



The White Lioness

Henning Mankell , Laurie Thompson (Translator)

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The execution-style murder of a Swedish housewife looks like a simple case even though there is no obvious suspect. But then Wallander learns of a determined stalker, and soon enough, the cops catch up with him. But when his alibi turns out to be airtight, they realize that what seemed a simple crime of passion is actually far more complex—and dangerous.

Combining compelling insights into the sinister side of modern life with a riveting tale of international intrigue, *The White Lioness* keeps you on the knife-edge of suspense.

The White Lioness Details

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From Reader Review The White Lioness for online ebook

Jeffrey Keeten says

”A child should grow, grow bigger; but in my country a black child has to learn how to grow smaller and smaller. I saw my parents succumb to their own invisibility, their own accumulated bitterness. I was an obedient child and learned to be a nobody among nobodies. Apartheid was my real father. I learned what no one should need to learn. To live with falsehood, contempt, a lie elevated to the only truth in my country. A lie enforced by police and laws, but above all by a flood of white water, a torrent of words about the natural differences between white and black, the superiority of white civilization.”

Kenneth Branagh is Wallander/

When a real estate agent turns up missing, Kurt Wallander of the Ystad Swedish police catches the case along with most of the department. They have a general idea of where she went missing, but they have few clues as to what has caused her disappearance. She and her husband are very religious, and Wallander finds himself thinking **”what it feels like to believe in God.”**

As we learn more about Wallander, we realize there are good reasons why he is estranged from his ex-wife, his daughter, and his father. We also start to understand the frustrations that the other cops have working with him. He is bloody brilliant most of the time between those other moments of complete befuddlement. He has a single minded purpose in tracking down a missing woman, a killer, or solving a puzzle of a crime. If I were missing, I'd want Kurt Wallander trying to find me. He devotes himself so exclusively to a case that he has little time for those around him, or eating, or sleeping. He makes these leaps in logic that baffle his fellow police officers, but what they don't realize is that while they are...having a life...Wallander is still ticking over the aspects of the case.

Wallander makes a breakthrough in the case, and this is one of those moments when time is of the essence, and he takes the day off to be with his daughter. He is trying to do the right thing, attempting to completely divorce himself from the case to pay attention to his daughter, but it turns into a missed opportunity. I, too, was frustrated with Wallander at this point.

They find the severed finger of a black man at the scene where they believe the real estate agent went missing. This turns out to be a digit that once belonged to Victor Mabatha of South Africa. This book came out in 1993 in Sweden and 1998 in an English translation, so apartheid was still fresh in everyone's mind. During the course of the plot, Wallander and Mabatha intersect, and Victor gives this impassioned explanation for why he is the way he is, which is the quote I chose to lead this review with.

So a missing person case becomes a nonsensical international case somehow involving a planned assassination in South Africa. Why are these people in Sweden? Henning Mankill adds some additional spice to the plot with a demented, immoral Russian named Konovalenko. He runs the sole of his boot down the face of a person he just killed to close their eyes. Somehow that made me shudder more than the actual killing of the person. Maybe because we all deserve some semblance of reverence in death.

I would be a very considerate serial killer.

I found it interesting that Mankill takes us from the mind of Wallander to the political musings of several politicians in South Africa. We start to discover the extent of the conspiracy. The question is, can Wallander put the pieces together in time to obstruct a world tragedy?

That looks like the face of a man who put two and two together and got sixteen.

I hope most of you have had the chance to watch the spot on performance by Kenneth Branagh in the 12 episode BBC TV series. They scrambled the order of the books, which required some changes to the backstory, but not enough to bother me. I have a set of the Wallander books and plan to read them all. I set them aside to watch the TV series, which does break a half a dozen Keeten reading rules, but certainly seeing the TV episode of this book did not detract from my reading enjoyment. A story well told can be experienced many times with new insights with each retelling.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Clay says

I hesitated a long time before reading the third Wallander story. That's mainly because I knew that this book would be much different than the first two since it is a lot more ambitious. It deals with Mandela... hence with world politics. Uuuughhh... is this really what I want to read in a proper noir/crime novel? Nah... I read the papers for that kinda stuff.

