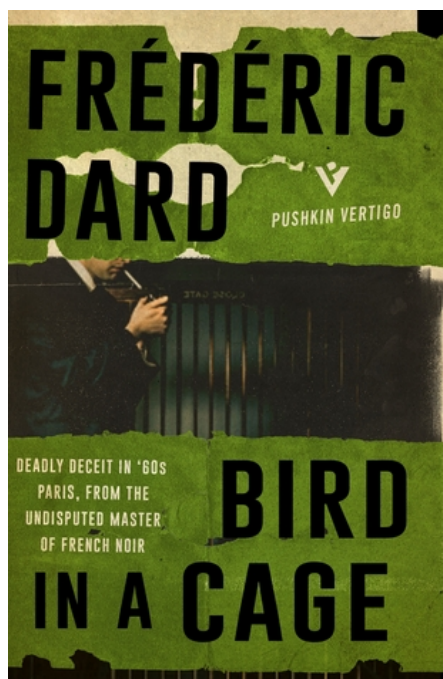




Bird in a Cage

Frédéric Dard , David Bellos (Translator)

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30-year-old Albert returns to Paris after six years away, during which time his mother has passed away, to find himself entangled in a complicated case centred around a woman he met at a restaurant whose husband's body appears in her lounge, but then disappears almost inexplicably.

Bird in a Cage Details

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Author : Frédéric Dard , David Bellos (Translator)

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From Reader Review Bird in a Cage for online ebook

Raven says

Bird In A Cage was imbued with a tantalising mix of Patricia Highsmith and Alfred Hitchcock, as a man returns to Paris at Christmas to mourn, and settle the affairs, of his late mother. He encounters a beguiling woman with her young child, whilst dining out one night who inflames his curiosity, being both attractive and the added mystery of appearing to have bloodstains on her sleeve. When he is enticed to return to her apartment, he becomes embroiled in a sinister and dangerous conspiracy which seeks to unravel his life completely. The emotional intensity of this plot is in evidence from the outset, with the title referring to an innocuous Christmas gift for the child, and the psychological impasse that Albert finds himself in, Dard has constructed a claustrophobic existentialist drama that toys with the reader's perception, and provides an additional deconstruction of male and female psychological impulses. This is a slim dark tale that is engaging enough, but did slightly lack the psychological edge, and bleak immorality of *The Wicked Go To Hell*, but is worth seeking out as an initial entry point into Dard's not inconsiderable back catalogue.

Col says

Synopsis/blurb....

'The French master of noir' Observer

It felt like the slipknot on a rope round my chest was being tightened without pity

Trouble is the last thing Albert needs. Travelling back to his childhood home on Christmas Eve to mourn his mother's death, he finds the loneliness and nostalgia of his Parisian quartier unbearable... Until, that evening, he encounters a beautiful, seemingly innocent woman at a brasserie, and his spirits are lifted.

Still, something about the woman disturbs him. Where is the father of her child? And what are those two red stains on her sleeve? When she invites him back to her apartment, Albert thinks he's in luck. But a monstrous scene awaits them, and he finds himself lured into the darkness against his better judgment.

Unravelling like a paranoid nightmare, *Bird in a Cage* melds existentialist drama with thrilling noir to tell the story of a man trapped in a prison of his own making.

'Disturbing from the outset with strong echoes of Dard's hero Simenon' Sunday Times Crime Club, star pick

'Exceedingly clever... you can only squirm more enjoyably into your seat as you read on' Bookbag, 5 stars

'If you're a fan of Film Noir, you'll love *Bird in a Cage*...if all the novels in the Vertigo series are this good, I predict I'll be needing more bookshelves.' Randall Writes

My take.....

One of those books where you finish and find yourself marvelling at the author's skill in executing a perfectly plausible and believable outcome, even while a major portion of your brain rebels against the resolution and the consequences for the main character.

123 pages from start to finish. Short, tense and compelling.

Our main character Albert returns home after four years away. His mother has passed whilst he's been gone, it's Christmas Eve and he's alone.

