



The Conjurer's Bird

Martin Davies

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The Conjuror's Bird is a beautiful story in the spirit of *Possession* that is as exciting as *The Club Dumas*, inspired by one of the great puzzles of natural history: that of the Mysterious Bird of Ulieta. Seen only once, in 1774, by Captain Cook's second expedition to the South Seas, a single specimen was captured, preserved, and brought back to England. The bird was given to famed naturalist Joseph Banks, who displayed it proudly in his collection until its sudden, unexplained disappearance.

Two hundred years later, naturalists continue to wonder if the world will ever get another glimpse of the elusive bird. Were it not for a colored drawing done by the ship's artist, there would be nothing to say that the bird had ever existed.

The Conjuror's Bird is a gripping literary mystery and passionate love story that tackles the intrigue surrounding the celebrated Banks, his secret affair with an enigmatic woman known only as "Miss B," and the legendary bird that becomes a touchstone for their love.

Seamlessly spanning two time periods, *The Conjuror's Bird* is at once the story of this romance and of a present-day conservationist named Fitz, who is drawn into a thrilling and near-impossible race to find the elusive bird's only known remains.

An Alternate Selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club and Quality Paperback Book Club

From the Hardcover edition.

The Conjuror's Bird Details

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From Reader Review The Conjurer's Bird for online ebook

Beatriz says

Tenho consciência de que o meu perfil enquanto leitora tem vindo a alterar-se ao longo do tempo. Se há cerca de dois anos bastava encantar-me com a capa de um livro para iniciar a sua leitura, hoje sou bem mais crítica em relação às obras que escolho. A minha presente necessidade de conhecer inúmeros pormenores acerca de um livro antes de decidir se devo lê-lo, ajuda-me a escolher obras com as quais me identifico diminuindo assim, os sentimentos de frustração e desilusão que experiencio ao ler algo que se revela não ser do meu agrado. Porém a minha falta de espontaneidade pode levar-me e, acredito que tal já tenha acontecido várias vezes, a perder a oportunidade de ter o prazer de deleitar-me com uma belíssima obra.

Na altura em que confiava muito mais nos meus instintos no momento da escolha de um livro, descobri este mesmo romance – “A Pintora de Plantas” de Martin Davies. No meio de tantas outras obras empilhadas nas prateleiras das estantes da Biblioteca Escolar, poderia ter passado despercebido mas as palavras que formavam o seu título e as cores quentes da capa, captaram imediatamente a minha atenção.

A leitura foi iniciada perto das férias do Verão e por esta razão pude ler apenas os primeiros capítulos da obra pois, durante o período de pausa lectiva todos os livros que pertencem à Biblioteca Escolar devem ser devolvidos. O livro ficou por ler uma vez que, terminei o meu percurso ao nível do Ensino Secundário e, assim sendo, não voltei a dirigir-me a esta recheada biblioteca. Dois anos mais tarde, reconheci-o assim que o vi numa papelaria e o mesmo tornou-se imediatamente parte da minha estante.

A história desenrola-se em dois períodos – atualmente e no século XVIII – acompanhando simultaneamente o professor John Fitzgerald na procura pela Misteriosa Ave de Ulieta e a vida pessoal de Joseph Banks, botânico e naturalista inglês que, exibiu durante anos na sua coleção o único exemplar existente da mesma. Fitz, recebe uma chamada de Gabriella, uma antiga paixão, e logo descobre que a mesma e o companheiro atual contam ter o seu auxílio numa busca que estão prestes a começar, uma busca pelo exemplar da Misteriosa Ave de Ulieta que desapareceu da coleção de Banks há duzentos anos atrás e nunca mais foi visto. Porque é que o casal quer encontrar a ave embalsamada? Fitz não sabe mas tem a certeza de que os motivos não são os mais nobres e por esta razão recusa-se a prestar ajuda. Ao regressar a casa após o estranho encontro com o casal, o professor percebe que foi assaltado. E o que levaram? Os documentos que continham toda a informação que pesquisou durante anos acerca da Misteriosa Ave de Ulieta! Deste modo, Fitz sente-se compelido a iniciar a sua própria investigação acerca do possível paradeiro da extinta ave tentando evitar que esta chegue às mãos erradas. A busca leva o protagonista a descobrir cada vez mais pormenores acerca da vida de Banks e de Miss B., uma misteriosa mulher que se revela crucial para o desenrolar de toda a trama.

