



## The Bat

*Mary Roberts Rinehart*

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## **The Bat** Mary Roberts Rinehart

An elite, rich, and spunky older lady rents a country house for the summer along with her skittish Irish maid and her niece. Some servants sort of come with the property but most soon abandon their new matron due to happenings within this large mansion. A converging plot concerns the homeowner (a banker) who has recently died and whose bank has just coincidentally failed -- the suspicion falls upon a youthful bank clerk who is the heart-throb of the old lady's niece. The central plot revolves around a mysterious and effective murder/burglar dubbed by the frustrated police as The Bat and who has been operating in the vicinity of this country home. The subsequent happenings in the house are almost slapstick in nature, in the old lady's efforts in solving the mystery of both the infamous Bat's activities and the bank embezzlement.

## **The Bat Details**

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## From Reader Review The Bat for online ebook

### Whistlers Mom says

Batman is born! (Maybe.)

The prolific Mary Roberts Rinehart published her first novel in 1906 and several (including this one) are now in the public domain. Ironically, I'd never bothered to down-load it because I had it confused with THE HAUNTED LADY, a later novel in which a bat features prominently. When I realized that it was one I had never read, I immediately remedied that situation.

To be blunt, it is the weakest Rinehart book I've read and I think the explanation for that lies in its odd history. In addition to being a popular novelist, Rinehart wrote plays. In 1920, she wrote a play called "The Bat." She must have gotten bogged down because successful playwright and "play doctor" Avery Hopwood was called in to complete the third act.

I'd never heard of Hopwood although he was a big noise on Broadway during that time. In 1920, he had four plays running simultaneously on Broadway, a record that's likely to stand for all time. I HAD heard of his play "Getting Gertie's Garter." Hard to forget, isn't it?

So Rinehart and Hopwood co-wrote the play and when she wrote a novelization in 1926, he was listed as co-author. The play is notable because the costumed super-criminal of the title was one of graphic artist Bob Kane's inspirations for Batman. The novel was recorded in 1933 and released by RCA Victor as one of the earliest "talking books." This book is a piece of American entertainment history.

Sadly, it's of more historical than literary interest. It's a blatant re-hashing of her second novel - the very popular and well-known THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE. Again we have a wealthy, elderly spinster renting a home in the country for the summer.

Here she has only a niece (instead of a niece and nephew) but in both the niece is in love with a bank clerk who has been falsely accused of a large embezzlement that caused the bank to collapse. The FDIC wasn't even a gleam in Roosevelt's eye at the time and the collapse of a bank meant the depositors lost their money. I could list other similarities, but not without giving away the plot. Let's just say that it's a pale copy of STAIRCASE.

For all that, I enjoyed it because of the wonderful character of Miss Cornelia Van Gorder. Miss Cornelia is "old money" in capital letters and can be as autocratic and intimidating as any Grande Dame who ever lived. She also has a soft heart, a romantic streak tempered with common sense, and a yearning to experience adventure. By renting the estate of a recently-deceased banker (president of that failed bank) she gets much more adventure than she bargained for.

There's some fine humor, especially Miss Cornelia's combative relationship with her long-time maid and sparring partner Lizzie. There's some shrewd social commentary. Rinehart was a wife and mother, but she was a fierce defender of the right of women to be educated, have careers, and play active roles in the world. She knew the value of money and "breeding" but she was contemptuous of snobs and reactionaries. She was a woman ahead of her time.

Rinehart created her "elderly spinster" character in 1908, when she was a young wife and mother and used it

again and again with different names and locations. THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE, THE BAT, THE CONFESSION, and THE DOOR all feature a shrewd, wealthy, old maid. Why was the very-married Mrs. Rinehart so fond of this character? She was married to a doctor at a time when medicine was NOT a lucrative career. There were bills to pay and a house full of children. Maybe the idea of being a rich childless women looked attractive at times.

As to why she "novelized" her play in such an uninspired way, your guess is as good as mine. I suspect she needed the money and it was a ready-made plot and characters. Most popular authors have succumbed to the temptation to toss off a quick book to keep the money coming in.

