



## Roseanna

*Maj Sjöwall , Per Wahlöö*

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**Roseanna** Maj Sjöwall , Per Wahlöö

The masterful first novel in the Martin Beck series of mysteries by the internationally renowned crime writing duo Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö, finds Beck hunting for the murderer of a lonely traveler. On a July afternoon, a young woman's body is dredged from Sweden's beautiful Lake Vattern. With no clues Beck begins an investigation not only to uncover a murderer but also to discover who the victim was. Three months later, all Beck knows is that her name was Roseanna and that she could have been strangled by any one of eighty-five people on a cruise. As the melancholic Beck narrows the list of suspects, he is drawn increasingly to the enigma of the victim, a free-spirited traveler with a penchant for casual sex, and to the psychopathology of a murderer with a distinctive--indeed, terrifying--sense of propriety..

## Roseanna Details

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## From Reader Review Roseanna for online ebook

### F.R. says

Well, this is a hell of a way to introduce a character. It was only when I came to enter the fact I was reading 'Roseanna' onto this website that I realised it is the inaugural book of the Martin Beck series (as you may guess, I'm more of a 'pick up and read' type of guy, than a 'research deeply beforehand' type of guy'). There was the legend in front of me: 'Martin Beck, 1'. And the interesting thing is that by the time I did add it to this website, I was already sixty pages through and hadn't noticed that this was an introductory novel. There was no grand and startling entrance; instead there was a police station, a somewhat miserable homicide detective and his downbeat, but professional team. And of course there was a murder which had to be solved. There's little in the way of background, little in terms of context, we are in Sweden in the 1960s and there's work to be done.

This is certainly one of the most existential crime novels I've ever read. Throughout there's a sense of disorientation, of questioning the world and the way it works, questioning the terrible things man does. Of course all mystery novels are about questions, all mystery novels are about the terrible things men do; but here the questions don't stop at the exit to the interrogation room, they are everywhere in the world. I make it sound bleak, yet the forward propulsion of the plot and the tension of each fresh questioning, means that it's never dull or a chore to get through. It's grim and unrelenting, sure, but also fundamentally gripping. There's a reason why these two are the godparents of Swedish crime fiction. As undoubtedly this isn't an English crime novel or an American crime novel, it's most definitely Scandinavian – the missing link between Ingmar Bergman and Harry Hole.

A body of a young woman is found in a lake and Martin Beck and his team are called to investigate. As summer turns to winter and everything gets colder and darker, the investigation continues – seemingly without conclusion. At the centre of the book is a sex crime, around it are possible other sexual assaults and the horror of it all is restated again and again. This is not a book that goes for moments of levity, this is not a novel which tries to lighten the tone; this is an examination of a crime which almost feels ground down by it. At the centre we have the policeman, Martin Beck, who is seemingly ill throughout, as if his malaise at the murders he faces and the state of the modern world has turned into physical illness. As I said this is his introduction as a character, but we find out little about him – he has a loveless marriage, a couple of kids and is building a model boat. What's really important to him is his job, or more specifically the case he's acting on. His colleagues are so ill defined they are almost cyphers, his team is barely indistinguishable from one another, but again that adds to the procedural existentialism of it. Rather than give these other policemen names, Sjewell and Wahloo may as well have just called them Officer A and officer B.

This is a truly Scandinavian crime novel.

Life is bleak, horrible things happen and there seems to be no escape from it. Martin Beck is building a model ship, that is how he amuses himself when he's not working (which takes up most of his time) or dealing with his family (which takes up less). He distracts his mind from what's going on around him, by working on this tiny replica of a boat. It's his form of escape. But Roseanna McKay, the victim, died on a boat. She was someone who was escaping, heading across Europe for the trip of a lifetime, and the horrible nature of life caught up with her there. And so before he's even finished it, the model of the boat – not even a real boat, but a model which couldn't sail him anywhere anyway – just looks even more futile as a means of getting away. It's actually pointed out that Roseanna McKay could have died in an accident, just been hit by a truck, but instead she was murdered and so became Martin Beck's responsibility. And so this detective, who is one of life's questioners, starts to question the world all over again and when he finds the answer he's looking for, it doesn't seem to give him any satisfaction at all.

Again, this is a very Scandinavian crime novel.

