



Birds of Wonder

Cynthia Robinson

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One August morning while walking her dog, high-school English teacher Beatrice Ousterhout stumbles over the dead body of a student, Amber Inglin, who was to play the lead in Beatrice's production of John Webster's Jacobean tragedy, *The Duchess of Malfi*. Barely able to speak, Beatrice calls the police. That is to say, she calls her daughter. Jes is a detective with two years of experience under her belt and a personal life composed primarily of a string of one-night-stands, including the owner of the field in which Beatrice has found Amber. In addition to a house and a field, Child Services lawyer Liam Walsh owns a vineyard, where Amber Inglin, along with a handful of other teens who've had difficulty negotiating the foster system, was an intern. Set among the hills and lakes of upstate New York and told in six vibrantly distinct voices, this complex and original narrative chronicles the rippling effects of a young girl's death through a densely intertwined community. By turns funny, fierce, lyrical and horrifying, *Birds of Wonder* probes family ties, the stresses that break them, and the pasts that never really let us go.

Birds of Wonder Details

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Author : Cynthia Robinson

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From Reader Review *Birds of Wonder* for online ebook

Biljana says

Cynthia Robinson's *Birds of Wonder* is a well-written story (and I loved the cover image). I'd expected more of a crime-focused novel based on the description (and because the book starts with the discovery of a body and moves into a police procedural approach at the beginning). However, I found that it became less and less of a central focus as the book progressed. That isn't a drawback, necessarily, but it wasn't expected and this may have dampened my reading experience a bit.

There are multiple points-of-view, which worked well (I enjoyed Beatrice, Jes, and Liam, in particular), but I would have been happier to have a more constant focus on one character. In a regular crime novel, I would have loved bouncing around different POVs and not sitting with a character for a longer period. Given that this became less crime-focused over the course of the book, I would have liked fewer POVs.

Overall, it didn't totally work for me, so I'm rounding down to 3 stars.

Paisley Bots says

Riveting and deeply satisfying — this book is a genre-melding gem that hits the mark where so many thrillers, suspenses, family dramas and multi-narrator pastiches fall short (and it is all these!). Robinson sets before us a tale that is distressing yet amusing, in a world familiar yet foreign. What seems like a simple whodunit becomes a profound commentary on modern gender, class, and family relationships, as well as a host of other complicated aspects of our culture. This is all told, miraculously, with witty sensitivity, great flair, and never a dull page. These *Birds of Wonder* perch most comfortably alongside their most distinguished avian predecessors — *Wind-up*, *Thorn-*, *Mocking-*, and *co*.

Jessica says

Check out my blog for an author Q&A and to read an excerpt!

This is the debut novel for Cynthia Robinson and she brings the readers on a journey seen through six different perspectives in *BIRDS OF WONDER*. An English teacher finds the lifeless body of one of her students, and the story begins.

Beatrice Ousterhout is an English teacher and is very involved in theater. The reader begins to realize that her mental state seems to be slowly deteriorating, which makes her a very interesting character perspective to read. After stumbling upon the lifeless body of Amber, one of her students, she calls her daughter Jes. Jes works for the police and begins the investigation.

While this does focus on the police procedural end, we also dive into the core of the relationships between the characters. Specifically the family dynamic between Beatrice and Jes and the affects her father's death had on the family. I really liked the ornithology elements - as someone that knows very little on the topic it was a unique inclusion for a murder investigation. We also get a glimpse into the lives of those affected by

Amber's death - her best friend, Megan, and brother Connor.

I loved going through each character and experiencing their development. You would think 6 characters is a lot to jump between, but Robinson does it effortlessly. I wouldn't classify this as a straight mystery novel, but more a literary mystery. We do get the investigation portion and some suspense, but the novel's focus is the innerworkings of relationships between mother/daughter, siblings, and husband/wife.

Robinson will keep you engrossed in the characters and trying to figure out what truly happened. I really enjoyed the ending and how we were brought there. I hope to read more from Cynthia Robinson in the future!

