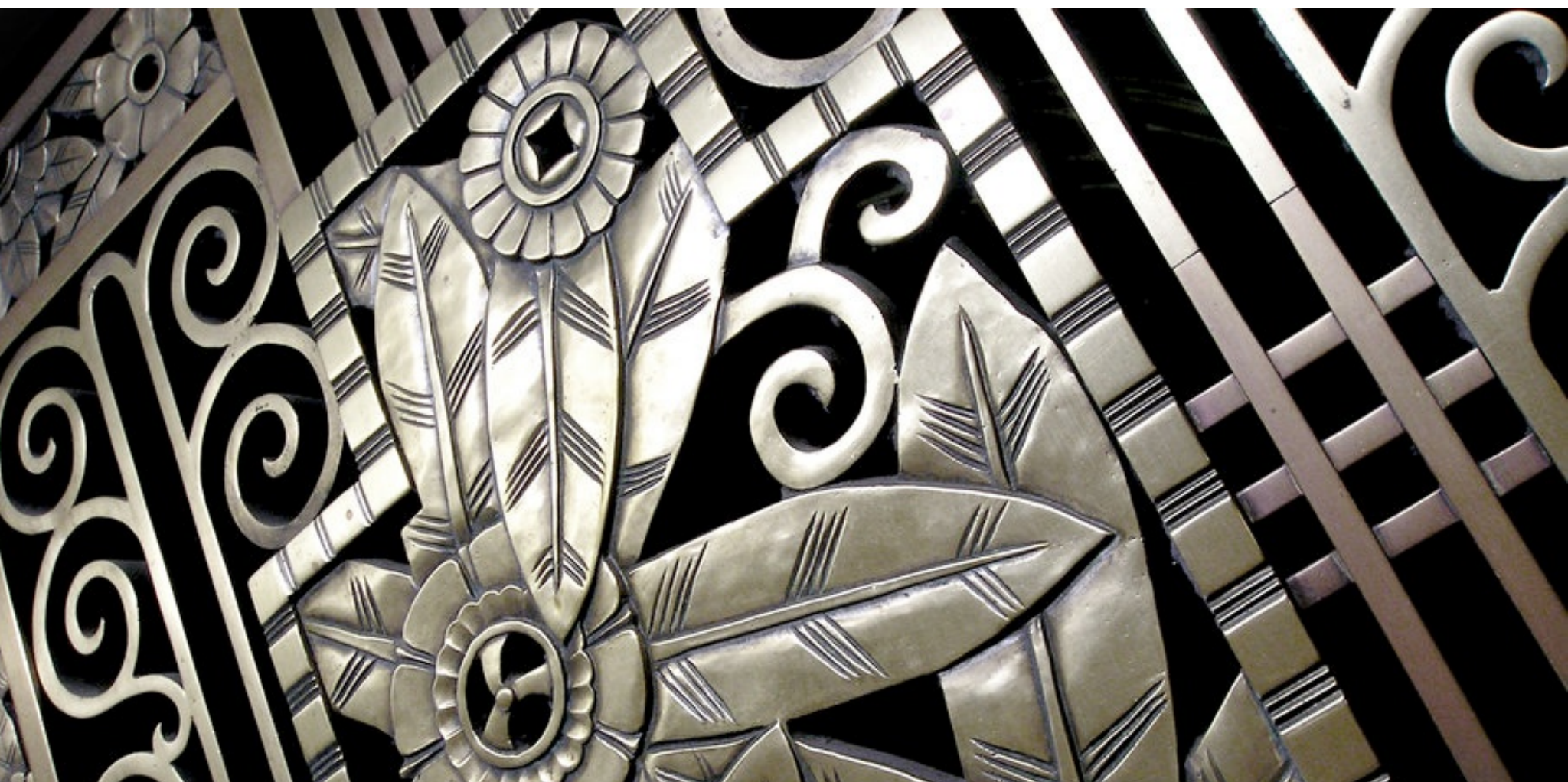
*sexual minstrels played their acts*

That, of course, was from when I was trying to do the rhyming thing, which worked in small doses. I didn't get too far with it, but I knew that if I was going to write a new version for today, it was going to have to swear and be bolder.

One thing I did map out was how the whole thing happened between Queenie and Burrs to lead to the tragic fall. Queenie flirts with Black, who makes showy love to Kate when he knows that Queenie can see them, just as Queenie uses oral sex with Burrs as a way to gather lust for her from Black. Both these tactics work in spades, and after Kate is distracted with throwing up after engaging in too much booze (which would be HUGELY difficult to acquire since making it is highly wasteful) and Burrs is off with Mae's kid

sister Nadine, who in the poem I think is 15, and in mine is 13. That allows Queenie and Black to scurry off and find a small niche to crawl into unseen and make love, as well as connect romantically. Burrs get wind of this from a drunken Jackie, who had managed to spy on the two of them. Burrs then creates a plan to get Black into a space where he can send him out the airlock. Burrs puts it to work, and ends up using the ill Kate as bait, having her wait in the second air tight area between the main ship and the shuttle docking bay so that he can get him to go to greet the shuttle, then Burrs would close the door behind him, open the shuttle bay doors and boom, he's out of the ship. He puts the plan in motion, but is given extra special drugs by Eddie and ends up tripping balls, leading to him failing to notice that while Nadine was told to get Black to help Kate, Queenie went in his stead, following a kiss with Black. Burrs didn't notice the switch, instead blasting Queenie out the airlock.

That's dark enough, right?