And in the background is an American cop with the unlikely name of Kafka. Raymond Chandler once called a character Hemmingway, describing him as "A guy that keeps saying the same thing over and over until you believe it must be good" (which given Chandler's style, is a dig you wonder how seriously to take). The Kafka reference in Rosanna can't help but add to the jaded existentialism of it all (even if the character of Kafka himself is the least jaded police officer on show). It's a reminder that for all these questions that need to be asked, there are – like Joseph K finds in 'The Trial' and 'The Castle' – some questions which can't be answered.

I know I've made it sound bleak, I know I've hammered down the point that this is very Scandinavian; but if you want to clutch a book between white knuckles and feel the hairs on the back on your neck rise, this is definitely one to go for.

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### Jeffrey Keeten says

**"He looked tired and his sunburned skin seemed yellowish in the gray light. His face was lean with a broad forehead and a strong jaw. His mouth, under his short, straight nose, was thin and wide with two deep lines near the corners. When he smiled, you could see his healthy, white teeth. His dark hair was combed straight back from the even hairline and had not yet begun to gray. The look in his soft blue eyes was clear and calm. He was thin but not especially tall and somewhat round-shouldered. Some women would say he was good looking but most of them would see him as quite ordinary. He dressed in a way that would draw no attention. If anything, his clothes were a little too discreet."**

And thus I was introduced to the Swedish detective Martin Beck. As you can see from that description, he is unassuming. He catches every cold, every flu bug, coffee makes him sick, but he drinks it, and riding the subway makes him nauseous, and yet he has to ride it. When he isn't sick he is melancholy on the verge of depression. He works massive hours for a combination of reasons mainly that he is obsessed by his cases and his marriage is on the skids. He married the woman that he wanted mainly because she was happy, an antidote to his sad nature. Once she had kids, like what happens with most people, she changed. It comes back to the old argument of whether men or women are crazier, the women that marry men thinking they can change them or the men that marry women thinking they are going to stay the same.

When Beck is home he works on a model ship allowing his mind to freely roam over his caseload. His kids are just background noise to his life. He doesn't seem to be interested in them. They are just symptoms to the disease of his failed marriage.

### Lake Vattern

The crime that is the basis of this novel involves the brutal murder and rape of an American tourist from Nebraska, Roseanna McGraw. Her body is fished out of Lake Vattern, and though the case belongs to a small town police district in Motala, due to the nature of the crime, a team of detectives including Beck are sent to assist. He meets a kindred spirit in the Detective Alhberg from Motala. They both obsess over cases and as no clues present themselves in the case of Roseanna they keep calling each other with meaningless information, in an attempt to stir the brain cells, as the case lingers unsolved for months.

The interest part for me was the police procedure part of the process. They enlist the help of a Detective Kafka from Lincoln, Nebraska who interviews former lovers and acquaintances of the deceased. This new

information is presented to the reader as transcripts of the conversations. Because the crime is a sex crime it required that the detective ask very personal questions of the satellite people around Roseanna. Beck also has to ask some very uncomfortable questions on his end of the investigation as he interviews people connected to his suspect. We are exposed to the humdrum nature of police work as the detectives wait patiently for any kind of new clue that will spur more action. The writers do manage to build the tension as Beck is sure he has his guy. Beck, running out of resources and time, comes up with a desperate plan to try and catch his suspect. Beck operates off of intuition, and so he makes leaps of logic without proof. The book felt very authentic and the writing was crisp and clean.

Henning Mankell wrote the introduction and he probably should be sending Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahloo a royalty check for each new Kurt Wallander book or movie deal because Kurt Wallander is without a doubt based off of the character Martin Beck. Wallander certainly annoys me more than Beck. I do feel at times like grabbing Kurt by the shoulders and giving him a good shake. He is just so inconceivably depressed all the time that it does start to feel like self-indulgent behavior. With Beck I felt more sympathetic with his plight. I have hopes that as the series progresses that he at least attempts to find a way to be happy.

With Martin Beck and Kurt Wallander providing my main exposure to Swedish culture I could get the impression that they are a depressed nation. I checked to see where Sweden falls on the list of depressed countries and they don't even break the top twenty. Suicide rates in Sweden land them at 30th in the world, certainly not high enough to make one think that everyone is suicidal in Sweden. If they are a melancholy nation they certainly don't feel the need to take that last slow walk out into the woods and eat a bullet.

Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahloo were a common law marriage team that wrote ten Martin Beck novels. They conceived an outline together for each book and then wrote alternating chapters. The book was seamless. I didn't find myself experiencing a difference of style leaving one chapter and starting another. I wonder if that was blended by the translation or if they really did have complimentary styles of writing.

### **Maj Sjöwall & Per Wahloo**

I will certainly read another Martin Beck. Vintage Crime/Black Lizard have reissued the series in attractive matching trade paperbacks that encourage the reader to want to own them all.

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### **Sun says**

The body of a young woman is found at the locks of Borenshult. The local police call in Martin Beck and his team from Stockholm to help identify her and catch her killer. Thorough and meticulous investigations follow.

There's a strong sense of patience and time in Roseanna, as in Sjöwall & Wahloo's *The Laughing Policeman*. I like the reality of long stretches of time, the deliberate treatment of procedural details that, instead of being tedious, give a heightened sense of reality and show the painstaking tenacity of the police at work. It all seems more human somehow than the (usually American) drama of solving the case overnight and then swooping in in the nick of time and nabbing the (usually serial) killer.

There's also a strange sense of calm and lots of sitting and sleeping and waiting. Heightened emotion is illustrated by action and by sweat. It works and it makes for an especially turbulent climax. I'm still surprised

at how such a candid story can have such startling impact.

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### **Thomas Strömquist says**

I thought that I should do some housekeeping and write the missing reviews for books I've already rated. This one I've read multiple times, I gave it all the stars and I compare it to every police procedural I ever read. There are a lot of good reasons for that, Sjöwall/Wahlöö's first 'Martin Beck' (i.e. "*Roman om ett brott*" = "Novel about a crime" in original (Swedish) editions) is a great 60's Swedish crime mystery. At times slow moving and with a tinge of melancholy feeling (like all the 10 books, don't let it put you off though! In this short format and really good narrative, giving the passages more of a bittersweet than dreary feeling, it works beautifully!). Great, true feeling characters and an unsurpassed ability to make the story feel both real and realistic. I recommend the whole series and certainly this book, which is one of the best.

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### **Trish says**

The clarity of the writing and translation held me in thrall. In Henning Mankell's introduction to the reprint out in late 2008, he mentions that this husband and wife team inspired the new breed of police procedurals by the greats we read now. The view of the cop as a flawed individual with physical and personal issues was a new concept when they began. The slow, solid build-up of tension in Roseanna was so subtle that the denouement, when it came, had me actually gasping for breath. A resounding five stars for this series.

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### **Rachel Hall says**

The ten novels written by husband and wife team Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö during the period of 1965-75 are now considered seminal and seen as a precursor for much of the police procedural genre that followed. Widely recognised as a groundbreaking series, the novels which feature Martin Beck of the Swedish Homicide Bureau have been credited with influencing the thought processes of the generations to come and with an introduction by Henning Mankell there could be no finer testimony. The introduction points out that the Sweden of 1965 was a society with closer ties to the past than to the future; the huge wave of immigration had not yet begun, the majority of the population smoked and typewriters, not computers, furnished the desks of the investigators. Despite being written in a different generation some things remain unchanged. That Sjöwall and Wahlöö used crime and criminal investigations as a mirror on Swedish society is without doubt. As I read, several constants which I recognise in much of the police procedural genre to this day still holds true, from the petty bureaucracy to the number of false starts and leads that go nowhere. Martin Beck is just as much an Average Joe as the next man on the street, just as fallible, frequently blighted by minor ailments such as a dodgy tummy and a sore throat and with a home life and family that seem more of a headache than a great source of sanity after a day at work. Martin Beck is a thinker; whilst he smokes, tries to sleep and tinkers with the model ship that preoccupies his thoughts throughout this case. As one grey, rain filled day merges into the next, Beck's disposition is never one of elation but in common with today's favourites, his desire to understand a human situation and see justice delivered is relentless.

