Although few murders are actually committed in Sweden, the Swedish crime novel has become a modern classic and has gained a worldwide reputation in just a short space of time. From Gotland in the east to Fjällbacka in the west, from Ystad in the south up to Kiruna in the north, the country is seen in a new perspective: via murder investigations where the focus is not only on the crime but also on the Swedish welfare model and human psychology.

The Swedish crime novel was in fact born over a century ago with the publication of The Stockholm Detective in 1893, written under the pseudonym of Prins Pierre.

The original golden age of the crime genre in Sweden was the 1950s, when Stieg Trenter's Stockholm series competed with Maria Lang's 'feel-good' novels set in both Stockholm and Bergslagen, and numerous other crime writers were active.

But today's crop of authors is infinitely larger. Sweden's current crime fiction phenomenon has largely been shaken out of the shabby overcoat of Inspector Martin Beck, the protagonist in The Story of a Crime, the legendary ten-book series by Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö. Roseanna from 1965 marked the arrival of the modern Swedish crime novel, rich in social criticism and portraying fairly ordinary characters trying to deal with an unstable society.
The narrow limestone island of Öland has gone the same way...
The 2006 publication of Easy Money by criminal lawyer Jens Lapidus marked a new direction for Swedish crime fiction. While James Ellroy and Dennis Lehane write in a similar vein, Lapidus is something new. The language is clipped, hip hop-influenced and full of slang expressions and mannerisms. The settings are the flashy nightclubs around central Stockholm, but also drug-running locations around Stockholm with poor suburban youth as foot soldiers. Lapidus calls his trilogy Stockholm Noir. He has since its completion written two further novels, The VIP Room (2014) and Stockholm Delete (2015), which are rooted in the trilogy but with different protagonists and partly different style.

JENS LAPIDUS (b. 1974)

The summer of 2015 saw the arrival of the eleventh police novel from Sweden's best-known criminologist, Leif G W Persson, who mixes a close familiarity with his subject with ironically humorous observation. His cast of police characters ranges from the masterly Inspector Lars Martin Johansson, a northerner who 'can see round corners' , according to his admirers, to the corrupt and prejudiced Evert Bäckström. They usually operate from Stockholm's central police station in Kungsholmen, but Inspector Johansson's favourite haunts are an Italian bar and a hot-dog stand elsewhere in the city. The protagonists seldom leave Stockholm, but in Linda – As in the Linda Murder, Evert Bäckström makes life difficult for people in the southern town of Växjö.

Arne Dahl is the pseudonym of author Jan Arnald (b. 1963), who has written 11 books about the 'A Group' , a talented group of unusual police investigators in Stockholm operating in traditional Stockholm environments: the old industrial zone at Sickla (now gone), the increasingly trendy streets of the Södermalm district, and luxury villas in wealthy suburbs such as Danderyd. But crime no longer recognises frontiers, and consequently Arne Dahl's new series is Opcop, about a group of Europol officers in The Hague in Holland who work across borders.  The 'A Group' favourites are still there, of course. So far, four Opcop books have appeared, with titles taken from old Swedish children's games.

LEIF G.W. PERSSON (b. 1945)

ARNE DAHL

The stripped beauty of Skogskyrkogården (the Forest Cemetery) recalls the places where rites of ancient Scandinavians took place.

The Stockholm metro.

Stieg Larsson's favorite café in Stockholm, Mellqvist Coffee Bar.

The Stockholm metro.

The Millennium Trilogy scarcely needs any introduction: journalist Mikael Blomkvist and the tough, asocial computer hacker Lisbeth Salander are world famous. Their creator, Stieg Larsson, died before the series was published and the trilogy achieved worldwide fame. It is an affectionate pastiche on the Swedish crime writing genre, represented by the whodunit, The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo, the police novel, The Girl Who Played with Fire, and the spy thriller, The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest. Stieg Larsson caringly describes Södermalm in Stockholm, where both Lisbeth and Mikael lives, but also the Stockholm archipelago and sparsely populated areas in northern Sweden. In 2015 an original sequel, The Girl in the Spider's Web, written by David Lagercrantz, followed the original trilogy.