I give this one 4.5/5 stars! (rounded up for rating)

Bex says

If you are looking for a good murder mystery that is more than a murder mystery, then I recommend *Birds of Wonder*.

Birds of Wonder is an engrossing and heartbreaking first novel. Detective Murder Mysteries are not my usual fare. However, there are always exceptions to the rule, and this was definitely one of those exceptions. The body of a beautiful teenage girl is found in the field of a prominent Child Services lawyer by her theater teacher, and thus begins *Birds of Wonder*.

The story is told from the points of view of the six main characters, each with their own chapters, and each is introduced in such a way as to build the mystery, main story and backstory with just a slow enough climb that you want to see what's next. The writing is succinct and each voice is clearly different. What I enjoyed most about this novel was that the authors' medievalist and ornithological expertise is well woven into the story, adding unique symbolism and interest to a murder mystery. At turns poignant and disturbing, this is a novel that explores the darkest edges of the human mind and heart, what we don't see (or more accurately, what we ignore) and is a story not soon forgotten. I absolutely recommend this book! Available February 20th, 2018.

Diane S ? says

Review soon.

Stacey A. Prose and Palate says

Birds of Wonder is an intriguing, character driven, literary mystery that incorporates nature, birds as well as theater in to the story. Though that may sound like an odd combination, the author did an excellent job of weaving the three themes together as the mystery unfolded. I loved the heavy artistic influence as well as the many Shakespearean references sprinkled throughout this book.

The story is told from multiple points of view but the main voices throughout are those of Jes (the lead

detective) and her mother, Beatrice (who unfortunately discovers the body of one of her students in the beginning chapters). Beatrice seems extremely scattered and unreliable at times and her mental state was often in question to me. Her relationship with her daughter was incredibly strained throughout the book which at first made it appear like Jes was just mean.... but then as the story developed the reason was made clear and YES. I can absolutely understand why Jes harbored such hostility and resentment towards her mother.

Beatrice's total denial of certain things that occurred in her marriage was very surprising to me, and her decision to play the part of the naive wife was as frustrating to me as it was to Jes. The mystery itself was well executed and I was pleasantly surprised by this solid debut. I look forward to reading what Cynthia Robinson writes next and I want to give a huge thank you to Smith Publicity for sending me this beautiful copy in exchange for my honest review.

Janelle • She Reads with Cats says

Many thanks to Smith Publicity for providing my free copy of *BIRDS OF WONDER* by Cynthia Robinson— all opinions are my own.

This is an original and lovely debut with interesting characters and an intriguing plot. The story starts off when a teacher, Beatrice, stumbles across the dead body of the star of a high school play, and it just takes off from there. This is a very character driven story that focuses primarily on relationships and secrets. It is not a thriller by any means, but rather a work of literary fiction with elements of mystery and suspense.

There are six different point of views but the story is told primarily from two perspectives: Beatrice, and her detective daughter, Jes. Beatrice comes off as confused and disorganized and Jes isn't very kind towards her. I was most intrigued by their relationship as Jes harbors a lot of animosity towards her mother, which in the end, the reason why becomes VERY clear.

One of my favorite aspects of the book are the creative and artistic details from Robinson. From the beautiful birds to the Shakespearean references integrated throughout, it's these details that make the story unique. I really enjoyed *BIRDS OF WONDER* and look forward to what Robinson comes out with next.

My rating is 4.5 / 5 stars!

Shirley says

This book will appear early next year— I read it in proofs. So... wait for it!

What I like: I love the genre of detective novels with wayward women setting the pace (V. I. Warshawski). And I live in Ithaca. So a wayward woman who transgresses in the vineyards along Cayuga Lake would appeal to me already.

The cuts between characters as the central character chases leads in the death of a lovely teenager — she clashes with her doting (but in her dotage) mother and fights off memory flashbacks of her ornithology childhood with her deceased father — can sometimes be hard to follow, but overall this is an excellent novel that both inhabits and transcends the genre. I know that it's tempting to notice the university that's on the hill over the town where the action mostly takes place, but I also like it that the novel pretty much ignores it in favor of the local story.

