



The Babes in the Wood

Ruth Rendell

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With floods threatening both the town of Kingsmarkham and his own home and no end to the rain in sight, Chief Inspector Wexford already has his hands full when he learns that two local teenagers have gone missing along with their sitter, Joanna Troy. Their hysterical mother is convinced that all three have drowned, and as the hours stretch into days Wexford suspects a case of kidnapping, perhaps connected with an unusual sect called the Church of the Good Gospel. But when the sitter's smashed-up car is found at the bottom of a local quarry—occupied by a battered corpse—the investigation takes on a very different hue.

The Babes in the Wood is Ruth Rendell at her very best, a scintillating, precise and troubling story of seduction and religious fanaticism—and murder.

The Babes in the Wood Details

Date : Published October 12th 2004 by Vintage Crime/Black Lizard (first published 2002)

ISBN : 9781400034192

Author : Ruth Rendell

Format : Paperback 336 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Crime, Detective

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From Reader Review The Babes in the Wood for online ebook

Jaksen says

So far, one of my favorite Inspector Wexford novels, by Ruth Rendell. I almost gave it five stars, but had one small (huge?) criticism about the book.

First off, it's the story of what happened to three missing people, two teenagers and a young adult woman. They've gone missing and it's up to Wexford, Burden, and associates to find them. This is all set against a backdrop of a flooded English countryside, with the nearby river literally moving right up the hill to Wexford's house. The feeling throughout the book is one of near-continual rain, dampness, and all the rot that comes with it. Think swamps, bogs, marshes. (Easy for me to do where I live; I've got a woody swamp in my back yard.) The whole book just feels wet, wet, wet. Even the daily newspaper being delivered to Wexford's house is water-logged and needs drying out before he can read it.

There's also a subplot, as there often is in this series, involving one of Wexford's daughters and her continuing issues with men. As this particular daughter is newly-divorced, and attractive, she's had a small succession of boyfriends in recent books. Her newest love interest is a problem and that's where I cut off one star. The development involving this fellow doesn't read true to me, although had the book been written in the 1990's or earlier, I'd have believed it. But what happens with this man and Wexford's handling of it, nope, I didn't believe it. I was very disappointed in the way Rendell handled the situation. I don't like to 'rewrite' the book I'm reading, going on with why didn't she do this? And oh, no, not the way it should have gone! Still, I had a problem with Sylvia, the daughter, and the boyfriend, so be it...

The main story, though, was beautifully written, littered with the usual mystery 'clues,' which this time I just didn't get. I had no idea who did what to whom and why until the very last pages. I've read a lot of mysteries and I've written a few, but this one totally surprised me. I was saying, why didn't I see that! That's so obvious! Yeah, after the fact.

There's a religious cult, the usual uncooperative witnesses, the general dislike of the police that so many English (in Rendell's books) seem to have. My general opinion of this is that those in the 'middle class' more or less appreciate what the police do and try to help them when and if they can, but not in England! Arrogant, snobbish, superior attitudes prevail. I'm surprised some of Rendell's characters, on meeting the police at the front door don't tell them to go around to the back and enter that way. This is a reoccurring theme in her books: a general lack of respect for authority, and maybe it has something to do with Rendell's background, not sure about that.

However, this was a good book, solid mystery. I will be sad when I run out of Inspector Wexford books to read.

Lynn says

75 pages in, 3 people are missing and all that is discussed is the rain.
I'm done.

Sophie says

This book had potential, but as the plot unfolded, I found it more and more tedious. There were so many cliches it became rather laughable at times: women-hating religious fanatics, repressed spinsters, nagging women, drunken aristocrats. There was even an absent-minded professor, though the author tried to excuse it by pointing out that the character was a cliche. Wouldn't it be better to avoid such cliches altogether? Overall, the mystery was fairly well laid out and I had a good idea of who the culprit was, but by the time we got to the reveal (which involved way too much exposition), I didn't much care. One aspect of the plot I found bewildering, though, was an episode of (view spoiler) This is my third or fourth book by Ruth Rendell and although I admire her intelligence and skill as a writer, I don't think I'll be in any hurry to try any more.