The first two books had many flaws but they were also interesting in a certain way because they mainly focused on the characters and the crime. This story is about Mandela and I think that this territory is way too big and grand to properly deal with when it is put into a crime novel. I obviously get the point, Mankell had good intentions but when I pick up a crime novel I enjoy reading about the most simple characters in their daily surroundings, it is absolutely enough for an exciting story. This book is simply aaaall ooover the place! There is nooooo character development whatsoever. There were too many plotlines, too many flat characters, the villains were only bad and nearly completely one-dimensional, there were also many plotholes and moments when I wanted to shout "Ooooh pleeeeaseeee... really now?" while rolling my eyes as hard as I could.

I don't want to hate on Mankell because he wanted to do something good and had the right intentions but in my opinion it didn't work out at all. If you want to write a proper book about politics or about Mandela then that's fine.

Mark says

I'm only reviewing this one book, but I've read the entire detective series by Henning Mankell, and I am a huge fan. I first became aware of him after returning from a trip to Sweden in 2004, and then discovered he has a cult following in Europe and is beginning to have one in the U.S. He has written all kinds of novels, but I've focused on his mystery series featuring Swedish police officer Kurt Wallander. The Wallander stories are good mysteries in their own right, but what commends the books is Wallander's struggles to live life as a

middle-aged detective whose personal life is always under strain. His wife has left him, his daughter has a spotty relationship with him, he finds another woman in his life but isn't able to commit, he constantly thinks about getting out of the police force. It's that human-ness, and what I think of as a Swedish pessimism, that makes this series so intoxicating. Also, because Mankell the author lives about half of every year in Mozambique, several of his plots also have fascinating explorations of problems in Africa. I highly recommend this series.

Jan-Maat says

Here the world of Swedish detective Kurt Wallander crosses that of South African plotters intent on political murder. I'm not sure if I read this before or after Dogs of Riga. I enjoyed this book, liked the characterisation and the settings, despite the more than slightly stretched set up. It was hard to avoid the feeling that Mankell really was much more interested in writing about southern Africa, where he spent part of the year living for a fair chunk of his life, rather than his shabby Detective living in gloomy Scandinavia.

I was thoroughly involved right up until the second murder, at which point I lost all emotional investment in the story, but if you are a murder mystery fan, you'll probably enjoy this better than I did. Reading teaches me that I'm not suited to the murder mystery genre I suppose. Come the second murder my suspension of disbelief is over, the illusion is gone and I can't see it as anything other than a constructed and unrealistic novel any more.

The reportage of Homicide was probably the last nail in the coffin for me for this kind of book.

Lyn says

Kurt Wallander and South Africa.

One of Sweden's most recognized fiction crime fighters gets caught up in international espionage in this 1993 post cold war thriller that has half of it's action involving the end of Apartheid in South Africa as the reigning Boers free Nelson Mandela and all hell breaks lose.

What keeps this moving and what holds it together is author Henning Mankell's excellent writing (and to be fair Laurie Thompson's translation) and his ability to convey a subtle but unsettling sense of disquietude in the Swedish coast town of Ystad.

What slows this down is Mankell's overly ambitious design. In a medium sized city (Ystad is around 30k population) an assassination attempt is uncovered following a murder. This connection to South Africa is both thrilling and stretched out – leading this reader to believe that Mankell uses his Wallander pulpit as a vehicle to talk about South Africa. Which is fine, it just spreads thin what would otherwise be a pretty good whodunit.

This reminded me of Jo Nesbo's 2000 publication The Redbreast of his Norwegian detective Harry Hole in the international intrigue, but unfortunately also Nesbo's 2002 follow up Nemesis in that both writer's felt the compulsion to throw everything but the kitchen sink in to an already busy mix.

This also made me wonder about Ystad. The map shows this as extreme southernmost Sweden and of medium size. I looked up some comparable United States and Tennessee towns of the same size to give me an idea about the kind of place Mankell describes. These are some very modest places. Towns like Oak Park Michigan, Lebanon Tennessee and Monterey California. What is Mankell's inspiration for such a setting?