Janel says

My thanks to Smith Publicity for the free review copy

2.5 stars - *Birds of Wonder* is Robinson's debut novel, literary fiction containing a mystery; but the mystery is used to display themes of family ties and the struggle to break free from your past. I read this book in two sittings in the same day, but this book wasn't for me, not because it isn't well-written, because it is. But sometimes you read a book and you just struggle to get into it, you know the impact it should be having on you, what you should be feeling, but you just don't feel it.

The interesting thing is, I think everything in this novel worked as it should. Told from six different viewpoints, it never became confusing and each voice was distinct. The plot is highly character driven and we get a good understanding of the character's lives – how they are connected to Amber Inglin, and how her death forces them to confront things in their own lives. For me, the most interesting perspective was from Jes, she wasn't a very likeable character, and seemed to intentionally put distance between herself and her mother, Beatrice. Beatrice didn't come across as overbearing, so I was curious to know why their relationship was the way it was. As far as her police skills go, appalling.

I think this book's USP was wasted on me, it contains many artistic references to birds; I'm sure this element will make this a unique and intriguing read for many. I know next to nothing about birds, and I can't say I'm interested in the different kinds – I didn't realise the title would feature so literally in the novel. It also contains theatre references – I think those who enjoy those two artistic references will really appreciate them.

The themes in this novel are dark, made even darker by almost every character being unlikeable. However, all that said, I just could not connect with this novel – there was no atmosphere that usually accompanies a close-knit community setting, with limited characters, and no one thing that was able to pull me into the plot and make me invested. But I wouldn't dissuade anyone from picking this novel up because there was no major plot hole (although I did think the investigation into Amber's death was not the strongest aspect of this book) or major failing I can describe – this was a case of: not every book can be for everyone, and this one just wasn't for me.

I think *Birds of Wonder* would appeal to fans of literary fiction who enjoy artistic references such as those mentioned above, and personally I believe it's a mistake to pick this novel up expecting it to be a crime fiction read. Yes, it contains a mystery, and is suspenseful at times, but it's an intricate character study displaying relationships (mother and daughter, husband and wife, brother and sister), and like the blurb indicates, the stresses that can tear these relationships apart.

MyKindleandaCupofTea says

'Birds of Wonder' is published in the USA Standing Stone Books on February 20th, 2018.

'Birds of Wonder' is a beautiful and very confronting novel. It confounded my initial genre expectations. The characterisation is rich and authentic and the bird motif adds a certain poetry to a compelling narrative explored through multiple, interwoven perspectives. It is timely and speaks to our current #metoo moment. As a male reader, it was challenging and uncomfortable at times. But good writing should shake you up a bit and prod you out of your complacency, right? It is an uncompromising, compelling and very satisfying read.

I should add that I don't usually give ratings or write reviews on GoodReads. I was very fortunate to receive an early reader's copy of this novel sent all the way to Australia by its very kind author. Thank you, ma'am. You need not have feared my reaction. I am very impressed.

Vanessa says

I think the author attempted to give this book an artistic and unique spin to the over saturated murder/mystery genre. What I first thought would be a standard murder/mystery ended up something different altogether. I'm not entirely sure I enjoyed all aspects of this book though. It seemed to me the whole town was full of seedy unsavoury people that made you dislike/suspect everyone of evil wrong doings that by the end you had no idea where the story was leading. The second half of the book was by far a more enjoyable read as it wasn't your typical whodunnit mystery but a dissection of a town uncovering a host of murky characters and as you got deeper you got a better picture of the people in it and how everyone fit into the storyline. It was interesting with all the different narrators but sometimes the writing veered off track making it an uneven read overall. I'd give this book 3.5 stars as I was curious to see how the whole plot would unfold.

Thanks to Netgalley and Smith Publicity for my advanced copy.

Pub date: 20th Feb 2018

Ana Cortils says

I want to thank Cynthia Robinson for writing BIRDS OF WONDER. I really enjoyed the thriller aspect—everyone's a suspect, which is a great hook, and I sensed that part might have been done with an ironic wink toward the genre. Each of the six characters is intriguing, leaving the reader wanting to know more! I found the interweaving of six distinctive narrative threads to be, frankly, masterful. The prose is dynamic—precise and to the point, and yet with a velvety, sort of poetic quality. The short sentences carry do the work of much longer ones. Truly enjoyed this book—one of the best I have read in a long time, and I devour stacks of books...!