It's not a bad book and it has some fine moments, but it's far from being her best. Rinehart was a serious writer and a skilled craftswoman. She wasn't brilliant, but she was a professional and she took it seriously. If you're a Rinehart fan, it's worth a read, especially since it's free. Just don't let it be your first Rinehart book because that would be unfair to both the author and the reader.

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### **Julie Davis says**

Read aloud at Forgotten Classics podcast.

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### **Christine Howard says**

Enjoyed it even though the writing is old style and there are lots of adverbs. I liked Rinehart when I was young and can still enjoy her.

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### **Judy says**

A friend who knows that I am interested in mysteries and in books published between the world wars, loaned me an anthology of three Mary Roberts Rinehart novels, so you will be seeing the other two in a week or two. Mary Roberts Rinehart has often been called the "American Agatha Christie". This is a comparison with which I would argue. She is also the author most identified with the phrase "the butler did it" (although she never said that phrase) and the "Had I But Known" school of mysteries. This book was obviously meant to be read by young women, late at night, with, hopefully, a storm of impressive magnitude raging outside. Published in 1926, the "mystery" was the part of the book that I enjoyed the least. More important to me was the picture of the period that the book portrayed. Gender, class, and race issues were all present in this book in a major way. The central character, Miss Cornelia Van Gorder, is an indomitable 65 year old spinster of means who rather than shrinking from the chaos of the mystery leads the charge into its unraveling. She is the "new woman" of the 20s (although a bit older than most of the examples of her type in the literature of the period) who looks beyond the traditional social mores and gender roles and wants the same for her niece. She refuses to be coerced by the men around her, enjoys the upheaval of the mysterious events in the mansion that she has rented for the summer, and decides that she has followed the rules long enough. Less appealing are the roles that class and race play in the novel. Lizzie has been Cornelia's Irish maid for decades

and Lizzie is obviously from a different class than Cornelia. Lizzie is no doubt loved by Cornelia, but that doesn't stop her employer from verbally abusing her and on one occasion, slapping her hand and threatening to lock her in her room. Lizzie demonstrates her class origins by continually becoming hysterical, needing to be attended to, and by her inability to cope with the situation in which she finds herself. The stereotype of the faithful, Irish servant with all of the folkways, superstitions, and terrors of the old country are assigned to her. Cornelia has to solve the mystery as well as deal with Lizzie's constant overblown emotions throughout the book clearly indicating which class each occupies and the values of each of those social classes. And, finally, the racial attitudes of the 1920s are highly visible in the literary treatment of Billy. Billy is the Japanese-American butler of the recently deceased owner of the mansion and he is mocked in every conceivable way. His manner of speaking and pronunciation of words, the color of his skin, the fact that he doesn't reveal his emotions, and the suspicion in which he is held by many of the characters (except Cornelia) all highlight the racial prejudices of many white Americans of the 1920s. But looking at this book primarily as a period piece makes the action in the novel all the more interesting.

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### **Charles says**

Another wonderful mystery from Mary Roberts Rinehart written in 1920, I got the book free from amazon, if you like the book check out the movie The Bat 1959 starring Vincent Price

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### **Joe McMahon says**

A surprising and unique book, even if not a good one. I had heard of it previously, and decided to try it. It reads unlike any other novel I've ever read.

The viewpoint is chaotic; not just a multiple point-of-view book, but one that veers from viewpoint to viewpoint in the same chapter, nearly in the same paragraph. Sometimes we'll be in one character's thoughts, and other times outside of them. Sometimes we'll shift to omniscient narrator -- and even the omniscient narrator can't explain what's happening!

It is full of mistaken identities, characters withholding facts from one another - sometimes we know them at the time, sometimes we don't -- impostures, bizarre occurrences only later explained, an infallible (or almost so) master criminal. I felt like Lord Peter, as if I were "slightly drunk and tossed in a blanket".

