

Drawn to Spiegelman's Wild Party

by M.C. Beaton

Joseph Moncure March's *The Wild Party*, we are told, is the book that made William Burroughs want to be a writer, so now you know who to thank, or blame depending on your perspective. It is this perspective that will most likely also determine your reaction to the rejuvenation of what is being hailed as a "lost classic".

The Wild Party
Joseph Moncure March
Pantheon Books

The Wild Party is the story, told in rhyming couplets, of a brutal couple and their evening of drunken debauchery. Moncure March's verse captures the coy aggression of drinking and the social circus from which it often flows:

*The way they drank was unholy
They hovered around the glass-filled tray
Ravenously,
Like birds of prey.
White, intense;
With mask like faces
Frozen in rigid, gay grimaces.
They chattered and laughed*

Stony-eyed:
Impatient:
Hasty:
Preoccupied.

However, at 109 pages and considering the increasingly prurient drive of the narrative, it does tend to

read like an over-extended limerick. This book, that was once banned and called immoral, is now being received as realistic. Realistic, in so far, that it depicts relationships other than the heterosexual. The depiction however is manipulative and callous. This lack of love for its characters leaves them

as little more than sorted characatures. It is this cold depiction that will leave some readers wishing this lost classic had stayed that way.

Ironically, the redemption of this book is its lurid drawings. Art Spiegelman, the book's illustrator, is credited on the jacket with twice the font size of the author. Indicating, I think, a recognition on the part of the publisher of where the virtue of this book lies.

Spieglesma, is probably best known for *Maus*, a 'comic art' portrayal of his father's years during the holocaust. Here, Spiegelman turns the same dark knowing eye on jazz-age society revealing a shadowy, sexy and disturbing world. Spiegelman's ink on scratch board

drawings go further to disquiet than the text. Burrs, the dominant male character is shown about to hit a woman with a shoe, while in the lower corner of the page an advertisement appears for your "choice of Cuban or Spike Heel" leather pumps.

The art work is cynical, stylish and contributes a depth to *The Wild Party* that rescues it from being a nasty joke and delivers it to the realm of art with rhythm. If we can call Spiegelman accompanying art the chorus to the doggerel verse, Moncure March's words best describes the books lasting value: "The verse was nothing—but the chorus was Art; And its music was enough to tear you apart."



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