Bev says

This is a slightly less than average effort by Rendell. It's pretty obvious "whodunnit" and the investigation is way more meandering than necessary. Other than providing the hysterical mother of the missing kids something be hysterical about (Oh, no! The floods! The kids have drowned....I just know it!) there's no point to the whole flood story in the book. The hysterical mother could have been just as hysterical without the rising river...and maybe the plot would have been a bit more on point. And, honestly, I get a little tired of the "repressive religious" people who so often get thrown in as suspects whether they actually did it or not. (Did they? I'm not telling.) The rendering of Joanna's character is interesting--not a standard female type. And Rendell's writing itself is still very good at this stage--I just wish the story had been a little more straightforward--more true red-herring sidelines and less flooding and family drama for the Wexfords (will Wexford's daughters ever have a happy life?) would go a long way. ★★ and 3/4. [rounded to three here]

First posted on my blog My Reader's Block. Please request permission before reposting. Thanks.

Elizabeth says

ZZZZZZZZZZZZ--am I finished yet? This book was OK, the writing was excellent, but it dragged on. The story could have been shortened a bit. The plot was good, but the outcome was very predictable, at least to me. I'm going to read The Rottweiler next, also by Ruth Rendell. I've heard it is really good.

Vastine says

(SPOILERS) An unfortunate misstep for the usually reliable Ruth Rendell. The book is filled with uninteresting subplots (especially one about a wealthy alcoholic and his narcissistic model wife) that constantly undermine the flow of the story. Like so many European crime novels, the story includes the usual religious boogiemen without even a hint of nuance. The solution largely comes via a plot device not the investigation we have been following (though to be fair to Rendell, pieces of the investigation help illuminate to the solution but they were not really the vehicle to its discovery.) And after that event, when the plot finally starts to move with a little passion, we are treated to a trip to Sweden complete with travel suggestions that kills all of the momentum. Finally, the explanation of the crime comes not through plot but by an unnecessarily long-winded and sometimes silly explanation from Wexford to his partner. When his partner kept asking Wexford to get to the point I shared his frustration. Rendell is a great writer and I will happily continue to read her books but my advice is to take a miss on this one.

Ilze says

Rendell has an extremely long list of novels to her name, some famously "Inspector Wexford" ones ... but why bother reading them? For the entire 300+ pages I've just waded through, I honestly had the sense that the writer was sitting at her typewriter laughing at her readers: She clearly knew from the very beginning who killed Joanna Troy and why the Dade children went missing, as well as where they were. All the questions Wexford asks and all the investigations as to what, where and how are mere red herrings meant to "entertain" the reader - not to mention Wexford's personal life. The way the excerpts about his daughters Sylvia and Sheila (I mean HOW is a reader supposed to tell the difference between the daughters if their names are so similar? They certainly don't have enough characteristics to distinguish them!) are placed in the text, it almost interrupts this slow-moving narrative. Besides, what was the point of the floods? Why tell the reader about Wexford's garden slowly absorbing some or other river that's not meant to reach his garden wall? It certainly had nothing to do with the main plot.

Who's telling the story? It isn't Wexford, in spite of the occasional "I" thrown into "his" thought-processes. I still (and this book has 323 pages, so I should know!) don't have a clear picture in my mind of what Wexford looks like. In fact, in spite of Rendell's attempts to create a "homely" life for him and his wife Dora, I don't know anything about her, except that she likes gardening. Does this make for a good story? Where's the suspense, the puzzles the reader can start solving for himself? I'd prefer to actually have the detectives discover something (or work at it at least), rather than have the clues walk into his office because they couldn't keep their secrets anymore, or have it revealed as an aside by one of his colleagues. What exactly does Wexford *do* besides sit at his desk and think; or walk out to lunch (which is either Chinese or a sandwich); or talk to Burden and ask questions that the reader lazily knows will be revealed at the end anyway? Not once does the author even try to give a hint as to where this is all going. It feels like a cul de sac until the key individuals give themselves up (almost right at the end of the book, take note) and reveal all - now, you tell me, is that supposed to be "exciting"?

