

# Bat Mann



German novelist Thomas “Bat” Mann was a somber champion of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, but he had his goofy side, too. At the otherwise august 1929 ceremony in which he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, he showed up wearing blue leotards, lederhosen and a hooded cape. During a rambling acceptance speech, he explained that, as an infant, his parents had abandoned him in a cave, where he was raised by an extended family of bats. For ten years, he ate grubs and little winged peanut butter crackers and slept hanging upside down from the cave’s rafters. Then, a World War I Swiss infantry division “liberated” the cave and captured the wild-eyed Mann-child. Thomas was fiercely averse to returning to civilization and only agreed when he was permitted to keep his massive collection of guano. Immediately upon reaching Berlin, though, he swapped the dung for a Mercedes Benz beater, customizing the grille and fenders so that the car resembled a bat in flight. None of this story seemed to have any connection with “Buddenbrooks,” the novel that precipitated the award, and nervous Nobel committee members huddled to consider revoking his prize. But then, a desperado crashed the party and, armed only with a sneer and supercilious attitude, began to rob the attendees. A cool-headed Mann, however, removed his left boot, aimed and fired. The W-ray that issued from the heel rendered the would-be villain instantly insensate, and the committee members just as quickly disregarded any problems they had with their awardee. Although Mann died in 1955, Berliners still occasionally claim to see a leotarded bat-man figure skulking through the city at night, keeping the streets safe for Mannkind.