A little research tells me this is actually a novel adapted from a play, so this perhaps explains the oddity of the presentation. It would be interesting to see this as if it were written by Hammett in the manner of "The Maltese Falcon", where everything is described from the outside, and we as the reader are challenged to understand emotions and motivations solely from the author's observations.

Overall: pretty good, the solution makes sense; the presentation of the clues isn't 100% fair, but it's intriguing nonetheless. A good filler novel for an idle evening, and certainly a unique reading experience.

I have to say that I think the writing is bad, but bad in such a unique way that it's worth reading once. It's certainly unlike any other book I've ever read.

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## **Bev says**

In Mary Roberts Rinehart's The Bat, Cornelia Van Gorder, a spinster who has longed for adventure, takes herself, her Irish maid Lizzie, and her neice Dale off to the country to escape the city's summer heat. She rents a country home that has recently become available when Courtleigh Fleming, a local bank manager, died. She's bemoaning her quiet, unadventurous existence when suddenly the countryside becomes the center for some very mysterious activity.

Cornelia begins receiving anonymous notes meant to frighten her away from the house. There are rumors that The Bat, a notorious criminal mastermind, is in the area. And...in the wake of the bank manager's death, it is discovered that a large amount of bank funds are missing--as well as one of the bank clerks. Cornelia's neice begins acting strangely, her maid Lizzie is nervous as a cat, and her butler Billy is inscrutable (as all Chinese men of the time are represented). Dale brings home a new gardener who isn't what he seems and Cornelia decides to request that a detective be sent to help her get to the bottom of the nasty notes. Who on earth could possibly care if she spends her summer in the banker's abandoned house?

That's when the excitement begins. There are mysterious people popping in and out of rooms. Strangers on the roof and bats flying through the rooms. The detective seems ready to round up and use the rubber hose on anyone who even looks at him cross-eyed. Billy the butler scurries around seeing ghosts and Lizzie is screaming at the drop of a hat. Before long, the banker's nephew is dead, a secret room is discovered, and the missing money is found. Cornelia gets her adventure....and even gets the satisfaction of outwitting The Bat.

Great fun. This book (which is based on the play The Bat, which in turn was based on Rinehart's The Circular Staircase) reads like a serial story. Just about every chapter ends in a cliff-hanger moment and there is more action going on in this old house than you'd believe. Four stars.

{This review is mine and was first posted on my blog at <http://myreadersblock.blogspot.com/20....> Please request permission to repost any portion. Thanks.}

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## **Kirsti says**

Wow, mystery novels were different in 1920. For example, if you published a mystery novel then, and one of your characters was Japanese, you might mention that Japaneseeness 50 or 60 times throughout the course of the book. You might also have the other characters impute certain moods or character traits to this character simply because he is Japanese. Also, you might create characters so stereotypical that most of the time you would use labels to refer to them: "the doctor," "the detective," and (G-d help us) "the spinster." And you might write unintentionally hilarious dialogue, like this: *"I'm not hounding this girl," he said doggedly.*

There must be *good* mysteries from the early 1900s, right? What are they?

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## **Tony says**

THE BAT. (1926). Mary Roberts Rinehart. \*\*.

This was Rinehart's second most popular book, and was adapted for the stage and twice for films. It was also, according to Wikipedia, the inspiration for Bob Kane's "Batman" series – although there is no

