



Gerald's Party

Robert Coover

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

Gerald's Party

Robert Coover

Gerald's Party Robert Coover

Robert Coover's wicked and surreally comic novel takes place at a chilling, ribald, and absolutely fascinating party. Amid the drunken guests, a woman turns up murdered on the living room floor. Around the corpse, one of several the evening produces, Gerald's party goes on — a chatter of voices, names, faces, overheard gags, rounds of storytelling, and a mounting curve of desire. What Coover has in store for his guests (besides an evening gone mad) is part murder mystery, part British parlor drama, and part sly and dazzling meditation on time, theater, and love.

Gerald's Party Details

Date : Published September 25th 1997 by Grove Press (first published 1986)

ISBN : 9780802135285

Author : Robert Coover

Format : Paperback 320 pages

Genre : Fiction, Literature, American, Contemporary, The United States Of America, United States

 [Download Gerald's Party ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Gerald's Party ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Gerald's Party Robert Coover

From Reader Review Gerald's Party for online ebook

Steve says

What a rollicking nutball good time!

Melanie says

In an attempt to tie up the year's loose ends, I decided it was time to return to, and finally finish reading the last thirty pages of, *Gerald's Party*.

I was using a train ticket as a bookmark.

The ticket was dated January 4, 2009.

That's my review of *Gerald's Party*

John Sundman says

Coover takes a minimally interesting premise--a cocktail party right out of a Hieronymus Bosch painting as the setting for a send up of the classic Agatha Christie "closed room" mystery--and beats it to death. I guess the meta-joke is that just as the hellish party is inescapable and goes on forever, the book is inescapable and goes on forever. Fortunately, however, the book is escapable-- you have only to stop reading.

Certainly Coover deserves some style points for verbal skill and unrestrained imagination. The book is finely crafted, in the sense of the interlocking stories & themes, the literary allusions & wordplay, etc, etc.

But it's pointless and ugly. Why would I want to read a thirty page "joke" about a stopped toilet and skating over a vomit-covered floor? How much necrophilia is "enough" for one avante-guard novel?

It might have been an interesting and perhaps disturbing story at 50 pages. But at more than 300 pages, it's just a bore.

Vit Babenco says

Robert Coover seems to have been partying hard one too many times.

“None of us noticed the body at first. Not until Roger came through asking if we’d seen Ros. Most of us were still on our feet – except for Knud who’d gone in to catch the late sports results on the TV and had passed out on the sofa – but we were no longer that attentive. I was in the living room refilling drinks, a bottle of dry white vermouth for Alison in one hand (Vic had relieved me of the bourbon), a pitcher of old-fashioned in the other, recalling for some reason a girl I’d known long ago in some seaside town in Italy. The vermouth maybe, or the soft radiance of the light in here, my own mellowness. The babble. Or just the

freshening of possibility. My wife was circulating in the next room with a tray of canapés, getting people together, introducing newcomers, snatching up used napkins and toothpicks, occasionally signaling to me across the distance when she spotted an empty glass in someone's hand. Strange, I thought."

Gerald's Party is a detective story but it is a far distance from pulp fiction. It isn't Ten Little Niggers so in spite of all the disasters enjoyment continues and party must go on...

"God saved Lot, you'll remember, so Lot afterward could fuck his daughters, but he froze the wife for looking back. On the surface, that doesn't make a lot of sense. But the radical message of that legend is that incest, sodomy, betrayal and all that are not crimes – only turning back is: rigidified memory, attachment to the past".

Gerald's Party is everything – history, religion, art, bohemian living and an allegory of human society.

Steven Felicelli says

The Exterminating Angel with carnage and fornication.

Jean-marcel says

A really long and sometimes painful account of the worst party ever. it's pretty funny though, I have to admit. And it goes on and on and on and there are no chapter breaks and stuff just kind of happens. There's murder and mayhem but the party just grinds on anyway. I think it's supposed to leave you feeling exhausted and completely desensitized, like the guests at just such a party. You can try experiments while reading like flipping to random pages or looking for phrases or characters names (easy if you're reading electronically!) and just reading on from there. I don't know, it's the only Coover I've managed to sort of get into as his short stories seem really obtuse. Worth a look at least, and a few snorts of laughter.

Mala says

2.5 stars

'...this party of yours is the true disturbance. Maybe all conventions are, all efforts at social intercourse.' (128)

Remember that creepy phone call scene from Lynch's *Lost Highway*?

In its better moments *Gerald's Party* reaches those dreadful palpitations, for the most part though; it meanders aimlessly with occasional scenes of (interrupted or otherwise) fornication, a body turning up every now & then, a deflowering which would be outrageous were it not so ridiculous, an a** wiping scene that goes on for what seems like ages—despite all that, this remains the most boring arty party party ever.