Time plays a central role in Roseanna as Martin Beck is called from Stockholm to shed some light on the young female whose body has been dredged from the Göta canal in the Swedish city of Motala. The discovery of her body is a matter of pure chance that owes more to the dynamics of the canal than anything, but identifying the body of a woman with "broad hips, heavy thighs and small slack breasts" is another

matter. The autopsy concurs with the first thoughts of the team; death by strangulation in conjunction with gross sexual assault. Martin Beck is puzzled by how she can have disappeared from people's lives unnoticed and perhaps because no one comes forward to identify her, he sees it as his duty to do right by the woman. From when the body is discovered on 8th July it takes a full three months for her identity to be confirmed. Even prior to the dredging activity taking place it takes days before the powers that be even decide on whose responsibility it is and to rubber stamp the operation.

From a point of view as sheer entertainment, Roseanna is not the most exciting novel to read, and I expect that those who cannot recognise how it has set the tone for many writers will judge it as dull. Nothing happens at a pace, false starts and drudge work is often the order of things, translations take days and it would be hard not to get despondent. With a timescale pinned down there is a very real sense of just what a mammoth task the investigators are faced with. The identification of the victim as Roseanna McGraw, a twenty-seven-year-old American travelling alone in Europe brings light at the end of the tunnel for the police, but the ensuing request for passenger lists aboard a canal boat she never disembarked reduces the list of suspects down to anyone of eighty-five people who travelled on this same vessel. Across the four continents making contact is hampered by technological limitations, and the ensuing sourcing of photographs taken by the passengers aboard is a nightmare. Much of the work occurs by limiting probabilities and assuming the most likely decision would have been selected as they track Roseanna's journey and a chance sighting of the suspect by a rookie sets in motion a trap, planting a police woman posing as a decoy to see if the man attacks again. But when three weeks have gone by and the suspect still hasn't made a move and the policewoman has knitted a sweater whilst she waits, have they got the right man? From start to finish, the solving of the case runs into the new year and takes six months and nineteen days to bear fruit. At times, almost a comedy of errors, Martin Beck and his cohorts endure a realistic grind to an outcome, who said being a detective was a glamorous job? Black humour is laced throughout Roseanna, and the incisive wit of the team is in evidence throughout and seen as the only positives when endless days of frustration endure.

On finishing the novel I spent a lot of the time thinking about the necessity of the police as an impartial agency to see all victims are recognised. Maybe if Roseanna's body had never been discovered her story would have gone unrecorded, and as an independent woman with a passion for travel she would have been assumed to still be out there living her life to the full. Yet the Swedish Homicide Bureau never think about casting this tragedy aside, knowing that there is no family to harass them and no media to hold them to account. Without the police, Roseanna's story would have never been resolved.

In contrast to many of the maverick tough guys that are often portrayed in crime on screen and in novels, the solving of the Roseanna case is a result for the entire team. Martin Beck is no more or less than any other man on the team he works closely with and they all take turns doing the donkey work, pounding the streets at the mercy of unsociable hours. The resulting arrest is always regarded as very much a team effort and not regarded as significant success, just a mere matter of the police doing their job.

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## Greg says

This is sort of like a police procedural version of John La Carre's Smiley novels. They aren't jargon littered like Le Carre's novels but the hero, Martin Beck, is sort of a non-traditional hero of the same ilk of George Smiley. Beck is a depressed middle-aged man, his only real quirk is that he likes building model boats, he doesn't like being around groups of people, coffee makes him feel sick, he's resigned to having to deal with his family who he doesn't seem to have enough energy to really like or dislike. He's a good detective but he goes about his job as if it's something of a chore that he likes doing but can't get excited at all about. I have a soft spot for people who go through life feeling resigned and depressed but are actually really good at what

they do, for example my favorite fighter comes across that way in almost every picture you see of him where he isn't eating ice cream. As my friend Tony describes him he looks depressed about the idea that he's going to have to go and beat someone up, but he's going to go do it and get it over with so he can go back to listening to depressing Russian religious music and training so he can go beat up another person for money.

Anyway, besides the wonderfully depressed main character this book is great for it's darkness and pacing. It's also great because unlike most American novels of the same genre the characters aren't all semi-annoying stereotypes, or if they are they are Swedish stereotypes that I know nothing about. There is also a refreshing lack of quiriness and machismo. I have little else to say. This might fit for my next crime / mystery series to read while I slowly read the last remaining Parker novels.

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## **Brad says**

When I finished Roseanna again last night I thought I should write a review talking about how rare it is for me to reread a book, and how Sjöwall & Wahloo have conjured something exceptional from me as a reader. When I started thinking about how rare it is for me to reread, however, I realized what a load of crap that is.