resemblence between his character and the character in the book. If you are like me, I usually turn a novel into a movie in my head while I am reading it. This novel became a cross between a Marx Brothers film and a Three Stoges farce. It had no relationship to what mystery readers of today have available to them to pass the long hours before bedtime. I feel kind of sorry for mystery fans of yore having novels like this as a benchmark. This is an obvious takeoff on the popular English cozy of the day. Rinehart injected her own form of comedy into the plot, but certainly didn't inject any mystery. In this story, which occurs in a country house outside of New York, Ms. Cornelia Van Gorder has rented the house for the summer to get away from the heat and hustle-bustle of the city. She has taken along her maid, Lizzie Allen, a ditzy woman who has been with Cornelia for forty years, Billy, her Japanese Butler, and Dale Ogden, her young niece. She rented the house from Richard Fleming, the son of the owner of a bank that had just been robbed of \$1MM. That robbery caused the bank to fail and his father, the owner, to have a heart attack and die. As soon as Cornelia begins to settle in, ghostly things begin to happen around the house. Strange noises are heard. Shadows appear where they shouldn't. Notes are found that threaten her with dire harm if she and her crew don't leave immediately. The notes are signed by "The Bat." The Bat is operating in the area, and has been robbing houses locally, along with doing general mayhem. We don't know who the Bat is, but he must represent clear and present danger. The novel features lots of characters coming and going in and out of doors, appearing and disappearing from the scene, pretending to be who they aren't, and the presence of a secret room. Every cliche you have ever encountered is in this book. Women faint at the drop of a hat. Everyone seems to have a revolver, although none of them seems to know how to use them. There are a couple of murders, but they are simply glossed over. This book sold over 100,000 copies!! Having not read any books by this author, I felt I had to have a go at her, and this is one of the two books that I picked to read. I can't wait to get to the next one.

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### Ryan says

I really don't remember what my first mystery book was or even what age I was when I first opened one. More than likely it was a Nancy Drew or Encyclopedia Brown book. It wasn't until I read my first Agatha Christie book that I truly became a fan for life. I was such a fan of her that I tended to ignore other well known authors and even moved onto Fantasy for a while. Now as an adult I'm having a great time discovery authors that have made names for themselves in the mystery genre. One author that I never heard of until Yvette, of in so many words..., reviewed a book of hers. Her name is Mary Roberts Rinehart and because of Yvette I figured out that she wrote the inspiration for one of my favorite Agnes Moorehead movies was based upon. That inspiration was The Bat, and luckily I found it in a used bookstore. Once I got home I couldn't help but get started on it and I finished it rather quickly.

Now this book is actually a novelization of the stage play "The Bat" that Rinehart wrote along with Avery Hopwood. The funny thing is, the play was actually the stage adaptation of her novel The Circular Staircase. I think that fact that this book came from a stage play is what made it a blast to read. It has the ebbs and flows of a stage play as the characters enter and exit the stage. That aspect actually reminded me of "Noises Off" as characters constantly exit and enter as certain key characters are doing the opposite. Chance encounters and even chance misses are part of what makes this book feel like a romping travel through a very scary house. Now I just need to see if I can get a hold of the play as well.

Obviously since I love the movie so much it was a little hard for me to separate the movie from the book. This was the same problem I had with The Thin Man by Dashiell Hammett. While the problem was the same, my reaction to it was a little different. this time around. I was able to keep them separate in my head

and not compare the two of them as much.

When Cornelia Van Gorder decides to leave NYC for the Summer she drags her VERY Irish maid Lizzie Allen, and her niece Dale Odgen along with her to a rented mansion out in the country. The owner of the mansion, Courtleigh Fleming, had supposedly died while he was out of town on his business. He was president of the local bank. After his death, Richard Fleming, his nephew, decided to rent the place out for the Summer. Now while that seemingly innocent transaction was taking place, other mischievous was afoot. The Bat, the most elusive criminal ever known has been spreading terror throughout the area. Every attempt has failed to bring his string of theft and murder to an end. When an ambitious detective decides to attempt what has already gotten one of his colleagues killed, the capture of The Bat, the game is on. Throw in a bank theft, from Courtleigh Fleming's bank, that a cashier is being charged with and you have the makings of a great thriller.

Fortunately, at least for her, the estate she rented was in the middle of The Bat's territory. It doesn't take long before strange sights and sounds are bothering the residents of the house. Men without faces, weird tapping noises in empty rooms, and glowing eyes are just some of the odd things that are bothering the residents of the house. Because of all the strangeness the servants up and quit except for the hysterical (I mean that in both senses of the word) and Courtleigh Fleming's Japanese butler, Billy. Both of them have seen and heard things that scare them, but for reasons of their own, they won't leave.