BIRDS OF WONDER was also very important to me on a personal level—reading it was an almost cathartic experience. Broken girls are broken forever. They require great will and courage, and a lot of therapy, just to keep going. I won't spoil this review with a spoiler, but I will say that this book came to me at a moment during which Spain has been horrified and shaken by a number of horrific cases of violence against women,

all in quick succession: three adolescent girls gang-raped (from some corners, the victims were blamed for not having fought harder against their assailants). Even more horrifying was the discovery of the body of 18-year-old Diana Quer, missing for nearly a year and a half. Diana was strangled because she **did** fight back against her attacker. Damned if you do, damned if you don't. From screens in the dark, to crime. The visibility of these cases has brought forward many other victims—Spain, and Europe too, are truly living a moment of crisis in terms of gender violence.

I'm deeply grateful for the delicacy and intelligence with which the author approaches these themes. And yes, I feel better after reading *BIRDS OF WONDER*. As though something in me has taken a step toward healing.

#metoo.

And please, keep writing!

Sue Em says

What starts out as a potentially interesting mystery segues into something different, but it's not well defined. The murder of a beautiful high school girl exposes the sordid secrets of the town. Well drawn characters. Liked it, but didn't love it.

Thanks to netgalley and the publisher for the opportunity to read this book in exchange for an honest review.

Wit & Wonder Books says

ARC provided by author in exchange for an honest review

Birds of Wonder by Cynthia Robinson is an intriguing murder mystery set against the backdrop of art and wine in a small town. When a young teenager, Amber Inglin, is murdered suspicion falls on her employer, vintner Liam Walsh; one of his workers; her foster siblings; a creepy artist and his alcoholic sister. Primary Investigator, Jesca Ashton is determined to solve it, but is distracted by potentially resuming an affair with, Liam, one of the suspects.

Ms. Robinson's weaving of art and birds throughout the story set a lush and meaningful background to the story. Her characters are rich and well-developed, if not necessarily likable. Amber's death is a beautiful life cut short, which is devastating to the people who care about her and are trying to help her, but is it as lascivious as it seems?

None of the characters are eminently likable and some are downright awful, but the stories within the story of the secrets that they try to hide from those around them make for compelling reading. I found this book irresistible and was anxious to finish it to see how Ms. Robinson resolved this mystery.

I highly recommend *Birds of Wonder* and look forward to reading other books by this author. Five stars.

Chandra Claypool (wherethereadergrows) says

When I first opened this book, I saw the table of contents and thought, "WOW, that's a lot of different POVs!" And we do get a variety of them: Jes, Beatrice, Edward, Liam, Connor and Waldo. There are times when too many POVs are introduced and it can get muddled and confusing. I'm happy to report that this does not happen here. It's easy to follow along with and I always find it interesting to be able to be inside the mind of the main players of a story.

Mostly this focuses on Jes. As an officer of the law, she clearly has issues with her relationship with her mother, Beatrice, leads her sex life in a variety of "drive-bys" and doesn't much care what anyone else thinks. I do enjoy a character with some sass. I felt myself getting irritated in her attitude towards her mother but then we find out why she is this way and wow. GOT IT.

This isn't so much a police procedural or even really a thriller ... it is more character driven as we see the relationships between each of them. Mother/daughter, sisters/brother, husband/wife, co-workers, etc. The uniqueness of this story are all the bird references. While this isn't a subject that normally piques my interest, I did find it intriguing in the story line.

A solid debut novel from Cynthia. This isn't a book that will shock you with some crazy twist or throat punch you into a WHAT THE moment. However, it does all come together at the end nicely and the author does keep you intrigued in the need to know. Sometimes it takes a tragic event to muddle up the waters and move you from that stationary point in your life.

3.5 stars rounding to 4