I am a rereader. I reread quite often, actually. Most of the books I reread, admittedly, are due to the classes I teach. I've read Hamlet and The Tempest and One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich dozens of times, and to a lesser extent Watchmen, V for Vendetta, Wuthering Heights, To Have and Have Not, Pride and Prejudice and Left Hand of Darkness. They're all books I love, but I reread them for practical purposes more than for pleasure. Last night, I thought, "I can ignore those. They don't count. I'm not a rereader." But that is crap too.

I reread The Sun Also Rises every year because it is my favourite. I reread China Mieville's books whenever I feel the need to exercise my brain. I reread Iain Banks and his twin brother Iain M. Banks because their writing and vision blow me away. I reread graphic novels like I eat M&Ms. I reread Aubrey Maturin because they feel like old friends. I reread Ursula K. Leguin because she is the best. I reread Dragonlance and Lord of the Rings because I am a geek. Yep, I am a rereader.

So rereading Roseanna isn't so special after all. It isn't some rare occurrence. It's business as usual when I find something worth reading again and again. And this book is that.

I have been listening to these books for my "first reading" and I recently reached the seventh book, The Abominable Man, wherein the interdependence of Sjöwall & Wahloo tales suddenly focused into a clear picture. They wrote ten books in their Martin Beck series, and it struck me that it is one of the only series I've read (apart from Lord of the Rings) where the authors had the entire series mapped out before they started.

I decided to test that theory by actually reading Roseanna (rather than listening), and it appears that I was correct. Beck and Kollberg are fully conceived from the first moment. There is no authorial searching for what these men will be, no feeling out their relationship and personalities. Everything is there. Everything is ready, and everything that is coming for these men (the two constants in the series so far) are there waiting for them. I can see it in their decisions, their emotions, their concerns, their actions -- everything.

I gave this book four stars when I first read it, but loved it enough to pass it on to a good friend (she loved it too). Now I have to give it five stars. I think the series itself constitutes a masterpiece, but as first chapters go, Roseanna is perfection.

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## Tfitoby says

The Martin Beck series is supposed to be amazing, I was very excited to finally find the first book so I could find out why. So far, so ordinary.

I can understand how it might have been revolutionary in Swedish crime circles, being the first of its kind to move away from the classic British mystery style of Agatha Christie but for me reading it in 2012 it doesn't have that shock to the senses factor it might have had in 1965.

This mixture of Ed McBain's police procedural style and Georges Simenon's psychological analysis makes for an enjoyable read and the influence of obsessive, isolated noir heroes such as Phillip Marlowe makes Martin Beck a good protagonist for a crime novel yet he isn't as hard-boiled as I was led to believe; despite finishing 51st in a Top 100 list on the subject.

It is said that these books were a political statement by the husband and wife writing team but based on this instalment it was lost on me. Perhaps the Swedes weren't used to having the working classes shown in such an honest light or the bureaucracy of public service put under the microscope but it all feels pretty standard to me now.

There's not much to say about the actual murder investigation, it takes them six months and features a lot of patience and waiting and chess playing. In the end we have to trust that the detective knows more than we do as it all hinges on his intuition upon meeting the suspect and in doing so the denouement is slightly less rewarding than if it was some vital clue that nail the murdering psychopath that his constant diligence had finally dug up but it is then buried by the following relentless tension as Beck and his team lay a trap that you desperately hope will succeed.

In the P.S. section of this publication Richard Shephard refers to the writing style as *literature verite*, the first time I have seen the phrase used and I think I will cling to it tightly from here on out. As a film graduate the verite style is dear to my heart, bringing to mind Ken Russell or even Jean-Luc Godard at the more stylised end of the spectrum, and provides an instant visual reference for what these authors were trying to achieve; the capturing of the beauty and mundanity of the everyday, the life and the very existence of these people formerly romanticised by novelists intent on skipping over the many periods of waiting and hoping and boredom that fill the days of a police detective. In this Sjöwall & Wahlöö succeeded and I hope that further dabbling with their ten book series is fruitful.

