



A Fatal Inversion

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A Fatal Inversion - a classic thriller from the queen of crime Barbara Vine 'An absolute winner ... a gripping read from start to end' Daily Mail 'Brilliant. Vine has the kind of near-Victorian narrative drive ... that compels a reader to go on turning the pages' Sunday Times In the long hot summer of 1976, a group of young people are camping in Wyvis Hall. Adam, Rufus, Shiva, Vivien and Zosie hardly ask why they are there or how they are to live; they scavenge, steal and sell the family heirlooms. In short, they exist. Ten years later, the bodies of a woman and child are discovered in the Hall's animal cemetery. Which woman? Whose child? 'I defy anyone to guess the conclusion ... the clues are cunningly planted, so that it seems one should have known all along. A most satisfying end' Daily Telegraph 'Nimbly written with all the Dickensian values of vivid characterization, fine prose style and a cunningly devised plot that shifts and twists and keeps you on the edge of your chair' Val Hennessy, Daily Mail A Fatal Inversion is a modern classic of the crime genre. If you enjoy the novels of P.D. James, Ian Rankin and Scott Turow, you will love this book. Barbara Vine is the pen-name of Ruth Rendell. She has written fifteen novels using this pseudonym, including A Fatal Inversion and King Solomon's Carpet which both won the Crime Writers' Association Gold Dagger Award. Her other books include: A Dark Adapted Eye; The House of Stairs; Gallowglass; Asta's Book; No Night Is Too Long; In the Time of His Prosperity; The Brimstone Wedding; The Chimney Sweeper's Boy; Grasshopper; The Blood Doctor; The Minotaur; The Birthday Present and The Child's Child.

A Fatal Inversion Details

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Author : Barbara Vine , Ruth Rendell

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Smitha says

I was drawn into this murder mystery. It was a great experience - listening to the book during my daily jogs. Am glad that I listened to the audio version because otherwise I would have just rushed through the book, in my usual speed-reading mode, sometimes even missing certain aspects. A wonderful psychological thriller, which shows how even gentle, normal people can commit crimes, if circumstances arise. I loved the descriptions of Acalpamos (not sure of the spelling) and wished i owned it. I would have loved a remote bungalow in the wilderness as a holiday home. I was drawn into the lives of Adam, Rufus, Zosie, Shiva and Vivian for the past few days.

Ruthiella says

I put this book on my TBR years ago because I read somewhere (in a blog or goodreads maybe) that this was a better, more realistic version of Tana French's The Likeness. My assumption was that this was also a mystery with a doppelgangers (a la Brat Ferrar), but it's not that.

The book opens with the remains of a human skeleton being found buried on the grounds of a country home in Suffolk. Naturally the police investigate. The story then slowly unfolds in flashbacks and forwards between 1986 London and 1976 Suffolk.

Fatal Inversion is an intense psychological suspense story. There is a murder but the focus is less on who did it and why (although that is eventually revealed) and more on how this murder has poisoned the lives of those who were witness to the crime and its cover-up. I can see the Tana French comparison a bit, you have young adults (18-25) living in a house which is sheltered and suspended from the outside world and a lot of emotional manipulation going on in that close environment. But personally if I had to compare this book to any other that I have read, it would be Sarah Water's The Little Stranger because of the ever building sense of dread and the way the survivors are figuratively haunted in the aftermath.

Philip says

This book is **always** up there among my favorite "Top 5 Vines" along with ASTA'S BOOK, BRIMSTONE WEDDING, A DARK-ADAPTED EYE and HOUSE OF STAIRS - and, like those, it's one I've pretty much lost count of how many times I've read.

As with most of the other Vines (of which this was the 2nd), "old sins have long shadows" that cast themselves on the present, and Vine moves effortlessly between 1986, when the skeletons of a woman and child are discovered buried in the pet cemetery of a country estate, and 1976, when a diverse group of young people (some of them college students) sets up housekeeping there for one carefree summer that will ultimately have tragic consequences and cast those "long shadows".

Mystery writer and historian Julian Symons wrote that A FATAL INVERSION had the most brilliant ending of any mystery he'd ever read.

Zac says

Probably the best Barbara Vine novel I have read. It was also the first of her books I read. The almost palpable sense of time and place she created was so convincing I can clearly remember the feeling I had reading this book. She always features such detailed and convincing characters it is a pleasure to follow the story which often involves a mystery or curious event. This book was thoroughly satisfying if you enjoy this type of book.

I have given this 5 stars because of the pleasure it gave me and I admit it inspired in me an interest in this novelist and this genre for a good while.