And what about Wallander? Hasn't the whole dark and wounded, brooding and philosophical, sloppy outside of a razor mind kitsch been done before? Well, sure, but Mankell does it very well in the Scandinavian crime fiction.

So, not his best but still very good and worth another visit to sunny Ystad.

Eric_W says

Some of the best police procedural/mystery writing is coming out of the Scandinavian countries. Maj Sjowall and Per Wahloo, for example, also come from Sweden, and their work is consistently excellent. Not to mention there must be some very good translators working on these books.

Mankell, who wrote this in 1993 as apartheid was beginning to crumble, has little love for those white South Africans who wanted to retain the status quo. In this, one of his lengthier works, his protagonist, Chief Inspector Kurt Wallender, from the small town of Ystad, is puzzled by the seemingly random death of a woman real estate agent. The case becomes more baffling when a house blows up leaving only traces of a powerful Russian-built radio transmitter and the remnants of a pistol manufactured in South Africa.

Mankell deftly – normally I dislike books with multiple points of view, but they are nicely integrated here – alternates between the committee and its representatives who are planning to assassinate Nelson Mandela in hopes of instigating a violent chaotic response from the black community that would force de Klerk to rigidly suppress it, and de Klerk's intelligence man who has to work in secret himself to find the truth.

The albino lioness, visited by one of de Klerk's agents on safari, becomes a metaphor not just for the South African white community, dangerous and unpredictable, but also the blindness and density of fog. What appears to be light may not be.

Harry says

Book Review

The White Lioness, the third in the Kurt Wallander series is perhaps intended as Mankell's most ambitious Wallander novel to date. I say "intended" because on some levels it doesn't succeed as such. I'm a big fan of Wallander: his idiosyncrasies, his anti-authority attitude, his loneliness and faltering family relations - they all evoke a reader's empathy in just the right amounts - but Mankell's ambitions to incorporate in this book a world stage of politics, assassinations, and third person point of views stretching across two continents may have stretched this book beyond the pale of a single mystery novel.

This book was published some 20 years since Henning Mankell's first trip to the African continent, a continent he now calls his second home. We write what we know and so it is to be expected that some of

Mankell's fondness for Africa would show up in a Wallander book (he has written stand alones that focus on Africa, novels such as *A Treacherous Paradise*, *The Eye of the Leopard*, or his *Chronicler of the Winds*), but the case can be made that as an author just because you know Africa or love its people, it doesn't mean that one should attempt to incorporate it in a Wallander series that takes place far removed from such passions.

This can create problems for the author. For example: Kurt Wallander is relatively ignorant of international politics (we know this from reading *Dog of Riga*). To create a book that focuses on the flammable politics of a nation far removed and place it within a Wallander book can stretch a reader's credulity as it did with me. To circumvent this problem, Mankell created various third person viewpoints that includes allowing the reader to enter the mind of de Klerk, president of South Africa. It didn't work for me. Not when reading a Wallander book.

This is not to say that the parts taking place in South Africa didn't evoke interest. Mankell does a good job of outlining the problem and giving some salient plot elements to drive the point home...but in many ways it was a superficial glossing over and served to divide the book so that it became as if I were reading two novels, instead of one. (Reminder to self: read one of Mankell's stand-alones taking place in Africa). The metaphor of the White Lioness concretized by an observation of several very minor characters while on safari works only to a certain degree to accent the issue of apartheid. Did it really drive home the essence of the novel? I didn't think so.

On the other hand, I had a few problems with the aspects of this novel that take place in Sweden. I know Wallander despises authority, I know he bucks the system...but to start pointing guns at his colleagues, and to wander into a fog like a lunatic without sufficient cause when the solution is to behave rationally to outsmart a villain? What is the deep underlying cause for this behavior? Lack of sleep? I don't think so, Wallander has never slept well.

Having said all of the above and the resultant 3 star rating, I still enjoyed the book. That after all, is the magic of Henning Mankell. To cause us to care about Wallander.

Series Review

Henning Mankell is an internationally known Swedish crime writer known mostly for this fictional character Kurt Wallander. He is married to Eva Bergman.