"How old does a man have to be not to feel like an orphan when he loses his mother?"

A trip outdoors wandering around his neighbourhood has him encountering an attractive woman in a bar, her young daughter in tow. Mme Dravet reminds him of his lost love Anne.

"However strong your feeling may be for someone's who's gone, it can't be called love."

The two get talking and return first to his house and then hers....big mistake!

Albert you should have stayed home!

I really, really liked this - length - big tick, characters - tick, set-up - tick, writing - big tick, setting - tick, resolution - big tick! Recommended to all.

5 from 5

I look forward to reading more from the prolific Frederic Dard, though my reading will be limited to whatever gets translated and reissued by Pushkin Vertigo. Crush and The Wicked Go To Hell await! Otherwise - je ne comprends pas!

There's some more coherent thoughts on Bird in a Cage over at A Crime is Afoot.
<https://jiescribano.wordpress.com/201...>

Read in September 2016

Copy received from the publisher.
<http://col2910.blogspot.co.uk/2016/10...>

Dana says

Bird in a Cage is a clever French noir novella. The setting is Christmastime, 1960s, Paris. I could perfectly picture this in black and white film. A great little read-in-one-sitting jewel.

Dave says

French Noir

Back in 1961 when this book was first published, 120-page books were the norm. Nowadays, most authors think everything has to be a magnum opus of 700, 800 pages or more. Now, this would only be at most a novella. It's a short tale that is drenched in melancholy, in sadness, in reminiscence. A man returns on Christmas Eve to see his mother's apartment years after she passed away and in his sadness wanders the

streets and cafes until he meets a most unlikely companion. While there's not a lot of overt action here, Dard weaves a fascinating little tale, a conundrum really, that is simply mesmerizing as our odd melancholy lead character feels the walls closing in on him bit by bit.

Nancy Oakes says

"I sincerely believe you have pulled off the perfect crime."

I'm in love with this novel. I was a bit worried at first that I was reading something along the lines of Cornell Woolrich's *Phantom Lady*, because in many ways *Bird in a Cage* begins with just that sort of feel, but as things turned out though, I was entirely wrong.

This book is one of Dard's "*romans nuits*" -- novels of the night -- which the back section of the novel states are "run of stand-alone, dark psychological thrillers written by Dard in his prime, and considered by many to be his best work." Well, after finishing two books by Dard last night (the other *Crush*), I may be tempted to believe it -- it's definitely the best of the pair.

It's Christmas Eve, and Albert has come back home to Paris and to his mother's apartment after being away for six years. Mom has died, and he has returned to an empty, but still unchanged place. After laying back in his old bed for a while, thinking he'd give anything to see his mom "just for a second, standing behind the door," and to hear her asking him if he was awake, his sorrow takes over and he needs to get out. Off into the night, into his old quartier he wanders, after having stopped in a shop to buy a Christmas decoration, a "silver cardboard birdcage sprinkled with glitter dust" with a blue and yellow velvet bird inside on a perch. Then it's on to a restaurant where he runs into a woman who reminds him of a woman from his past named Anna, but this woman has a small child with her, and Albert suddenly feels the tragedy of the "shared loneliness" of the two. After a short stint at a movie theater, Albert walks the woman (still nameless at this point) home; she invites him up for a drink and some impulse drives him to hang the birdcage on the woman's Christmas tree. The little girl is put to bed, after which the woman reveals that she would really like to go out for a while, and they talk about her marriage which is extremely unhappy. Returning her to her home, Albert realizes that they're not alone -- there's now a coat hanging on a hook that belongs to the woman's husband. It's at this juncture where the story really takes off, as Albert is forced to make a confession to this woman who promptly throws him out. But he just can't leave, so he waits, hiding outside and watching as things get weirder and weirder before he steps in once more and gets the surprise of his life.