Maria says

Terrific. Evocative of Robertson Davies & John Fowles, to a lesser degree, in both tone and spirit - wonderfully done until the very last chapter where the resolution is formulaic & one sighs at the predictable, pat ending but so what - it's a fascinating and absorbing novel that I highly recommend. Psychological suspense - top of the line.

Wanda says

Probably not the best Barbara Vine/Ruth Rendell book to get started with. For me, it didn't flow as well as I could have hoped. Plus, although I certainly don't require likeable characters to keep me engaged, I have to care about who did what and why. I found all of the characters in this novel to be unpleasant (to say the least) and I couldn't care much about how they ended up.

It was odd—gathering the details gradually and making assumptions about who the woman and the child found in the pet cemetery could be and how they got there. I've read books where I've known the perpetrator from the beginning, but still was intrigued by the story, but this book didn't grab me the same way. It wasn't until the very last pages that I found myself engaged. That's a long time to wait.

I was reading AFI largely on my work coffee breaks. It helped to have no alternative reading available, as I found myself reluctant to pick up the book and yet anxious to get finished and move on to something more rewarding. Truly, cognitive dissonance.

Perhaps I was just in the wrong mood for this mystery—I'm a bit off of mysteries right now, I think perhaps I've read a few too many of them in the last while. But it was one of the books that I chose for my 2018 reading list and so I forged ahead with it. Your mileage may vary.

Joyce says

Not my favorite Ruth Rendell, who really wrote this. A convoluted and sad plot. A collection of people that coulda/shoulda known better. No real admirable person in the bunch. I kept waiting for someone to act heroically, and they didn't.

Barbara says

This is one of Barbara Vine's earlier richly crafted novels. Her writing is elegant and skillfully constructed. "A Fatal Inversion" is not an ordinary mystery with a familiar plot, it is a chilling psychological study which gives the reader insight into a horrifying murder. It is compelling and certainly thought-provoking.

A landowner in the English countryside discovers an old pet cemetery on his vast property, where he finds human bones also buried. This fact and the subsequent police investigation set this story into motion. The manor house had been inherited by a nineteen year old young man previously. During an idyllic summer, he and a group of young people lived a carefree, irresponsible existence there, selling household contents to provide money for sustenance and entertainment. It was here that the murder occurred, which is evident at the outset of this book. Vine has masterfully woven this suspenseful tale back and forth from that summer to a dozen years later when the surviving members fear revelation. Character development is richly drawn, adding to the atmosphere of tension.

DeAnna Knippling says

Most of the book was a three--but the ending was a five, such that it reframed the rest of the book. Not the kind of story I normally go for.

Alexandra says

Oh wie liebe ich diese A-Z Autorinnenchallenge. Beim Buchstaben V habe ich erneut eine für mich komplett neue Schriftstellerin entdeckt, die mir sehr gut gefallen hat.

Barbara Vine kann wahnsinnig gut fabulieren, die akuraten Landschaftsbeschreibungen, die atmosphärische Dichte des Plots und die intensiven Figurenentwicklungen fallen zuerst ins Auge. Sehr schnell war ich als Leserin gemeinsam mit dieser Kommune auf diesem geerbten Landsitz in der Nähe von London.

Die Story weist eine sehr spannende Konstellation auf. In einem Haus werden zufällig die Knochen einer Frauenleiche und anschließend auch noch eines Babies entdeckt. Dieser Roman ist nun vordergründig die Geschichte jener fünf Personen, die mehr oder weniger gut mit dem Trauma der Vergangenheit, das dem Leser erst nach und nach enthüllt wird (Mord Totschlag Unfall), zurechtkommen. Die Handlung springt sehr schnell und unvermittelt permanent zwischen Gegenwart und Vergangenheit, was ein bisschen herausfordernd zu lesen aber punktgenau konzipiert ist, denn die drei männlichen Protagonisten haben dieses

mehr als zehn Jahre alte Trauma noch nicht wirklich verarbeitet, das schlechte Gewissen und die Selbstvorwürfe holen sie immer wieder ein, trotz aller Vertuschungen gelangen die Wahrheit und alle verdrängten Fakten allmählich an die Oberfläche des Bewusstseins. Das ist auch psychologisch sehr gut konzipiert, durch den Fortschritt der polizeilichen Ermittlungen werden die Herren der damaligen Kommune allmählich nach und nach nervös, weichgeklopft und offenbaren sich selbst und dem Leser das Geständnis, die Beichte, was wirklich passiert ist.

Auch beim Kriminalplot wurde ich am Ende des Romans noch einmal gehörig überrascht, was mir sehr viel Vergnügen bereitet hat, denn ich werde sehr gerne ein bisschen an der Nase herumgeführt.