Cornelia, who refuses to be scared by anything, quickly becomes convinced that the missing money is hidden somewhere in the house and that someone is looking for it. She is joined in the house by the detective who arrives just as the action starts heating up. Before we know it there are characters (three of which I haven't even talked about) all over the house, some of whom end up dead before the mystery is solved. The solution is fantastic and one of the best I've seen done in this type of mystery book. It was slightly different from the movie version I'm used to, so while I wasn't surprised by it, I felt a little annoyed I didn't figure it out earlier than I did. Now I will say I figured it out before the reveal, but it was still a lot of fun.

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### **Ann Sloan says**

After the last book, I did promise that I would cleanse my palate with something truly classic and well-written. Well, one out of two isn't bad. When I saw a Mary Roberts Rinehart's novel on Net Galley, I couldn't believe my luck. My mother introduced me to her books back in my pre-teen days – that is what passed as YA literature back then. I read a couple of her books in the past few years and enjoyed them for what they are – old-fashioned, demure, cozy mysteries with a likeable heroine narrating the story. This book, however, was just a little too too, if you know what I mean.

In case you aren't familiar with Rinehart, she was born in 1876, in Pittsburgh and died in 1958. Her family experienced its financial difficulties, which surprised me, as I'll explain a little later.

Mary Roberts Rinehart was a well-known mystery and romance writer. Her stories combine adventure, love, ingenuity, and humor in a style that is distinctly her own. Most of her fiction included startling plot twists. Rinehart generally added realism in her depiction of contemporary life, with many different classes, corruption high and low, and a great diversity of characters. Her leading lady was inevitably a woman of a certain age with a comfortable income, with the notable exception of her Miss Pinkerton series. Rinehart's stories appeared in the Saturday Evening Post, and she was also a published playwright.

Mary Roberts graduated from the Pittsburgh Training School for Nurses in 1896. That same year she married

physician Stanley M. Rinehart. She and her husband started a family, and she took up writing in 1903 as a result of difficulties created by monetary losses. Her first story appeared in Munsey's Magazine in 1903. The Circular Staircase (1908), her first book and first mystery, was an immediate success, and the following year The Man in Lower Ten, which had been serialized earlier, strengthened her popular success. Thereafter she wrote steadily, averaging about a book a year. A long series of comic tales about the redoubtable "Tish" (Letitia Carberry) appeared as serials in the Saturday Evening Post over a number of years and as a series of novels beginning with *The Amazing Adventures of Letitia Carberry* (1911).

Rinehart served as a war correspondent during World War I and later described her experiences in several books, particularly *Kings, Queens and Pawns* (1915). She wrote a number of romances and nine plays. Most of the plays were written in collaboration with Avery Hopwood; her greatest successes were *Seven Days*, produced in New York in 1909, and *The Bat*, derived from *The Circular Staircase* and produced in 1920. She followed this in 1926 in novel form.

In 1914, Rinehart's writing and career drastically changed. Rinehart gave up mystery and humorous fiction, and turned to straight novels for most of the next 15 years. Her novels were commercially hugely successful, but critically slammed. While inoffensive morally, critics felt they represented lowbrow popular fiction.

According to her biographer Jan Cohn, Rinehart often suffered horribly from depression during these years. Her husband Dr. Stanley Rinehart bitterly resented his wife's commercial success. He seems to have used his medical degree and general intellectual skills as a weapon to demonstrate his mental superiority to his wife, the trashy author of popular fiction, and pushed her to write "serious literary works". By contrast, Rinehart had a happy relationship with her three sons. Motherhood is always depicted in glowing terms in Rinehart's fiction, although often shown to be very hard work, while marriage is an unmitigated horror story. Husbands are commonly depicted as misogynists who are cold hearted, philanderers, men intolerant of their wife's career, who have to have their own ways in the smallest details. The best of these mainstream tales are from the 1930's and in the collection *Married People*. Rinehart also wrote a number of powerful tales about wife beating long before it became a feminist issue in the 1980's.

Rinehart did write some mystery and humorous fiction during these years. The crime story "The Confession" (1917) is a grim but powerful portrait of a woman's guilt, depression and mental breakdown.