Selva Subramanian says

Was going through a reading slump, so thought why not a good old murder mystery to rev things up. It partly did the trick for I managed to complete it. Otherwise, I found it to be slightly boring and disappointing. It is hard to write a review of a murder mystery without dissecting the plot and giving away spoilers. I can only say that certain elements/subplots worked for me and certain things didn't. Also, I thought it was a case of Ruth Rendell winking at the readers and thinking let me twist a few familiar tropes of a mystery here. Think Ruth Rendell has a liking for dysfunctional families to be the core of her plots...I have read only one more book of her and it centered around the same aspect. I mean the similarity was striking. As much as I like Rendell's smooth writing and intricate psychological aspects of her plot, I think I prefer Patricia Cornwell though I have had a hit and miss history with her too.

So, not bad but I wouldn't necessarily recommend it.

P.S: Does it rain continuously for 3 months in any part of England? In this novel, It does and it annoyed the hell out of me.

Laura says

Another great masterpiece written by Dame Rendell.

4* Going Wrong
4* The Keys to the Street
3* The Fever Tree and Other Stories
4* A Judgement in Stone
3* Fall of the Coin
4* People Don't Do Such Things
3* The Girl Next Door
2* To Fear a Painted Devil
3* Dark Corners
3* Live Flesh

Inspector Wexford series

3* Shake Hands Forever (Inspector Wexford, #9)
3* The Veiled One (Inspector Wexford, #14)
4* Kissing the Gunner's Daughter (Inspector Wexford, #15)
3* Harm Done (Inspector Wexford, #18)
3* The Babes in the Wood (Inspector Wexford, #19)
TR From Doon With Death (Inspector Wexford, #1)
TR A New Lease of Death (Inspector Wexford, #2)
TR Wolf to the Slaughter (Inspector Wexford, #3)
TR The Best Man to Die (Inspector Wexford, #4)
TR A Guilty Thing Surprised (Inspector Wexford, #5)
TR No More Dying Then (Inspector Wexford, #6)
TR Murder Being Once Done (Inspector Wexford, #7)
TR Some Lie and Some Die (Inspector Wexford, #8)

TR A Sleeping Life (Inspector Wexford, #10)
TR Death Notes (Inspector Wexford, #11)
TR Speaker of Mandarin (Inspector Wexford, #12)
TR An Unkindness of Ravens (Inspector Wexford, #13)
TR Simisola (Inspector Wexford, #16)
TR Road Rage (Inspector Wexford, #17)
TR End in Tears (Inspector Wexford, #20)
TR Not in the Flesh (Inspector Wexford, #21)
TR The Monster in the Box (Inspector Wexford, #22)
TR The Vault (Inspector Wexford, #23)
TR No Man's Nightingale (Inspector Wexford #24)

Nikki says

I recently read that Ruth Rendell has published her last Inspector Wexford novel (*The Monster in the Box*) and realized that I had a little catching up to do. In *Babes in the Wood*, Rendell comes closer to her standalone psychological suspense novels (some of which she publishes as Barbara Vine) than I recall her doing in past Wexford books. It seems that each family in this book is more dysfunctional than the next. Wexford and Burden must also deal with a fundamentalist church and with heavy rains and flooding that muddy the waters in more ways than one. I'm not a big fan of psychological suspense novels filled with deviants of one kind and another, so if this melding of Rendell's writing styles continues, I may be glad to see the series end, but Rendell is still a master writer and the book held my interest to the end.

Pupottina says

Una lettura può essere anche rilassante oltre che avvincente. Può sembrare che le due sensazioni si escludano, ma in un romanzo di Ruth Rendell, come in uno di Agatha Christie, si amalgamano alla perfezione. *SOLI NEL BOSCO* è un nuovo capolavoro di Ruth Rendell, dove le vicende si evolvono in un crescendo, rivelando segreti di famiglia e questioni religiose.

Già dalle prime pagine l'interesse si incentra sulla misteriosa sparizione di Giles e Sophie, fratelli e adolescenti che un'alluvione ha avvolto nel nulla. Un caso di cronaca che coinvolge la collettività dove indaga l'ispettore capo Wexford.