'You've got drug addicts here! You've got perverts, anarchists, pimps, and peeping toms! Adulterers! You've got dipsomaniacs! You've got whores, thugs, thieves, atheists, sodomists, and out-and-out lunatics! There isn't anything they wouldn't do!' (130)

One would think that with a guest list like that, this party would be fun fun fun but don't get your hopes too high 'cause this is the most banal group of people gathered together & after a while, I wished that *Gerald's*

harried wife would mix rat poison in the food & put them all out of their misery—that would be mercy killing, you know.

I was totally confused. I didn't know whether the night was running forward or backward.

Same here!

Gerald's Party remains a mishmash of a Roman bacchanalia & a Boschian nightmare. I could call it an Agatha Christie on steroids but that would be a lazy observation—the grand dame would be horrified by that: her books so carefully plotted, her moral universe intact in its just balancing of crime & punishment, while here what we mostly get is a rambling, impressionistic first person narrative via Gerald's consciousness (with endless random dialogues [attributed & otherwise] from other characters hitting you from everywhere). An endless parade of characters, rather voices - cacophony & claustrophobia all around.

But then Coover is on record stating that he likes to take genre literature on their own turf & beat them at their own game—so, if in *Lucky Pierre*, he outporns porn; here, is a parodic take on parlour murder mysteries that take themselves too seriously. For Coover writing is all about play: play with form, play with subject. It's just that the play here gets too tedious & if that's a commentary on the banal lives of these banal people, then five stars for that!

In *Birdman*, Iñárritu had captured an essential fear of being caught naked/exposed in public, likewise, Gerald's Party is, in a way, every party giver's nightmare: a party that never ends, guests that never leave, leaving the hosts at their wits' end, providing constantly for food & entertainment, the toilet gets clogged (nicking 1/2 star for that. Yeah I know shit happens; I just don't want to be reminded of that.), & you've guests here with secret links & histories—no wonder the body count begins.

If chaos frightens you then the deafening silence that follows it here is even more frightening in its despair. But that's taking a charitable view. Truth is (view spoiler)

A kind of odd stuttering tale that refused to unfold, but rather became ever more mysterious and self-enclosed, drawing us sweetly toward its inner profundities. (83)

The ending brought a curious twist: life as a performance, & gave some idea about why these people carried on nonchalantly despite the deaths around them but by that time I was too exhausted to care—I was glad the party was finally over.

Edit: 19/10/15

I should also mention Lynch's *Blue Velvet* wrt this book: white picket fences & beautiful gardens in perfectly normal happy-looking suburban homes, and the festering reality below the ground... Gerald's Party also takes us to that space & if you find that unrealistic—just remember that Coover learnt his realism from guys like Kafka!

Here are the professional reviews:

<http://www.nytimes.com/1985/12/19/boo...>

<https://shigekuni.wordpress.com/2009/...>

David says

This book gets designated the second I've read within about six weeks to include a sex scene in a cave atop a pile of human bones. (It is times like these that really force a person to question their own taste.) There's a lot to recommend here. The Bosch comparison is right on, and if you're interested in *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, I'd give this a try, which is another way of saying it has got a lot of graphic sex, graphic violence, and people eating some really nasty food, all taking place in a nowhere land with fascinatingly bizarre social mores. I wouldn't call it misogynistic as a below reader did; it's clearly a male sexual fantasy, and everyone in it is too self-centered to be actually hateful. There are a lot of great set-pieces here, with the excruciatingly long ass-wiping scene nearing near the top, along with the genitalia severing and pretty much everything said or done by the Inspector and by Ros. The problem, for me, was that most of those peaks come early, and 300 pages is a very long read for something that's mostly plotless, especially with awkwardly integrated philosophizing getting more and more prominent as the book went on. But come on, if I can't sell you on a book with a 20 page ass-wiping scene, I don't even know why you read books.