She also wrote two fusions of supernatural-psychical research fiction and mystery fiction, "Sight Unseen" (1916) and *The Red Lamp* (1925), which are among the author's lesser works. As early as "The Amazing Adventure of Letitia Carberry" (1911), Rinehart was talking about spiritualism in her mysteries, but in that story it is just a red herring - no actual supernatural events occur.

Spiritualism is not found just in Rinehart, but in many other American authors of mystery fiction of the period, such as S.S. Van Dine, Ellery Queen, and John Dickson Carr. It makes their storytelling so interesting. *The Bat* uses spiritualism, but as mentioned above, it serves as a red herring.

In the early 1920s, the family moved to Washington, DC when Dr. Rinehart was appointed to a post in the Veterans Administration. He died in 1932, but she continued to live there until 1935, when she moved to New York City. There she helped her sons found the publishing house Farrar & Rinehart, serving as its director.

She remained best known as a writer of mysteries, and the growing popularity of mysteries after World War II led to frequent republication of her works. Her autobiography, *My Story*, appeared in 1931 and was revised in 1948. At Rinehart's death her books had sold more than 10 million copies.

Sometimes real life can be stranger than fiction. Rinehart also maintained a vacation home in Bar Harbor, Maine, where, in 1947, her Filipino chef, who had worked for her for 25 years, fired a gun at her and then attempted to slash her with knives, until other servants rescued her. The chef committed suicide in his cell the next day.

Rinehart suffered from breast cancer, which led to a radical mastectomy. She eventually went public with her story, at a time when such matters were not openly discussed. The interview "I Had Cancer" was published in a 1947 issue of the *Ladies' Home Journal*. Rinehart encouraged women to have breast examinations.

The Bat

I had the feeling as I read this book that it would be easily adapted to the stage. Ninety plus of the story takes place in the living room, with characters coming in and out of various doors. Turned out I just really have a second sense (you think). As this story was originally a play, Rinehart might have used a little more creativity in rewriting it as a novel. It was also adapted for the movies in 1926, along with *The Bat Whispers* (1930), and a remake of *The Bat* in 1959. In 1933 RCA Victor released *The Bat* as one of the earliest talking book recordings. I would love to hear that. I wonder how many records it took to record and whether it was on 16 rpm or another speed.

Some believe that *The Bat* shows Rinehart at the height of her powers and is her greatest work. I can't agree. There were too many characters, the butler was referred to as "the Jap" (although that might have as politically correct as you could get at the time), and Rinehart operates as uber-omniscient author. She is constantly telling us that a character is doing something that no one else notices. Subtlety is nowhere to be found. I don't remember that style from her other books; perhaps it is because of its stage heredity that it is present here. Also, I was about 75% through the book when I realized who done it – I don't appreciate that in a mystery.

Off, off topic:

When reading books from another era, you can pick up the most interesting pieces of trivia. At one point, Miss Van Gorder refers "Gillette as Holmes." I wondered who Gillette was. I Widipediaed him. The following is from that source:

William Hooker Gillette (July 24, 1853 – April 29, 1937) was an American actor, playwright and stage-manager in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He is best remembered today for portraying Sherlock Holmes on stage and in a now lost 1916 silent film. His portrayal of Holmes helped create the modern image of the detective. His use of the deerstalker cap (which first appeared in some Strand Magazine illustrations by Sidney Paget) and the curved pipe became synonymous with the character. And it was in his play, not in Arthur Conan Doyle's stories, that Holmes first said "This is elementary, my dear fellow," which subsequently became "Elementary, my dear Watson". Gillette assumed the role onstage more than 1,300 times over thirty years, starred in a silent motion picture based on his Holmes play, and voiced the character twice on radio.

So, really, Gillette is responsible for the image we have today of Sherlock Holmes. Doyle created him, but Gillette gave him form.

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## **Luisa Knight says**

Loved the writing style and the plot twists! If you're looking for a good, clean murder mystery, try this one!