Henning Mankell - Author

It might be said that the fall of communism and the consequent increase in Swedish immigration and asylum seekers has been the engine that drives much of Swedish crime fiction. Mankell's social conscience, his cool attitude towards nationalism and intolerance is largely a result of the writer's commitment to helping the disadvantaged (see his theater work in Africa). In this vein, readers might be interested in his stand-alone novel *Kennedy's Brain* a thriller set in Africa and inspired by the AIDS epidemic (Mankell often traveled to Africa to help third world populations); or read his *The Eye of the Leopard*, a haunting novel juxtaposing a man's coming of age in Sweden and his life in Zambia.

Mankell's love of Africa, his theater work on that continent, and his exploits in helping the disadvantaged is

not generally known by his American readers. In fact, an international news story that has largely gone unnoticed is that while the world watched as Israeli soldiers captured ships attempting to break the Gaza blockade, few people are aware that among the prisoners of the Israelis was one of the world's most successful and acclaimed writers: Henning Mankell.

It is no exaggeration when I say that Henning Mankell is by far one of the most successful writers in Scandinavia, especially in his own country of Sweden. The Nordic weather, cold to the bones, drives its populace indoors for much of the year where cuddling up to read the latest in crime fiction is a national pastime.

For many GR readers who have been introduced to Kurt Wallander it is interesting to note that ultimately the success of bringing Mankell to English speaking audiences only came after bringing in the same production company responsible for Steig Larsson's Millennium trilogy for the wildly popular BBC version starring Kenneth Branagh. Viewers had no problem with an anglicized version of Mankell's work, an English speaking cast set down in a genuine Swedish countryside. Of course, to those fans thoroughly familiar with Mankell's work, it is the Swedish televised version that is found to be a more accurately portrayal of Mankell's novels...not the British, sensationalized version. And there's a reason for that.

Henning's prose is straightforward, organized, written mostly in linear fashion, a straightforward contract with the reader. It is largely quantified as police procedural work. The work of men who are dogged and patient to a fault. Kurt Wallander, the hero in Mankell's novels, is the alter ego of his creator: a lonely man, a dogged policeman, a flawed hero, out of shape, suffering from headaches and diabetes, and possessing a scarred soul. Understandably so and if some of the GR reviews are an indication; like his famous father-in-law Ingmar Bergman, Mankell is from a country noted for its Nordic gloom. But before you make the assumption that this is yet another addition to the somberness and darkness that characterizes Nordic writing Mankell often confounds this cliche with guarded optimism and passages crammed with humanity (for Mankell, this is true both personally and professionally as a writer).

As Americans we often think of Sweden as possessing a very open attitude towards sex and that this is in marked contrast (or perhaps reprieve) to the somber attitudes of its populace. But this is a view that often confounds Swedish people. The idea of Nordic carnality is notably absent in Mankell's work, as much a statement of its erroneous perception (Swedes do not see themselves as part of any sexual revolution at all) and in the case of Mankell ironic because the film director most responsible for advancing these explicit sexual parameters (for his time) was his own father-in-law the great Ingmar Bergman. In a world where Bergman moves in a universe where characters are dark, violent, extreme and aggressive - take note that the ultimate root of this bloody death and ennui lies in the Norse and Icelandic Viking sagas of Scandinavian history - that dark, somber view ascribed to both Mankell and Bergman's work was often a topic of intense jovial interest between these two artists.

For any reader of Nordic crime fiction, Henning Mankell is an immensely popular and staple read.

Enjoy!

June says

Henning, dude, if you want to write a book about how it sucks to live in racist South Africa, I'm all for it. But I picked up this book because it was a KURT WALLANDER mystery. Wallander--the SWEDISH policeman, for christakes...is he really going to foil a plot to assassinate Nelson Mandela? I want to read about SWEDISH police doing SWEDISH things like solving murders in SKANE, drinking coffee and eating sandwiches. If I wanted to read the Ladies Detective series, I would have joined a book club...

Laura says

This is the third book of the Wallander series.

The plot is around an execution-style murder of a Swedish housewife. This apparent simple investigation unmasks a murder plot against President De Klerk and the future South-african president Nelson Mandela. A ex-KGB agent together with a mercenary south-african will be responsible for such political outrage.

