

K. Short Guide

K. by Mary Roberts Rinehart

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Characters

Sidney Page is clearly modelled on the young Mary Roberts. Sidney's dead father, who bequeathed her "the dreamer's part" of her nature, certainly reflects Rinehart's own father, a failed inventor who committed suicide. Mrs.

Social Concerns

Rinehart's major themes in *K.*, the first of her novels to be based largely on autobiographical material and to depart from the mystery formula that had served her so well in earlier books, are those of individual freedom and identity. Its protagonist, Sidney Page, is a young woman bound by the social mores of "the Street," where she lives with her widowed mother who runs a boarding house.

Sidney is about to enter training as a nurse, in keeping with the traditional expectations for a woman, but secretly she wants to escape; she longs for the freedom to do something, to do anything beyond what society expects of her. These desires to move beyond the expected social role are symbolized by her androgynous first name. She does not want her actions and achievements to be limited by her gender.

Concurrent with Sidney's struggle against the limitations placed on her by her sex, Rinehart portrays the personal anguish of the great surgeon Edwardes whose faith in his own skill has been destroyed by the accidental deaths of three of his patients. Disguised as the mysterious new boarder, K. le Moyne, Edwardes enters Sidney's life just as she begins her training. Given Rinehart's own feelings and the sentiments of her audience, it is no surprise that Sidney's longing for freedom and K.'s self-doubts are all resolved by their growing mutual love.

Techniques

K. is one of the first books in which Rinehart attempted to write mainstream fiction. She does not rely on the comfortable formula of the detective novel, and the tone is completely serious. She also departs from her early tendency toward romanticism in favor of realistic depiction of everyday life, especially in the hospital scenes. Her handling of plot is not sure, however, and the conclusion seems banal, sentimental, and predictable.

Adaptations

A film version of K. appeared in 1918 under the title *The Doctor and the Woman*. Six years later Universal brought out K. — the Unknown.



Related Titles

K. is closely related to its immediate predecessor, *The Street of the Seven Stars* (1914) and looks forward to some of Rinehart's later attempts at serious novels, especially *This Strange Adventure* (1929). In *The Street of the Seven Stars*, Harmony Wells, a gifted young violinist, must choose between her career and her love for the young physician Peter Byrne. In spite of the presence in the novel of Dr. Anna Gates, a proponent of women's rights, Harmony comes to the inevitable conclusion that if she is to have a career, it will be Peter's. Such an ending, of course, assured *The Street of the Seven Stars* a place on the best-seller lists.

In what was one of her last attempts to establish herself as a writer of serious fiction, Rinehart examines the life of Missie Colfax in *This Strange Adventure*. Again, largely autobiographical, the novel traces its protagonist's life from her childhood in a neighborhood very similar to that in which Rinehart grew up, to a loveless marriage to a wealthy philanderer, to a brief attempt at fulfillment through love (Missie, given her author's awareness of her audience, remains physically chaste), to a self-sacrificing return to care for her invalid husband, to the final stunning realization that her sacrifice for her son has been worthless. At the end of the novel, Missie returns to her childhood home intent on suicide, only to discover the gas has been shut off. She cannot even succeed at self-destruction.

This Strange Adventure was an ambitious book for Rinehart, given the popular reputation she had built on happy endings. It was, not unexpectedly, largely unsuccessful and seems to have marked Rinehart's final attempt to move beyond the constraints of her own popularity.



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Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

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