Cleanliness: The words "d\*mn" and "h\*ll" are used a number of times throughout the book. There is a short scene with a ouija board at the beginning of the story.

\*Note: I listened to the audio version of this book so this Cleanliness Report is not as thoroughly detailed as other reports are. Some inappropriate content may have been forgotten/missed and not included in the report.

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### **Bonnie says**

I read this book after reading Rinehart's earlier book *The Circular Staircase*. *The Circular Staircase* was made into a play that was then written back into novel form by Rinehart as this book. It is very much a product of its time in terms of racial stereotypes, views on gender, etc. The story in this book was less developed than the one in *The Circular Staircase*. This felt more like you were reading a play made into a book, which is in fact what it is. The plot was compressed and the characters weren't as well developed as in Rinehart's earlier work. That being said, it was still an enjoyable read. And it was a fascinating juxtaposition to compare Rinehart's two books as well as the movie version made in the 1950s to see a similar story and characters handled differently at three different points in the 20th century.

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### **Amy "the book-bat" says**

I had a lot of interruptions and distractions while trying to finish this book. I think I may enjoy it more if I can read without distraction.

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### **Matt Kelland says**

Somewhat disappointing. It was an interesting curio from the point of view of the origin of the Batman character, but not what I'd call a good read.

However, it was fun to encounter the bit where the villain shines a searchlight onto a house, with the silhouette of a bat on it. Definitely inspiration for Gotham's famous Caped Crusader.

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### **Tom Schulte says**

I read this because I heard it may have had something to do with the genesis of Batman. Comic-book creator Bob Kane said in his 1989 autobiography *Batman and Me* that the villain of the 1930 film "The Bat Whispers" was an inspiration for his character Batman. If there is a thread of connection to this book, it is frail and gossamer indeed. this bat is inept and gun-slinging while being a criminal and not crime fighter. still an amusing read of a plucky and aged socialite cum crime fighter if you set aside racist and classist stereotypes. It obviously would make an entertaining movie if done like a *Clue*. and, what is the "evil's four hundred" she speaks of?

This 1926 book is actually a novelization of Rinehart's successful 1920 play of the story. It feels amplified too much from a small idea. Three films were made based on the original Broadway play.

The first film, also called "The Bat", was released as a silent film on March 14, 1926 by United Artists, was produced and directed by Roland West, and written by West and Julien Josephson. Director Roland West remade his film with sound four years later in 1930 as "The Bat Whispers", also by United Artists, and starring Chester Morris and Una Merkel. A third film by Crane Wilbur was released by Allied Artists in

1959 as "The Bat", starring Vincent Price and Agnes Moorehead. There are also a few TV adaptations. I first remember seeing the Vincent Price version as part of Wolfman Mac's Chiller Drive-In in a spoof that included speeded up parts and skits. Re-watching the original film now I can see how the third movie is furthest from the book and surely the play. This is a case where the movie is better than the book, IMO. The elitism and racist stereotypes of the book are dispensed giving us two plucky, determined women as well as a villain that is more advanced and threatening. The book's Bat is actually a crude, blunt instrument and a rather minor, ineffectual characters. Where the book Bat has only a mask and relies on a gun and breaks windows, the 1959 Bat had deadly talons and a glass cutter. If anything, the 1959 fusion of science and technology into an alter ego has some kinship with Batman. In the book, Rinehart seems to awkwardly advance the plot by interjecting a God's eye view rather than clues for the reader to decipher. In the 1959 movie, this is done in an effective cut-to-the-chase move and the whole thing is really an effective, well-structured, well-paced period film that I recommend over the book.

So, the 1926 version apparently is a better source for the Batman inspiration. Online researchers have noted Kane himself seems to refer to the 1926 film when he thinks he is talking about the sound remake of 1930. I can definitely see the source for both the book and superhero in the 1926 film. Being a silent film based on a stage production, it is visually more stunning and crafted for effect than the dialog- and actor-driven Price film later. This 1926 Bat comes across as an evil twin to the combi book icon. He has the ear, makes his mark to have only his eyes dramatically lit in their black mask, rappels around and uses grappling hooks and the movies uses a shadow of a bat in a circle of light. From The Bat (1926) The Bat in his flowing, cape-like costume and eared mask looks down through a window after choosing a grappling hook:

The 1926 film also has the caricatures and campy blend of comedy and drama that came out in the book.