## THE POEM THAT LAUNCHED A THOUSAND HIGH SCHOOL PARTY FILMS BY CHRISTOPHER J GARCIA

When I watch a film like *Can't Hardly Wait*, I see them for what they are: simple stories of characters and how they behave when they are supposed to be having a good time. They're just that - Simple. The parties have predictable paths they follow, there's always booze, typically drugs, usually sex, and a high level of inappropriate behavior when put into the context of the world in which the film exists. *Can't Hardly Wait's* not the only party film out there. There are a bunch of classic films from the 1980s and 90s set at parties, typically teen parties of one sort or another. *I Love You, Beth Cooper* would probably qualify, *Dazed and Confused* certainly would. You could stretch it a bit and put films like *Eurotrip* into that category. And it's not just movies of teens having the wildness at a party. *The Party*, featuring Peter Sellers, is one, and the more recent *The Lather Effect*, with Connie Britton and Eric Stoltz, is another. Party films are all over the place!

They also happen to be some of my favorites.

You can look at the 1920s as being the place where they originated, and if you look a bit more closely, you'll see that *The Wild Party* also resembles the worlds that are presented in high school party movies.

Let's start with the times in which *The Wild Party* was created. It was the 1920s, Prohibition was in full effect, which led to an explosion in the public consumption of alcohol in private. This is easily echoed in the world of the High Schooler. Booze is banned to them, and thus it is everywhere. I can remember drinking vodka mixed with grape soda while at play rehearsals when I was at Santa Clara High. The parallels are obvious.

*The Wild Party* is largely about sex. High School itself is largely about sex, and as so many movies of the 80s, 90s, and even today, will tell you, High School films are largely about the chasing and making of sex. In *The Wild Party*, sex is less a path to love, but more an experiment in what the boundaries of a relationship, or even more pointedly, the boundaries of what is acceptable in a given situation. This perfectly defines the role of sex in High School, and especially in high school movies. In *The Wild Party*, the characters are acting like teenagers, and even more so, they're acting like over-privileged teens. In the film *Dazed & Confused*, the teens are acting far more like adults, though they're all still testing out not only what is acceptable, but what is possible within the roles they play in the situation.

No film looks at the role of sex and romance in a high school setting better than *I Love You,*

*Beth Cooper*. It is the story of a nerd who makes his big move on the girl of his dreams through his graduation speech. She's the most popular girl at the school, or was before they graduated. The pair, along with three friends, meet up and spend an insane night going through post-graduation situations that all came from, or were noted by, our hero in that speech. The pair spend the night looking through their positions, at how they've both been defined by their roles in the school, by the people around them. There's also sex, a somewhat off-kilter look at homosexuality, at drinking, at drugs, and at violence. The parallels between it and *The Wild Party* would seem thin if it weren't for the fact that in both, it is unexpectedly sudden romance that leads to our conclusion and the definition of the genre of the piece.

We can see further connections between *The Wild Party* and *Can't Hardly Wait*. In both, the party is wild, far wilder than the hosts ever expected. In March's poem, we see characters who are dealing with their relationships deteriorating because a new partner becomes a possibility. *The Wild Party* is a tragedy because of how Burrs and Queenie fall apart, even within a story that has a lot of comedy. *Can't Hardly Wait* is a comedy because of how Preston and Amanda come together in a story that is often a bit dark. There's also a strong feeling of a party that is inevitably heading towards a strong, and always certain, conclusion... though that's the truth about all well-written stories, right?

One of the other sources for the themes that are so prevalent in party films is the tradition of the 'orgy' in the silent films of Erich von Stroheim. Now, they weren't literal orgies (though there are stories...), but there was always a party,

the shooting of which took place over a weekend. Von Stroheim would throw a party with actors, extras, folks just hanging around, and he'd shoot various moments all the time. This gave off the impression of a party that was not under control. This got him in trouble with censors (I'm pretty sure they had to make a lot of cuts to mollify Will Hayes) and probably ended his career earlier than it should have ended. These scenes, narratively, are nothing like the modern party film, but they feature so many of the signs of party films, including the sweeping camera.

Now, what's funny is that Hollywood was insane during the 1920s. Fatty Arbuckle, the stories of the events that folks like Gloria Swanson and William Desmond Taylor attended, so many parties, the drugs, the drinking. It was a crazy time, and everything that happened in *The Wild Party*, was happening in Hollywood, and a thousand times more. The thing that's funny is that March didn't have Hollywood in his mind – he had New York and Vaudeville, which was oddly far tamer. They were no saints, these Vaudevill-

ians, but they didn't have the disposable income or the steady address that stars of the pictures had. When you look at the modern high school movie, they are far more based on the idea that these are people who are forced to interact because of their location (like Hollywood or the 1920s Vaudeville circuit). *The Wild Party* is a gathering of characters who have no reason to interact other than the party. The parties in a high school teen movie are thrown are not a group who has chosen a sort of family, they've come together because they made it through a trial and are now wanting to either kiss off their days together with a bang, or to take revenge on various folks.

So, *The Wild Party* is something that almost no screenwriter has read, but they've worked in the same vein, bringing in the same ore. They have managed to evoke the same emotions, and while one is more extreme than the other, they're so very similar.





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## THE DRINK TANK

Edited by Chris, James, and Vanessa

The Chapter Introduction Art is all from the legendary painter Tamara de Lempicka. Her work may be the best Art Deco in painting.

Ken Anderson writes

<http://lecinemadreams.blogspot.com/>

William Garver writes <http://boozemovies.com>

Chuck Serface is The King of Men