MJ Nicholls says

This is the sort of book people write drooling dribbling cock-tugging theses about—the multifariousness of its structure and tropes and voices is denser than a chocolate-and-toffee car park cake (a cake the size of an actual car park). I toggled between three and four stars because I was with then not-with then with then not-with the novel about nine times per page, lapsing from amusement into rage, from rage into arousal, from arousal into boredom, from boredom into amazement, from amazement into suicidal thoughts . . . and on and on. The US edition has a cover showing a Roman bacchanalia—this is more apposite a whetter than “dinner party from hell” (unless taken literally), or nihilistic postmodern romp, though both those elements are dominant. Basically, Ros is a slutty actress who is found dead at a dinner party which is happening in a house somewhere, and some characters respond normally (wailing and such), while others behave like psychotics, perverts, unhinged nutballs, and bad comedians, and abuse her corpse with emphasis on the crotch. Gerald spends his time wiping arses, placating his ill-placed son, and trying to screw Alison while a range of drunken voices twit around him and pull the narrative over here, over here, over here, and over here, then back here, then over here, then oh look someone's been shot in the head oh well better have sex with this teenage whore and get stuck in her vagina, then over here, then over here into a marsh of tagless dialogue running for twenty pages or so, then into another farcical sex scene of questionable morality. I think I started out trying to praise this novel. Well, don't read it unless you're familiar with plotless formless hardcore PoMo antinovels that demand dissection. Otherwise, the comedic set-pieces and exhausting pace, the blurred distinction between theatre and reality, truth and exaggeration . . . all interesting nooks of interest for the avant-garde bookman.

Jason says

Very, very deep now into a Coover completist kick, it strikes me as worth noting that though the master is well-understood as a postmodernist at play in the realm of extant forms and as a wild, comic maven in love w/baroque mischief-making, he is insufficiently appreciated as a peerless artist of the obscene. *GERALD'S PARTY* could well serve as a rousing Exhibit-A for any huckster wishing to launch an investigation into this claim. It is through and through a malevolent, obscene novel. Now, I am the furthest thing from a prude. I am incapable of being appalled by a novel. However, I am more than capable of being awed by a largesse of

runaway prurience. And I am awed by the horrifying places Coover can take me, and the counterintuitive goodwill he appears to extend in so doing. To call GERALD'S PARTY merely bawdy is to fall egregiously short of adequately appraising its profoundly discomfiting diagnoses. One is obligated to approach this work as one locked in an engagement w/ the power and possibility of exaggeration. Our world, the one we basically operate in, is sufficiently indexed by this novel that its exaggeration of the carnal and destructive in our workaday lives is able to command status as a brutish, piercing judgement. Scoundrel, know thyself! This is Coover's most biblically belligerent novel, appearing steadfastly committed to taking no prisoners. Many will not wish to take this trip to terminus. Woe unto them. But who could blame them? Sex and violence, worked into our very helices, in no small part define us, they are indeed the repressed of the domestic scene, but we are not used to having these forces unleashed in such a way, and we are certainly not used to this level of abhorrence played at this level of comedy. There are many chortles here, but, by God, many of them ought catch in the throat. It is too easy to see GERALD'S PARTY as another postmodern intertext, this one playing on the parlor drama / murder mystery, but that only works at the most abstracted theoretical level (there is a detective on the scene, but he is more nightmare Borges than pomo Poirot); what this thing is doing page-to-page is way off in another realm. It is we who are obscene. The obscenity that we are - as detailed w/ full-frontal shock-and-awe caprice in this delightful, harrowing novel - exists in concert w/, and not despite, what is fundamentally high-minded in us. So we find in this novel a combination of dreadful sin unleashed and persistent questions ontological, epistemological, and relating to the higher categories of aesthetics. We grapple w/ time, the domain of theatre, truth, beauty, identity, love. And we do so as we gorge ourselves in the most beastly manner. GERALD'S PARTY is a vertiginous (and vertigo-inducing) highwire act. It does extraordinary things (inside and outside parentheses) to evoke radical, cascading, sensory, many-partied simultaneities. There is a huge cast and it is careening about in cosmic free-fall. I can only imagine how exhausting and laborious a book this must have been to write. Probably Coover's most exhausting and laborious. And you have to go a little mad to give birth to such a Golem. Literary immortality is made of such undertakings, and Coover is as deserv'd of it as any American author. And he outdoes himself here, though, sure as shit, it ain't pretty. A blundrbuss. A cuss'd masterwork. I wonder if Darren Aronofsky read it before he made his comparatively chill MOTHER!

mark monday says

the writing here is dark and sardonic. some rare moments of realistic emotion occasionally intrude upon the constantly surreal tableau. i might have had a problem with what appears to be consistent misogyny... but there's plenty of misandry to go around too, so i suppose one could say that the author is even-handed in doling out the various moments of criminal shallowness, tunnel-vision, and all-around nastiness. despite the often despairing ideas on display, it's not too heavy a read - coover has an appealingly light touch. and there's genuine fun to be had overall in just rushing through this extended depiction of a party where everyone overindulges, gets laid, questions lifelong commitments, and are too superficial to notice their own bleeding angst. what a party! i think i must have the wrong friends. that gerald's a real prick though.

don't expect anything remotely like a conventional narrative. it's pomo, homo. expect stream-of-conscious ramblings, unattributed "dialogue", and berserk nonsensical behavior featuring a dead body, and then another, and no one letting those bodies interfere with getting their drink or fetish on. it's all pretty much the opposite of quote realistic unquote. or is it?