Este é sem dúvida um dos melhores livros que já li pois envolve o leitor na procura pela ave enquanto nos possibilita desfrutar de uma linda mas, realista história de amor.

Isabel says

3,5*

P. 378 - "Meu caro Solander, escreveu (...), Disseste-me uma vez que o passado deixa uma sombra. Viste muitas coisas que eu não pude ver. Mas vejo agora que, para lá dessa sombra, há uma luz do sol, há árvores e folhas.

Ele tem uns olhos verdes tão lindos, Solander."

Adrien says

This is my absolute favorite kind of book -- historical research! Like *The Historian* and *Possession* (though not *quite* as good as either), most of the novel is spent in archives and libraries tracking down obscure bits of paper. I personally love this kind of thing, and could read about looking for lost material all day long. The pacing of this novel was excellent -- it kept me turning pages quickly. With that said, that's partly why it is not quite as good as the above mentioned novels -- it was competently written with great characters and story, but a lot of me was reading just to find out what happened next. It was like *Possession* but without so much work. It all depends on what you're in the mood for.

I also had a few quips with the plot, but overall it was so enjoyable that it still gets the coveted four stars. I think the highest praise I can give it is that it sparked my interest in Joseph Banks -- I love it when pleasure reading encourages non fiction reading. I will certainly be hunting down other works by this author.

Elizabeth says

A short review, I'm constrained by time.

I loved *The Conjuror's Bird*. It's a mystery with two stories running parallel, one set in the 18th century and the other in modern day. It's based on a true story and the modern part hands on the hunt for a valuable and important stuffed extinct bird. The earlier part of the tale is about how the bird came to be in a particular family, and it explores a delicate and rare love story for which the bird is in part a metaphor. The writing style is easy and graceful and contains a lot of home truths.

Well worth the read.

Kinga says

You know when teachers tell you you are smart and talented but lazy? I've heard it many times. I am sure many of you heard it as well and I am absolutely positive Martin Davies heard it more than once.

He is a talented guy. He managed to create a mystery story that revolves around a stuffed bird. And not even a colourful, exotic one, just a plain grey bird. To be fair, the bird is now extinct and the stuffed specimen is the only specimen in the world. And it is missing. In fact, it has been missing for 200 years or so. Using primary sources Davies creates two stories, one is a 19th century romance and the other is a contemporary mystery. I am not a big fan of two intervening narratives because I have OCD that stops me from reading more than one book at a time. I am always tempted to read one story, and then go back and read the other story. Alas, my OCD doesn't allow me to read pages in any other than numerological order either. Sigh.

On the top of that Davies added a story of the narrator's grandfather search for African peacocks. Therefore we have three stories and 305 pages. You do the math.

"That Thursday evening I was working late, removing the skull of a dead owl."

This is the first line and it shows a lot of promise but after that there just rah, rah, rah, bam, bam, bam and off we go. Davies just didn't take his time. The man can write, and he had a good story but everything was

barely touched. He did a real disservice to his characters, the poor things looked all like cardboard cut-outs of themselves. The 19th century England was not brought to life either. I had to rely on the vision of the period I had in my head thanks to more hard-working authors.

All in all, a decent beach read for times when you feel lazy and can only associate with like-minded authors.

Kaethe says

I know I'm not the only one who'll compare it to Possession. Is this a type of book, a sub-genre? These books set in two timelines where the people in the present are trying to figure out some sort of mystery in the history? Lord Byron's Novel: The Evening Land is another example.

Marianne says

This book is actually one big meh. I've been looking forward to reading it for months but always put it off, and maybe it was the anticipation or the blurb, or my own shortcomings as a reader but it was just an epic disappointment.