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## João Carlos says

### Maj Sjöwall (n. 1935) e Per Wahlöö (1926 – 1975)

**Per Wahlöö** (1926 – 1975) e **Maj Sjöwall** (n. 1935) dois escritores suecos, marido e mulher, unidos pelo amor e pelas convicções políticas, **os verdadeiros criadores do romance policial nórdico**, com o início na série protagonizada pelo inspetor **Martin Beck**, rigorosamente planeada, intitulada "A História de um Crime", 10 livros, cada livro com 30 capítulos, no total 300 capítulos de verdadeira e genuína literatura policial, publicados originalmente entre 1965 e 1975, ano da morte prematura de **Per Wahlöö**.

Em “**Roseanna**” uma jovem mulher é encontrada morta no **Canal de Göta** (Göta kanal em sueco), que atravessa o Sul da Suécia, permitindo viajar de barco entre Gotemburgo e Söderköping, nas margens do Mar Báltico, ligando o lago Vänern até ao lago Vättern. Tem uma extensão de 190 km e no seu percurso tem 58 comportas e 2 aquedutos.

Um cadáver que ninguém consegue identificar.

Inesperadamente, e com a ajuda do tenente Elmer B. Kafka, detective da polícia de Lincoln, Nebraska, EUA; o corpo é identificado: pertence a Roseanna McGraw, uma turista norte-americana, de 27 anos, com 1,67 m de altura, bibliotecária, que viaja num dos barcos de passageiros que faz regularmente a travessia do Canal de Göta.

O inspector Martin Beck da polícia de Estocolmo é encarregado de liderar a investigação, que vai avançando lentamente, estamos em 1964, sem telemóvel ou internet, na época dos telefones fixos, dos faxes e dos telegramas, que exige paciência e rigor nos detalhes, e uma análise meticulosa dos procedimentos policiais e criminais.

“**Roseanna**” é o primeiro romance da série com o inspector Martin Beck, um homem taciturno, fumador inveterado, pouco ambicioso, totalmente focado no trabalho, alheado da família e dos problemas familiares, onde a dedicação excessiva ao trabalho acaba por ser a fonte dos conflitos familiares, sobretudo, com a sua mulher Inga, profundamente humano, melancólico, com uma personalidade distante, por vezes individualista, com poucas relações de amizade, excepto com os colegas Kollberg e Melander, em suma um solitário, mas com um método de trabalho que assenta sobretudo na sua capacidade de análise, que conduz a inúmeras questões, que vão sendo respondidas, não escondendo as suas falhas ou os seus insucessos, mas procurando as ligações entre os detalhes e as pistas, mas mantendo sempre presente uma obstinada persistência na busca da justiça.

Passados 50 anos a história de “**Roseanna**” mantém-se actual e a escrita da dupla **Per Wahlöö e Maj Sjöwall** permanece intemporal, uma leitura cativante, em que facilmente se percebe a influência numa geração recente de escritores policiais escandinavos, com destaque para **Henning Mankell** que escreve o prefácio da edição que li.

Em Portugal no início dos anos 90 foram editados pela Editorial Caminho, na colecção Caminho de Bolso Policial (que alternava com a publicação de livros de Ficção Científica) os livros: “O Homem que Se Desfez em Fumo” (1966), “O Homem À Varanda” (1967), “O Polícia Que Ri” (1968), “Desapareceu um Carro de Bombeiros” (1969) e “O Homem Abominável” (1971).

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## Carmen says

I liked it a lot. Very Scandinavian. I say this because (like other Scandinavian books) they treat crime as something done by insane people who are to be pitied, not loathed or hated. They also are very methodical and relentless in their pursuit of criminals. This took place in the sixties, and that was very interesting. Beatles, no cell phones, telegraphs, etc. Since the villain is a rapist and murderer, some things get disgusting at times. Not description-wise, the Scandinavians are very good at being dry and vague, but police interviewing (normal) people about their private sexual lives and setting up a policewoman as bait for the rapist/murderer.

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## Harry says

## Book Review

Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö

With an introduction by Henning Mankell (he of the famous Kurt Wallander series) and writes:

*"I have a strong and indisputable memory that back then I thought of the novel as straightforward and clear, a convincing story presented in an equally convincing form. [...] Today as I reread the novel I see that my first impression still holds true. The book has hardly aged at all."*

*Roseanna* is remarkable, especially where it concerns Henning's last remark. It could have been written today. Of course, back then everyone smoked, no computers or cell phones, and everyone ate their dinner and lunch in cafes and used public phones and/or land lines. But you hardly notice it when reading the novel. Clearly, Per and Mah were very focused on delineating a series based on the National Homicide bureau in fictional form but based on reality. Verisimilitude was used in the police procedurals but tidbits that might age the novel (such as the mention of products, companies, or processes of the time) are not present.