STIEG LARSSON (1954-2004)

For a crime writer, it is extremely useful to have worked both in the Swedish security service and as a counter-terrorism officer in the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe). Kristina Ohlsson made her debut with Unwanted (2009), a traditional police thriller and the first in a series of five about police inspector Alex Recht and investigative analyst Fredrika Bergman, whose investigations become increasingly international in character. Especially in Hostage (2012) Kristina Ohlsson incorporates her knowledge about terrorism and security policing. Kristina Ohlsson has since written two hard-boiled thrillers about lawyer Martin Benner, Lotus' Blues (2014) and Mio's Blues (2015).

KRISTINA OHLSSON (b. 1979)

Photo: Let Ideas Compete
This crime writing duo first appeared in 2004 with The Beast, which dealt with paedophilia but also asked questions about the impact of individual acts on the community at large. In their six books, Roslund and Hellström scrutinise Sweden's and especially Stockholm's underworld, sometimes literally, as in The Girl Below the Street (2007), in which homeless people live in city tunnels. Two Soldiers describes a fictitious Stockholm suburb which has turned into a ghetto. In recent years, Anders Roslund and Hellstrom Börge have not written together, but are working with others.

Nighttime in one of Stockholm's suburbs.

Photo: Daniel Mott

ANDERS ROSLUND (b. 1961)
BÖRGE HELLSTRÖM (1957-2017)

With her debut novel, The Bomber, in 1998, Liza Marklund changed the Swedish crime writing map. The book was a major success. Marklund was awarded both the Swedish Crime Writer Academy's prize for a first book and the new Poloni Prize designed to encourage women writers of crime fiction. Since then, restless tabloid reporter Annika Bengtzon has starred in a total of eleven books (the concluding book, The Final Word, appeared in 2015) – and she is an unusual protagonist. She leads an everyday brand of city life in her Stockholm flat, forever puzzling together bus times, press deadlines and parental obligations. The first books of the series in particular are set on the streets of the capital, where murder victims are discovered in a Jewish cemetery in the inner city, a woman is murdered in the central square, Sergels Torg, and Bengtzon meets a bomber at a fictitious Olympic stadium in southern Stockholm. In later books Annika Bengtzon has been to the far north, in Luleå, but also crossed the country's borders, including to Spain's Costa del Sol.

LIZA MARKLUND (b. 1962)

The far north of Sweden, around Kiruna in northern Lapland, is the setting for Åsa Larsson's five detective novels about the nervy lawyer Rebecka Martinsson who leaves Stockholm for the small village Kurravaara. Together with the calm and self-possessed local police officer Anna-Maria Mellan, she investigates cases where priests are murdered, sects are exposed, murder victims are found both on and under the ice, and in a small dog kennel a boy who can no longer speak is hiding. The landscape is mortally cold and people live far apart, but it is strangely warm and secure in the kitchens where the dogs sleep in the heat from the stove. In recent years, Åsa Larsson has started to write children's books that have become very popular.

ÅSA LARSSON (b. 1966)

Criminal psychologist Sebastian Bergman has in the so-far five books been one of the more unpleasant main characters in Swedish crime fiction. He is gifted but so unreliable that the head of the National Homicide Squad, Torkel Höglund, dares not give him any demanding assignments. Bergman is nevertheless drawn in when a boy disappears in the quiet town of Västerås, when a woman is found dead in the Stockholm suburb of Tumba, when two women hiking in the Jämtland province discover skeletons, and when an entire family is murdered in the province of Värmland. In the most recent book Those Who Failed (2015), reality show participants are murdered.

MICHAEL HJORTH (b. 1963)
HANS ROSENFELDT (b. 1964)

Nowadays, Kerstin Ekman doesn't write crime novels, but both her first six books and her best-known work are murder stories. She made her debut in the 1950s during the golden age of Swedish crime writing with 30 Metres of Murder which was widely acclaimed, as were her subsequent books. But the book selected a few years ago as the best Swedish crime novel ever written was Blackwater, a horribly suggestive story about a young woman and her daughter who arrive in a small village in the forest region of Jämtland province. An incredibly beautiful Swedish summer greets them, but the idyll is shattered by the discovery of two tourists murdered in their tent. Kerstin Ekman is one of Sweden's foremost contemporary authors.

KERSTIN EKMAN (b. 1933)

Lapland described by Åsa Larsson is a mixture of pervasive nature and indispensable technology.

Kiruna, the northernmost city in Sweden has an eternal night in winter and midnight sun in summer.

MICHAEL HJORTH (b. 1963)