Dave Christopher says

A warped fever dream of a book. I couldn't put it down. I often think of re-reading it, but am not sure I want to go "back there" -- the world it creates is uncomfortably dark (but hysterically funny).

Zack says

For some reason I've never got around to reading as much Coover as I feel I should have. SPANKING THE MAID when I was in high school, other shorter bits and pieces . . . Finally got around the GERALD'S PARTY and I'm kicking myself for not getting into his novels sooner. This is such an utterly brilliant piece of multi-layered work words (other than the exact ones the book itself is composed of) will not do it justice. "Sublime" is as close as I can come. This isn't one of those nearly opaque literary exercise novels either. Not even close. Abundant Shakespearean/Joycean wordplay aside, this thing has so many scenes of such beautifully rendered slapstick it's capable of punching the same funny-buttons the Marx bros and W.C. Fields did at their best. I am truly a Coover convert now. Splendid novel by a splendid writer.

Nate D says

The home, and a perfectly ordinary social occasion (or is it?) become an increasingly dire nightmare, kicked off by a murder, escalated by ordinary party mechanics turned ever more desperate and unreal. Coover's novel is one of those post-modern oddities that is arguably so extreme in formatting as to be much realer than realism. Here by concerning itself with every member of the party (there must be 50 or more named characters here and Coover seems to know them all well: their motives, their personalities, their quirks, their hidden backstories. How actually far more unreal are those party scenes that manage to confine themselves to a single conversation, when, as here, any moment in such a crowd must necessarily be the interleaving of dozens of narratives and conversations (Altman got this too). So does the fact that the people remain so wrapped up in themselves in spite of everything happening really make this "unrealistic" given its extreme arguable naturalism? Well, yes and no. The increasing sensation of simulacra as the party is overrun by actors as it progresses eventually cuts off my ability to connect with the characters (not so in the beginning, but then my favorite party guest wound up dead) making this run towards strain and tedium at points.

And yet. There's a lot here the works exceedingly well. The the way in which Coover constrains this to one house, one party, for 300 pages is pretty amazing. I love the claustrophobia, the way the characters and house unfold, room by room, sub-scenario by sub-scenario, utilizing the full semantics of lived space. Or, well, most of it. There's always more I want done in this area. We never actually make it to one extremely relevant household space, for instance, though Coover is knowingly withholding it, suggestion here more powerful, presumably. Plus, the sort of real-time unfolding, though time is also completely destabilized. After the crime is discovered, the police collect the watches, cutting everyone off from the chronology, a sensation emphasized perfectly by the complete lack of page numbers. It's brilliant form-as-function -- without a bookmark, in this swirl of drawn-out and intercut interactions, I'd be as lost as the characters.

On the other hand, Coover is of that era of post-war modernists and postmodernists who knew that sex was the grand unifier that would give blood to intellectual construction. Sometimes at the expense of well-considered gender politics. As such, Robert "Spanking the Maid" Coover often wears a satyr's horns,

undercutting the deep sadness that arguably lies beneath this novel with a flippant, sometimes problematic eroticism. It's a pose, of a kind, and he clearly has a great deal of empathy for his characters at other times, but still it can frustrate. At the same time, it works. Here this otherwise possibly unendurable exercise really does directly take on life and narrative momentum from its narrator's quest between twin poles of sex and death. At least until, as mentioned, that other main theme and great artifice, theater, overwhelms the action.

Tony says

I have to tell it this way.....

When I was in my last year of college, my roommate recommended that I take a class called 'French Literature in Translation'. At the time I was immersed in German and Russian Literature and was certain I would find the The Answer there. So, *pourquoi?*, I asked Howard.

Howard explained that it had nothing to do with Jean Cocteau, although I might find his name in the syllabus. No, he said, it was Janet. Janet!

Janet was the professor in 'French Literature in Translation'...and Howard was in love with her. She was young, as professors go, and, for the time, *avant garde*. Howard had taken the class but knew her otherwise, having traveled in the same artistic circles. Well, it was not exactly organic chemistry, so....hi, ho, hi ho.

Janet was as advertised. Jeans and tank tops, colorful scarves. A passion for literature. An occasional f-bomb. She cultivated gay students when there was still a huge closet. If you were the kind of sap who would fall head over heels for a lovely college literature professor, she was your guy. The class was okay, although, from my seat in the back, it seemed, just wearing colorful clothes (the students) didn't make you particularly insightful.