As police procedurals go, the pair are masters of their art. From the very first we encounter an thorough examination of the decision making of the various agencies involved when encountering Roseanna's body in the sludge of the Gota Canal. As with Mankell's Kurt Wallander, Martin Beck is a dogged policeman who despite months going by never gives up and keeps pounding the pavement for clues as to the identity of the killer. For courtroom thriller enthusiasts, the lean prose is interspersed with fascinating transcripts of interviews with possible suspect lending the novel a highly realistic form while simultaneously inviting the reader to solve the crime ahead of Beck.

Immigration, as with most Scandinavian novels, makes its appearance and throughout the novel Maj and Per place tidbits that with a certain sense of alertness can give the novels a heightened sense of appeal. For example, Henning in his introduction noticed the following:

*"There is one small detail on the second page of the novel that fascinates me when I see it again. The story begins in early July, with the date clearly specified. A dredging boat has arrived at the canal in Ortergotland. The authors write: 'The vessel...moored at Borenshult as the neighborhood children and a Vietnamese tourist looked on.' A Vietnamese tourist! In Sweden in 1965! That may have happened once at most. But, here the authors are giving a nod to the major event of my generation: the Vietnam war."*

Having read this novel immediately following Henning's Faceless Killers I was personally struck by the similarity in style and perhaps even liking this one a tad bit better. Whether or not that view remains in place as I read both the Martin Beck and Kurt Wallander series, remains to be seen.

Enjoy!

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## Series Review

Two writers from the left, without too much argument, started it all where it concerns crime fiction in Scandinavia (the books were written in the sixties). Jo Nesbo considers this team of writers the Godfathers of Scandinavia crime fiction. Henning Mankell perhaps the most famous Nordic writer of them all often makes references to Per and Maj as having influenced his work. In the words of Barry Forsaw whose *Death in a Cold Climate: a Guide to Scandinavian Crime Fiction* serves as the Bible for Nordic readers says of these authors: *"Their continuing influence (since the death of Per Wahlöö) remains prodigious."*

Briefly: Wahlöö was born in Tölö parish, Kungsbacka Municipality, Halland. After his studies, from 1946 onwards he worked as a crime reporter. After long trips around the world he returned to Sweden and started working as a journalist again. He had a 13 year relationship with his colleague Maj Sjöwall but never married. Both were Marxists. He has been married to Inger Wahlöö, née Andersson. He was brother to Claes Wahlöö. He died of cancer at Malmö in 1975, aged 48. His work (independent of his collaboration with Maj on the Martin Beck series) primarily consists of his *Dictatorship* series and the two novels featuring Inspector Jensen.

Maj Sjöwall is a Swedish author and translator. She is best known for the collaborative work with her partner Per Wahlöö on a series of ten novels about the exploits of Martin Beck, a police detective in Stockholm. In 1971, the fourth of these books, *The Laughing Policeman* (a translation of *Den skrattande polisen*, originally published in 1968) won an Edgar Award from the Mystery Writers of America for Best Novel. They also wrote novels separately.

Until recently, it was considered a scandal that publishing houses offered no translations of these two highly influential authors. But as the Nordic crime wave hit British and American soil (beginning in the nineties), this egregious blot on the reputation of publishers was finally remedied...albeit late in the game. There were simply too many crime writers that cited Per and Maj as the fountain head of the socially committed crime novel. Yet one more example that everything starts at the grass roots level and then filters up into the corporate halls of publishing.

Although not as prevalent as in the work of Per Wahlöö (see my review of *Murder on the Thirty-first Floor*), the left wing ideological views of the pair are common knowledge and can be viewed as interspersed throughout their famous Martin Beck series. I've often spoken in my reviews of Nordic fiction that aside from being excellent and compelling reads in the mystery genre, Nordic writers on the whole use this genre based platform to comment on sociopolitical issues of the day as that takes place in the Scandinavian countries. For their time, this pair of authors were considered the pioneers of this authorial attitude.