As usual, Inspector Wallander gives his own personal way in this crime investigation.

The book's tittle refers to an albino lioness and its real meaning is given below:

Page 383:

He was thinking about the white lioness. A symbol of Africa, he thought. The animal at rest, the calm before it gets to its feet and musters all its strength. The beast of prey one cannot afford to wound, but which has to be killed if it starts to attack.

A movie was made based on this book: The White Lioness (1996).

And Kenneth Branagh played the role of Kurt Wallander in BBC Series - The White Lioness (2015).

Laurel says

Published in 1993, this is the third book in the Kurt Wallander series, and the best in my opinion, preceded by Faceless Killers and The Dogs of Riga. Wallander is a detective inspector in a small city in Sweden. He is divorced, out of shape and experiences waves of self-doubt concerning his abilities as a police officer, father, and son. When Wallander has a case to solve, he is like a dog with a bone. He cannot let it go, and all else goes by the wayside. In this book, he is still reeling from his last case, laid out in The Dogs of Riga. He would like to begin a relationship with a women he met while on that case, but is gun shy. Suddenly, he must cope with a missing person's case. A female real estate agent is missing, and Wallander's instincts tell him that the case will not end happily.

More than half of this book takes place in South Africa, with the political turmoil of Nelson Mandela's rise to power, as the country is on the verge of its first free elections in April of 1994. Markell places Wallander, via the case he is working, in the middle of a complicated plot to assassinate Mandela as he speaks to a huge crowd. How can the missing woman, an explosion at a deserted farm house and the discovery of a unknown

black man's amputated finger, found at the explosion scene, all be related? Wallander must unravel an exceptionally puzzling case. Along the way, Mankell offers some insight into the political, social, and cultural powder keg that was apartheid South Africa, in 1994. His epilogue at the back of the book is dated June, 1993.

It is ironic that as I have been reading this book over the last few days, the news has been filled with reports of Nelson Mandela's ever-worsening illness. At age 94, his countrymen and the world are beginning to realize that this great man is going to be lost to us. But all that he has achieved will remain. I gained some insight into the power struggles between white Afrikaners determined to keep black South Africans bound by the horrific restraints of apartheid, of underground groups within the black population working to end apartheid, and the enormous rift between the two groups and cultures. Notwithstanding a riveting plot, reading *The White Lioness* has been enlightening and most worthwhile.

Lewis Weinstein says

Mankell undertook a difficult premise ... major related crimes on two continents, without much coordination between the police. I am intrigued by Wallander with all of his flaws and uncertainties. The African side was relatively weaker, with no well-developed characters to care about. The ending was staged and anti-climatic. So I gave it 3*** on a stretch. Other books in this series are better.

Debbie says

So far it's been my experience that the Kurt Wallander series seems to improve with each successive novel. This one was rich in setting, characters, and interwoven incidents that held my attention throughout. A very good read to me.

James Thane says

This, the third entry in Henning Mankell's series featuring Swedish Inspector Kurt Wallander, appeared in 1993, and is a very ambitious effort--in the end, perhaps overly so. The story starts simply enough with the murder of a real estate agent who finds herself in the wrong place at the wrong time, but it quickly spins into a major international conspiracy involving a plot by die-hard South African whites to assassinate Nelson Mandela, shortly after he was released from prison.

The plotters have recruited a black assassin to murder Mandela, hoping to spark a race war that will enable the whites to continue to control the country. They've recruited a former KGB agent to train the assassin and have concluded for some reason that the training would best be done secretly in Sweden, which is how Wallander's murder investigation becomes mixed up with the conspiracy.

The story is told from several different points of view and jumps back and forth from Sweden to South Africa. It's quite a long and complicated book with a fairly large cast of characters. In many ways it's a very intriguing story, somewhat along the lines of *The Day of the Jackal*. But it drags on a bit too long, and it's hard for Mankell to maintain the suspense throughout the book.