The concept of the book is decent but the execution was poor. I never felt invested enough in the relationships to care about the present story (which is a shame as I felt the Fitz/Gabby backstory was fascinating and heartbreaking and I wanted to read more about it) and the back story was okay, but not enough to really make you give a damn about the quest to find this extinct stuffed bird and a load of paintings.

I think the book could have benefited from another 100 pages to flesh out the characters. I mean when we didn't even get to see the goodbye between Gabby and Fitz despite the history between them (in their 20 pages of interaction in the book we learn they were lovers, were married, lost a child, he left her and she continued to write to him for the 15 years they were apart but never divorced and the ending just felt so anti-climatic. Fitz and his student, Katya (who I think we were supposed to be rooting for?? I don't know - random insertion of someone to move the story along I guess but she made no indent into the story beyond solving all the clues and being the romantic foil to contrast Fitz past relationship and his new one, I think.

Maybe I missed something epic that made it stand out as something memorable, or maybe my love of past/futures colliding just wasn't enough to overlook a book that fundamentally is about taxidermy and is 100 pages of characterisation short of being worthwhile as a character driven book. It definitely improved in terms of readability as it progressed, but to be honest - I was expecting so much more from it when I picked it up. It's definitely not one that will be getting picked up again anytime soon.

Jill says

So I've been on an "academic mystery!!!" kick of late, and friends: it comes to an end today.

Here's the thing about calling something 'formulaic' -- you can't really do it until you know the formula. Now, I can suspect a formula, but I don't actually read that many mysteries (or genre fiction, period), so

like...it's more me saying "this is kinda predictable" or "this is dumb" than "this is formulaic."

But FRIENDS, I have read enough. I know the tropes. The quirky, down-on-his-luck male academic with a mildly sad past. The completely random, mildly harsh female academic who begrudgingly but inevitably helps him. Their completely unrealistic romantic relationship. Other weird academics searching for the same thing. No one needing to take time off while they chase random leads around the English countryside. And the ultimate prize, the ultimate treasure, being something that no one in the real world gives literally a single fuck about.

So friends, I can now say: "THIS SHIT BE FORMULAIC."

Some fun terrible moments from The Conjurer's Bird, specifically:

- The main descriptor of women being 'slim.' Like, *he saw her slim form or her slim figure stirred him* or whatever. To the point where on page 301 I barked out a laugh in public:
"He barely had time to note the slimness of her figure before she turned and the light fell golden on her face."
hahaahah I just
BARELY had time
but this guy is a winner don't worry he's got this
noted!!!!!!
phew!!!
hahahaha

- Hi my name is Fitz, I have a mildly sad past. I will keep referring to "the photo by my bed." You'll think it's of this ex of mine BUT IT MIGHT NOT BE. Also I will end every chapter by referencing my grandfather whose quest *exactly* parallels mine, just in case you didn't notice the parallel. Also I'm profoundly unlikeable so you won't root for me and if I succeed you might even be like "aw shit I wanted the other way more interesting mildly antagonistic character to get it." Oh well.

- Okay spoilers ahead but no one reading this review should read this book so I don't care: KATYA. Listen. Listen. Fitz has an upstairs he lets to students. Fine. Katya, his tenant, is a Master's history student whose dad is a famous historian. Fine. They exchange zero words until ~the game is afoot!~ Fine. But SUDDENLY, Katya is MASSIVELY interested in literally EVERYTHING to do with this dumb fucking bird, and Fitz, and keeps referring to her father and what a sellout he is.

I mean 2+2=Katya's gonna get the bird for her dad, right? Predictable.

BUT NO, WRONG, because LITERALLY NOTHING HAPPENS WITH HER. She displays zero qualities, and just falls in love with this weird older guy who taxidermies animals in her basement and they drive around looking for drawings of plants and hold hands. I just like ----- what the *fuck*?! It's so clearly wish fulfillment on Davies' part that I...I don't know. The women in these books are so one-dimensional it's ridiculous, and I'd be pissed, except *everyone* is one-dimensional so enh.

- Who cares about birds. Why did I ever buy this book.