Now before you decide to forego this excellent series based on the Marxist ideology of its authors, let me assure you that Per and Maj's views at no point interfere with your appreciation of a good mystery novel. It might be said that their edgy point of view may be considered less important than the telling of a good tale. This too, is a hallmark of Scandinavian crime fiction: sociopolitical commentary never overshadows the story itself (though I would argue that in Per's novels written alone, this might not be the case).

For an understanding of the realism of their work within Scandinavian crime fiction as married to their political attitudes, I highly recommend a reading of these two authors, together, as well as (in the case of Per) his own work.

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## **Diane Barnes says**

"A murderer is just a regular human being, only more unfortunate and maladjusted".

Well, that's a scary thought. Police procedurals are not my usual reading, but this was a book club assignment, and I'm a conscientious member, so I gave it a chance. It was excellent, and fortunately I had the afternoon free, because it was hard to put down.

The dead body of a young woman is found by a dredging machine, and the police finally decide she was killed on a Swedish cruise boat carrying 85 passengers. Nude, no identification, it takes several weeks before they even know her name. To complicate things, the passengers were tourists from many different countries, and had all gone back home. No sweat, right? Just check a little DNA, internet searches of names and addresses, cross referencing with other countries' police departments, easy-peasy. Except wait, this book was written in 1967! None of that existed. Crimes had to be solved with old-fashioned legwork, deduction, poring over reports and tapes of interviews, a few photographs (no cell phone videos taken by by-standers), no instant communication with anyone, especially overseas when even phone conversations were static and unclear. It was positively medieval!

And that was the fun in this book, because I realized how dependent we've all become to instant news, when we have pictures and life histories of mass shooters 10 minutes after the killings, right there on the news channels that are always a click away. With Wolf Blitzer and Anderson Cooper telling us all the gory details just as soon as the little microphones in their ears tell them.

Here we have a small group of detectives determined to solve this case, led by Martin Beck, a depressive, unhappy, unsociable middle aged man, but who is like a dog with a bone, obsessing over every detail. I liked his character a lot.

This book was translated from Swedish, and is the first of a series, so I guess I have to add Nordic Noir to my genre list now. A nice quick read when I'm in need of something just a little different.

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## **Kemper says**

So first off, this has nothing to do with that Toto song. Just thought I'd get that out of the way right off the bat.

This was published in 1965 and was the first in a series of ten books about Swedish police investigator Martin Beck. When the body of a woman who was raped and murdered is pulled out of a Swedish canal, Beck is called in to investigate, and he'll spend months pulling together the facts he'll need to solve it.

This has an interesting introduction by the Swedish crime writer Henning Mankell who recounts reading this as a teenager and being hugely influenced by it, and that makes sense considering that his creation Wallander almost seems like a direct descendent of Beck. It seems to be a forerunner to a lot of the Swedish crime fiction that has gotten so popular in America lately.

I liked the realistic depiction of an overworked and sickly detective with an unsatisfying home life patiently working his way through an investigation. I especially enjoyed a section where the police gather photos from all the tourists on a cruise ship to build a timeline of the victim's last hours.

Like the best procedurals, it avoids histrionics and patiently sucks you into the story which eventually reveals the nature of the victim, the detective and the killer. I'm interested in checking out how this series developed through the rest of the books.

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## Algernon says

I found out about this book through a recommendation for something similar the Henning Mankell, and it is revealing that Mankell is the one who writes the foreword of this true classic of police procedural novels. Indeed, Kurt Wallander and Martin Beck seem cut from the same cloth, 40 years apart: middle aged, slightly depressive, with broken marriages, stubborn and unrelenting in the pursuit of justice. I'm not talking about any plagiarizing, each series stands on its own merits and has distinctive touches. More likely Mankell recognizes the influence it had on him as a young reader and the enduring quality of the themes presented in Roseanna.

One of the reasons I think this story has endured is its realism and no frills writing style - a cold enumeration of facts and great dialogue that suggest rather than declaim the human hearts behind the investigation. The authors have avoided both the Agatha Christie style of intellectual detective exercises and the American flashier detectives with their racing cars and blazing guns. What we have here is "the banality of evil" , not the evil masterminds or the gang lords but the persons living next door to us. And the resolution will come not from the armchair deductions puffing a pipe or from a shootout, but the from the slow accumulation of facts and a lot of gumshoe.

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