I'm rating this three stars rather than four because over the course of the story, Kurt Wallander occasionally takes actions that make no sense. The maverick cop who follows his own trail and sometimes takes shortcuts while ignoring the orders of his superiors is a staple of crime fiction, and most of us love these characters, at least as long as what they are doing seems logical. In these case though, on at least a couple of occasions, Wallander does things that seem totally illogical and which leave the reader, as well as his colleagues, wondering if he might be having some sort of mental breakdown.

Still, in all, I enjoyed the story and I'm looking forward to the next installment.

Brad says

I approached *The White Lioness* tentatively, afraid that I wouldn't like it and that it could very well mark the end of my appreciation for the written Wallander.

Faceless Killers was a somewhat uninspired though compelling murder mystery. It was straightforward, and exactly what one would expect from the story of a taciturn Swedish cop in quiet Ystad. Coupled with the BBC movies, it was more than enough to make me want to proceed in the series. *Dogs of Riga*, however, was something else entirely. It wasn't bad, but it was thoroughly unexpected. It was a political thriller in the guise of a cop mystery, and Kurt Wallander's foray into Latvia felt too forced and uncharacteristic (despite the book's early place in the Wallander chronology) to rise above Mankell's personal, political agenda. It wasn't bad, but it made me wary of what might come next.

Once I saw the map of South Africa and the disclaimer at the beginning of *The White Lioness*, I was even more frightened: "Since *The White Lioness* was first published in 1993, some towns and areas in South Africa have been renamed. The names in use then have been retained here."

"Uh-oh," I thought, "Another *Dogs of Riga*. And to some extent it was, but in a more masterful and confident way. Mankell does with *The White Lioness* what he probably should have done with its predecessor. He tells two parallel stories: one is a tense murder mystery starring Kurt Wallander at his unpredictable best; the other is a suspenseful political thriller set in de Klerk's Africa at the tail end of apartheid. This time, however, he doesn't try to force Wallander into a foreign trip. He doesn't embroil Wallander in a Jason Bourne style international action story. Instead, he lets these two stories bleed into each other in their separate countries, showing us how the actions of men and women in Sweden and South Africa simultaneously and unwittingly affect the other.

The two stories are constantly and necessarily tied together, but few of the important characters ever meet.

It is an impressive balancing act, and it ratchets up the suspense to a level I've never before experienced in a Wallander book. This was the first one I couldn't put down, and I didn't want it to end. It's a real shame that *The White Lioness* is so rooted in its time and place. An assassination attempt on Nelson Mandela would not have the same implications today, which means that this story, barring an attempted big screen period piece, will never make it to the screen, at least not with Branagh as Wallander.

How I would love to see it, though. This really is an excellent Wallander tale. The *Dogs of Riga* have been put to rest.

Tony says

THE WHITE LIONESS. (1993; Eng. Trans. 1998). Henning Mankell. ****.

I wish I had had the foresight to read Mankell's books in order, although, ultimately it didn't make any difference. What precluded my doing so was the fact that the books were not translated in order into English from the Swedish originals. I don't know why. In any event, I have finally made it to this episode, which starts out rather mundanely with the disappearance of a female estate agent. Several days after her disappearance, her husband shows up at the local police station and reports her 'missing' to Wallander. The usual search is conducted with no success. The police mostly believe that the wife disappeared for personal reasons and that she would ultimately turn up again in due time. Not so. A man in the process of stealing well pumps for ultimate re-sale as antiques discovers a woman's body at the bottom of one of the wells he was raiding, and reports it to the police. When the body is recovered, the woman – the one who was missing – was found to have been shot in the head. Suddenly the case takes on a whole new meaning. What Wallander discovers is that he is now in the midst of a grand conspiracy to assassinate one of the key political figures of South Africa that involves agents from Africa and ex-KGB agents training in Sweden. The plot in this thriller is - to –ay the least – complicated. We have multiple crimes going on in at least two different continents, and a vast array of bad guys conducting them. I usually try to keep track of the characters in a book by writing down their names as I go along, in addition to a brief description of them. With this novel I gave up. There are too many characters to keep track of. Somehow, however, Mankell makes it all work out, though, so that the reader is not confused. This is another well written case of one of our favorite Swedish detectives and one which will keep you up for several nights running. Recommended.