The has obvious inspiration from the book and reshoots scenes from the silent film while giving us a less bat-like bat. I don't have a firm opinion on Bob Kane's honesty on if he came up with batman and if so, how, but if you go back in time before Rinehart's novel to Avery Hopwood's mystery play The Bat done with Mary Roberts Rinehart and throw in crime-fighting vigilante and "wealthy, young man about town" The Shadow, you just about have it.

Rinehart's novel is more interesting as a period gothic, pot boiler drawing room mystery already a step away from any germ of Batman.

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### **Susan Jo Grassi says**

Loved this book. They made a movie out of it with Agnes Moorhead and Vincent Price. It was good but a different timeline.

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### **Greg says**

"Mid-20th Century American Crime Readathon"

## BOOK 16: "The Bat" by Mary Roberts Rinehart, 1926

HOOK=4 stars: Is this the basis for THE BATMAN? Early deaths in chapter 1 lead us to think this Bat might be a murderer, or at least hunting for one. And why, exactly, is this Bat meeting with the chief of police in Chapter 1? Even Jo Nesbo's relatively recent "The Bat" (his debut) didn't completely satisfy our bat cravings! But without the fame of THE BATMAN, we might pass on this almost impossible-to-find work. PACE=3: Even, solid.

PLOT = 4: A lonely 60ish woman wants to get out of the city for a season and rents a Country House right in the middle of "Bat Country" where murders are being committed. There is a sensational twist here, but Rinehart doesn't use it as effectively as Dame Agatha Christie used it years later. Did Christie borrow this idea and then turn it into a permanent imprint on the mystery genre? I'm glad she did, as Rinehart glosses over it as if she didn't know exactly what to do with it.

PEOPLE=2: After reading the book, I can't even remember now who was who.

PLACE= 3: I love a good mystery in a Country House, and Rinehart does create a fine atmosphere of money and menace in the 1920s. However, there are too many terraces, windows, driveways, French doors, hidden rooms, etc., and it's easy to get lost. And the nearest electrical station house shuts down the electricity to this power-consuming monstrosity whenever there is a storm, and hence we get storms....every night....which is rather convenient for the Bat, be he/she good or bad.

SUMMARY: My average rating is 3.2, or 3 stars here on goodreads. I enjoyed this, but oh, there are two missed opportunities: 1) the aforementioned twist which is actually easy to miss here, as Rinehart just lets it pass and 2) the author couldn't get a handle on who is where and when during the last half of the book, most of which takes place in a Country House during a storm. Perhaps I'm being a bit unfair: no one does a Country House Murder Mystery like Agatha Christie, but Rinehart does a fine, 3 star job. Is Rinehart America's answer to Dame Christie as some say/write? That's a nice sentiment, but Christie has no equal.

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### **Bill says**

What a strange and goofy book. *The Bat* almost reads like a spoof of overused dark-old-house mystery tropes, but the lack of playfulness in its use of those tropes gives away that the author is playing it straight here. Although there are broad comedic aspects that might have played well in the play this novel was based on, such as the maid whose every appearance ends in a shriek and a faint, but which don't translate well to the novelization. There's also some passive bigotry towards the Japanese butler and the Irish maid which is a little hard to stomach. And if you don't roll your eyes the first time a character leaves a gun on a tabletop while turning his back on a suspect, you will by the third time.

According to *Wikipedia*, this novel was ghostwritten by Steven Vincent Benet. Go figure.

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### **Amethyst Marie says**

Rinehart is quickly becoming a new problematic fave. I recommend this book for its great female characters and because of its history in inspiring the creation of The Goddamn Batman. I can't do so without the caveat that its depiction of an Asian male character is racist as hell.

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