Fazit: Ein psychologisch klug konzipierter, sprachlich und inhaltlich anspruchsvoller Roman mit einem spannenden Krimiplot. Warum ich nun speziell bei diesem Buch nur 4 Sterne vergebe (eigentlich sollten es 4,5 sein), weiß ich auch nicht so genau, aber es könnte daran liegen, dass sich die Geschichte zu Beginn ein bisschen zu gemächlich entwickelt. Vielleicht liegt es aber auch wahrscheinlich daran, dass ich zusätzlich 2 Bücher von der Autorin gekauft habe, die möglicherweise auch noch viel besser sind. ?

Lyn Battersby says

I'd read all the Ruth Rendell in my local library and was feeling rather down. I love Rendell's different take on the crime genre and wanted more*. In my trawling the catalogue system, however, it became obvious that all was not lost. Rendell also writes crime under the name Barbara Vine. I was a little worried about heading into uncharted territory, after all, writers rarely use pen names without reason, so I wondered what she had done to this titles to mark them as 'different' from a Rendell work.

In the end I shrugged, picked up A Fatal Inversion and took it home.

And devoured it.

Yes, it is somewhat different, but in a good way. Grittier and more clue driven than your typical Rendell, Vine nonetheless relies upon characterisation and human motive to drive her plot rather than the crime itself. We know the crime is coming, we know who did it and how they're going to handle it. What we need to know is the hows, whys and wherefores involved.

In "A Fatal Inversion" we are immediately introduced to a crime; the bodies of a young woman and baby are discovered in an animal cemetery attached to a manor. Next we meet Adam, Rufus and Shiva, three men who share a past but have gone their separate ways with the understanding that they'll never contact one another again. This decision is overturned when the bodies are found and they begin to work through what happened that fateful summer 10 years ago...

These aren't spoilers. It's all there pretty much in the first chapter. Vine doesn't play whodunnit in this novel but instead takes us on a journey through the past and how that past both changes and catches up with the individuals concerned.

Very satisfying, very rewarding.

*When discussing Ruth Rendell's style I'm not including the Wexford novels which are far more traditional and 'hard boiled' than her other fiction.

Sue says

My second of Vine's psychological suspense novels. The word mystery just doesn't describe what happens in this book. The central event occurs in 1976 but is discovered with the uncovering of human bones in an animal graveyard 10 years later. The most recent owners of this suburban estate have begun a process that will lead to the unraveling of several lives.

Vine/Rendell is expert at the slow disclosure of facts and feelings, the essence of the psychological novel. This particular novel is written so well that the unraveling is slowly reflected in the structure of the story itself. Wonderful!

I was on the fence about 4 vs 5 stars as I seem to be giving many 5 star ratings lately. But of the book deserves it, why hold back.

Highly recommended.

Cathy says

I didn't like this at all. The later half of the book was slightly better, when we actually had some dialogue and not just endless descriptions. It wasn't suspenseful enough for me and I honestly didn't even care to find out who murdered whom by the end of it.

Pushpa says

This is my second Barbara Vine book, after *The Chimney Sweepers Boy* and I loved it. I could not put the book down.

The murder which is revealed in the very first chapter had taken place at Wyvis Hall aka "Ecalpemos", a fatal inversion of the word, "Someplace". This inversion of the word "Someplace" sets the manner in which the book is written, which is, an inversion of the events, the murder first and then the whodunit, the whydunnit and the howdunnit, revealed slowly through an almost confusing backwards and forwards into time.

It is called a psychological thriller but to my mind, it is not a thriller in the true sense of how the genre is understood. This book is a slower paced and deliberate unraveling of events and the characters and motives of the people involved. It is a well written psychological mystery.

The ending is absolutely superb. I did not see it coming and was fooled completely. It was crafted brilliantly, saying, but not saying enough and leaving us to figure it out.

I will give it 4 stars.

The only thing that I could not understand was why Shiva and Lili should die. It did not do anything for the plot. The only reason I can think for it is to justify the belief that Shiva had in the concept of retribution. He thinks that his son died due to placenta praevia because of retribution. So, the only explanation is that his death is also a retributive action by God for his part in the murder. Having said that, why wasn't the actual murderer struck by the retributive action of God? Food for thought.

Cheryl says

Not a fan of the writing style. The plot was slow moving, but did pick up toward the end. None of the characters were likeable. Although this was probably intended by the author, it still was tedious to read, as they were shallow and self-absorbed. I skimmed some of this book (especially in the first half) just to get to the explanation of the murder. There's a bit of a surprise at the end, which made me give the book 3 stars instead of two. An OK read.