Anyhow, Janet made it a rule that every student had to come to her office for a 'mid-term'. It was just a discussion, not a test, but that didn't stop wags (looking around) from calling it an oral exam. I scheduled mine at the last time available one day. I showed up, jeans, flannel and an attitude; and I knocked on the open door.

Janet was aflutter, having nothing to do with me. She said, "Fuck this, can we go to the bar?" Well, that was actually my major, so, "Sure"...hoping she was buying. The short walk to the bar, guy that I was, I was already composing my letter. *Dear Penthouse Forum: I never thought this would happen to me.....*

I forget what we talked about. But I tend to be more charming and insightful after a couple. I passed the mid-term, in other words, although no Penthouse material was forthcoming. That didn't stop me from exaggerating the meeting to Howard, waiting on pins and needles, but, I figured, I'm going to hell anyhow.

Near the end of the semester, the last book was Ubu Roi. Now I don't know if you've ever read Ubu Roi but it's some weird shit. Some French make-believe king who has a series of adventures that become more and more bizarre. Absurdist. Oh, well. There are things you have to do in college.

Now, I was always pretty good at reading a book and then writing about it; got me through various levels of

education. Reviews, I think they're called. But this *Ubu Roi* had me stumped. I mean, it's *absurd*; what do you want me to say? For whatever reason, I could not just bang it out.

The weekend came. My paper wasn't done for Tuesday's class, but it was, you know, the weekend. One of the great things about having Howard as a roommate was that he always went home on the weekends. And I was in a Budding Romance. So, Saturday night, I dimmed the lights. No hurry. We'd have all weekend. In mid-nuzzle, there was an urgent rap at the door. It took a while, but I got there, and opened the door a crack. There was Howard. This might be a good time to mention that Howard was particularly short, maybe 5'3" or 5'4". He wasn't usually shit-faced, but he was shit-faced that night. Next to him, very tightly, was a 6'2" blonde in an evening gown. Gentleman that I am, I didn't look to see if she had an Adam's apple. This was an emergency, what they call it. And it was only fair to yield the room to the besotted Howard (I didn't mention Janet).

So much for Budding Romance, although these things work out.

So we bid adieu. I was, all of a sudden, alone. But that's always been okay with me. I sat outside the dorm building, on a lovely Spring evening/morning, and watched the passing panoply of life. It's quite the show, you know, when you aren't doing anything. Ever-changing characters and storylines. And no commercials. It was, well, absurd. The whole night. And all of it.

So, I wrote it in my mind first; and then, after a proper breakfast, on an electric typewriter. Inchoate sex, interrupted by Toulouse-Latrec and a giant Amazon. Shit-canned on the street. Where the fun really begins.

I thought I had nailed it. I felt I had got to the core of *Ubu Roi* and wrote the paper in an experimental way, mimicking Alfred Jarry. Oh, Fame, Fortune, and Penthouse Forum!

Maybe not so much. I'm not sure what it was. Maybe I introduced some homosexual characters in a way she felt was politically insensitive. Maybe there was some unknown code in there that rankled. Maybe it just wasn't any good. (Really?) Regardless, as she was handing out the papers, she set her face in stone and said, "I should read this to the class," meaning, I would be publicly humiliated.

So there I was, cussing. *I coulda been a.....* I don't know. One kind word, who knows.

If someone did not get what Robert Coover was doing, he didn't care. He didn't go to law school. Instead, he blew the top off what is possible.

This is bacchanalia. But really filthy bacchanalia. Offensive. And not everything written is possible. Stylistically, there might be four or five conversations going on at the same time. Purposely so. There is comedy and sexual abuse and art appraisal and adultery and murder. But it's all of a piece.

And then, the spinning stops, just for a few pages, and Coover - clearly Coover, here - tells a story about 'his' grandmother, and how she told him a good night story every night *about a man who had to climb a staircase with a thousand steps to get to heaven*. There was a story or more on every step and he always fell asleep first, until the night he didn't. *It was, as my grandmother had intended from the first step on, her principal legacy to me...*

Mostly though, what Coover sees, is absurdity. He writes it that way. Because, how else?

I offended, as I often do, without intention. We never spoke again. Another callous, which is wrong of me, I know that. I saw something as I sat on a bench, locked out of my room. Smelled it too. What was real became a story. And the story became real. I had a glimpse.

It was never about a teacher taking a student for drinks. And not about my lying to Howard. It's not about sex on a Saturday night. It's this, and only this:

Don't put Ubu Roi in my hands unless you mean it.