Sophie e Giles sono scomparsi. I due adolescenti erano stati affidati dai genitori a una tata e, al loro rientro da un weekend a Parigi, dei tre nessuna traccia. La signora Dade non ha dubbi: i suoi figli sono morti, annegati. Un'ipotesi per nulla bizzarra, considerato che il diluvio in corso, con piogge mai così torrenziali a memoria d'uomo in quella parte del Sussex, ha provocato l'esondazione dei fiumi e nemmeno un edificio nella valle è scampato alla furia delle acque. Lo sa bene anche l'ispettore capo Wexford, su a Kingsmarkham, dove la piena montante ha per ora risparmiato la sua casa, ma lambisce ormai l'estremità del giardino. Ecco perché non è strano che venga subito inviata una squadra di sommozzatori alla ricerca dei corpi. Più strano semmai è che i ragazzi siano davvero affogati pur essendo entrambi abili nuotatori, e per di più lontano dalla zona allagata. È solo l'inizio di un'indagine oscura, disturbante, che costringerà Wexford a mettere in discussione le sue più solide certezze sulla società in cui vive, e perfino sulla sua stessa famiglia. Andando oltre la fredda analisi di come e perché un crimine viene commesso, per esplorare i modi in cui la violenza infetta e distrugge chiunque tocchi.

Un perfetto capolavoro del genere giallo.

Regina Lemoine says

One of my favorite Wexford novels. It's been fun rereading these.

Ed says

Extremely detailed police procedural set in the capital of Rendell-Land, Kingsmartin. Wexler and Burden are joined by a few other detectives, including Sargent Barry Vine (Rendell's pen name for her non-Wexler books is Barbara Vine) and a couple of redoubtable female detective constables. Three people have disappeared--two young teenagers and the woman who has minding them for the evening while their parents were in London--and after a while are presumed dead. There is a memorable cast of unsavory characters--parents, friends, religious fanatics, teachers--many of whom are the type you would not want to spend more than a few minutes.

As with many of Rendell's books the mystery itself, while not apparent until the end, is less important than the investigation and the revelations of the rotten core of much of what she sees as contemporary English society.

Bettie? says

Read by.....Nigel Anthony
Total Runtime..... 12 Hours 10 Mins

Description: *With floods threatening both the town of Kingsmarkham and his own home and no end to the rain in sight, Chief Inspector Wexford already has his hands full when he learns that two local teenagers have gone missing along with their sitter, Joanna Troy. Their hysterical mother is convinced that all three have drowned, and as the hours stretch into days Wexford suspects a case of kidnapping, perhaps connected with an unusual sect called the Church of the Good Gospel. But when the sitter's smashed-up car is found at the bottom of a local quarry--occupied by a battered corpse--the investigation takes on a very different hue.*

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2* The Best Man to Die (Inspector Wexford, #4)

3* A Guilty Thing Suprised #5

3* No More Dying Then (Inspector Wexford, #6)

3* Murder Being Once Done (Inspector Wexford, #7)

3* Some Lie and Some Die (Inspector Wexford, #8)

3* Shake Hands Forever (Inspector Wexford, #9)

- 3* A Sleeping Life (Inspector Wexford, #10)
- 3* Put on by Cunning (Inspector Wexford #11)
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- 3* The Veiled One (Inspector Wexford, #14)
- 3* Kissing the Gunner's Daughter (Inspector Wexford, #15)
- 3* Road Rage (Inspector Wexford, #17)
- 3* Harm Done (Inspector Wexford, #18)
- 3* The Babes in the Wood (Inspector Wexford, #19)

- 3* Not in the Flesh (Inspector Wexford, #21)
- 2* The Vault (Inspector Wexford, #23)

Harry Connolly says

Book 12 of #15in2015

Wow. This was sort of terrible.

Rendell died recently, and the way her obituaries described her work made me want to sample it. The sensible thing would have been for me to carefully select a much-lauded novel, but instead I grabbed something at random on the shelf.

The characters were cliches: an absent-minded professor, a snotty supermodel, misogynistic Christian fundamentalists, the overweight guy who can't resist a sweet cake in the most awkward of social circumstances. The plot dawdled, in part because of characters who *find a body* but don't report it because of the bother it would cause them (missing children? So what?) and in part because there's so little going on.

Worse, there are continual little author self-inserts that make no sense in the context of the rest of the book. Stuff like (paraphrasing) "The inspector had forgotten to ask an important question, and it would be weeks before he realized what it was" which doesn't match the bulk of the novel, but seems very like a ham-fisted attempt to create tension.

Finally, it's apparent from the latter part of the book that the author had a lovely vacation abroad, and much of the denouement made it tax-deductible.

Maybe her earlier work was more nuanced and interesting. Maybe it had momentum. This doesn't.