- The historical narrative was also really dumb. Honestly, I think Martin Davies read Possession and was like "K IMA DO IT BUT WITH BIRDS?????" and y'all know how I feel about Possession so

I should really give this one star, but I tend to reserve my one-star ratings for like Really Infuriating books,

and this was more laughable than irritating, so...y'know. Plus I didn't HATE reading it. Most of it. But god --- this is the last one for awhile.

Helen says

This was not nearly as light as the title or cover suggested it might be. Two narratives, one set now and written in 1st person and one set in 18thC written in the third. Together they combined to create a satisfying mystery, love story and thriller. Enjoyed it enough to pick up Martin Davies' second novel today.

Rory says

This was a complete chore to read. Boring first person narrator finds himself immersed in a boring mystery/wild goose chase (the wild goose being the mysterious Bird of Ulieta), paralleled with the story of a boring 18th century circumnavigator's boring relationship with his boring mistress.

Julie Durnell says

This was so enjoyable, I loved the moving back and forth between the two stories, done so well that it was not hard to follow. It is just a captivating read!

Karen says

I really liked this book and the switching bewteen the two different timelines each chapter. I loved both era's but probably enjoyed the historical pieces the best - the way of life, the stigma associated with a young woman not being a virgin and its implications for the rest of her life. The adventures overseas to draw wildlife (no cameras), and the inability to communicate quickly with people on the other side of the world (no phones or even telegrams) made me focus on how very much has changed in the world and how we are both richer and poorer for it.

Sue says

What a lovely book - I suspect it will stimulate much discussion at book club at the end of the week. It took me just over 24 hours to read its 307 pages, not bad going, and not rushed, just pleasurable. There is romance, but in the background. There is mystery, deception and detection, corruption and greed, consideration of social status and mores, natural history and art, history and the seeking of information from public records, the necessity of knowing what you are looking for, be it fact or inspiration. Indeed, there is travel, through time and internationally, withh beautiful descriptions. There is sensuality, betrayal and honesty. If I begin to describe or to precis the story, it will spoil the pleasure of the reading for others, and this book deserves to be read. I really enjoyed my day between its pages, and it is a book I might well want to re-read in the future.

P. says

I sort of hate going into all the little criticisms I think of when reading, because if the story is engaging, then I don't want my criticisms to overshadow it. Then again, if the writing and story were really engaging, then I wouldn't have time to think of criticisms while reading. So: writers of historical fiction, please give me more detail. While this book had a really interesting (and mostly based on true primary source stuff) premise, it ended up feeling a little thin because the author hadn't taken the time to flesh out the time period, or create convincing dialogue that wasn't just an interlude between rushed expository paragraphs. And unfortunately I got the idea that he was a bit of a drunk (the author). And then I got the idea that the main character was based on him, and I pasted his author's photo onto the idea I had of the main character, and his unsubtle crush on the graduate student character became sort of creepy... you see, it sounds like I didn't enjoy reading this. But I actually had a pleasant time of it. It was recommended by a patron.

Lowed says

In 1774, an unusual bird was spotted on Captain Cook's second expedition to the South Seas. This single specimen was captured, preserved, and brought back to England and no other bird of its kind was ever seen again. The bird was given to naturalist Joseph Banks, who displayed it proudly in his collection until it too disappeared. Were it not for a colored drawing created by the ship's artist, it would seem that the Mysterious Bird of Ulieta had never existed.

Two hundred years later, naturalist John Fitzgerald gets a call from an old friend asking him to join the search for the bird's remains. He traces the bird's history, uncovering surprising details about the role of a woman known only as Miss B in Joseph Banks's life and career.

Seamlessly leaping between time periods, *The Conjuror's Bird* is at once the story of Joseph Banks's secret life, Fitz's thrilling and near-impossible race to find the elusive bird, and of John's grandfathers' search for an unknown peacock from Africa.

There is something about this book that triggers the interest of the readers. As one reviewer has already noted, Martin Davies has a way with words and could really keep you over the edge. I'm not into birds per se, but if it has something to do with finding a lost item that could involve an unexpected adventure and an untimely love affair, then enlist me on the next expedition! Ü

This is a four!