When I finished this novel, to say I was blown away is to very much understate how I felt about it. Frankly, I thought it was just genius. I think my insomnia may have been caused by a) first the tension that kept ratcheting up throughout the story and b) just laying there thinking about the book and about just how cleverly Dard put things together here. It's like I was expecting one thing and then out of nowhere, it became an entirely different ball game altogether, where everything changed completely.

Passing on this book because it was written in 1961 would be a shame -- it's absolutely perfect for vintage crime readers, for readers who enjoy French crime, and for readers who are looking for something different in their crime fiction. My advice is to run, do not walk, and pick up a copy ASAP. This one I just loved. Absolutely.

Lawyer says

Bird in a Cage: In a Bleak Midwinter

*Some enchanted evening
You may see a stranger,
you may see a stranger
Across a crowded room
And somehow you know,
You know even then
That somewhere you'll see her
Again and again.
-Oscar Hammerstein II, 1949*

Ah, what could be a more enchanted evening than Christmas Eve in Paris? Albert Herbin has returned to the city after an absence of six years. To the home in which he grew up. But it is lonesome there for his mother has died. Were she still alive they would have spent Christmas Eve in their normal fashion. At home. A celebration over a dinner of roast chicken and a bottle of champagne.

Albert leaves the silence of his old home in search of life and happy memories of his childhood. Entering a small shop he buys a Christmas ornament, a little sequined bird in a golden cage. He decides to have dinner in Chiclet's, a fine restaurant which he had never entered before, though he had often dreamed of it.

Yes, and in that crowded room he sees a young mother dining with her small daughter. He is drawn to her. So like another young woman he had once loved, but lost. On such a night is it not possible for a man to experience love at first sight? And is it not possible this young woman is as lonely as Albert and he should be invited back to her home on such a lonely enchanted evening? After all, she has been estranged from her husband for years. Her husband Jerome pays no visits to his wife or his daughter.

But what Albert finds at this young woman's home is the body of her husband. Dead from a gunshot to the head. A pistol lies on the chest of the corpse. The police must be called. Inquiries must be made.

If you are looking for a story with a happy ending, this is not it. For Frédéric Dard has written this dark little tale. Dard, one of France's most prolific writers of thrillers and classic noir literature.

In just one hundred twenty three pages, Dard has written a dark novel of clever twists and turns that will keep the reader enthralled from first page to last. Both Albert and the young mother have secrets that each will learn about the other on this Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. As Albert learns they are birds of the same feather. The question is whether one or both of them will end up a bird in a cage by the turn of the final page. Was her husband's death a suicide or the perfect murder.

No. There is no happy ending here. This is noir fiction, a novel of the night. As Otto Penzler, editor of The Mysterious Press has said,

Look, noir is about losers. The characters in these existential, nihilistic tales are doomed. They may not die, but they probably should, as the life that awaits them is certain to be so ugly, so lost and lonely, that they'd be better off just curling up and getting it over with. And, let's face

it, they deserve it...

The noir story with a happy ending has never been written, nor can it be. The lost and corrupt souls who populate these tales were doomed before we met them because of their hollow hearts and depraved sensibilities.

Noir Fiction Is About Losers, Not Private Eyes

Open this little gem. Don't be surprised if you read it in one sitting. I did. It is just that good.

Bert says

Loved this! Claustrophobic, Simenon-esque mystery with beautiful descriptions of those french streets and bars on Christmas night, full of nostalgia and sadness and the agonies of love! Woo!

Zachary Littrell says

It's a solid French murder mystery (It's Christmas in Paris, and Mme Dravet's husband's body has a nasty habit of disappearing and reappearing), a first rate reveal,...a whiny protagonist, and an aggravating ending. Actually, the novella doesn't really end: it just full-on **stops**. I want to pull my hair out that of all the places Dard could've hung up his story, he picked the least satisfying. What horse manure!

In conclusion, it's still a fun read, just accept that Albert is a moron and not a lot of what happens holds up to scrutiny. Just relax and enjoy a Parisian murder on Christmas (and prepare for the book to kick you in the derriere on the way out).

Jana says

Thanks to Ryan for recommending this little psychological piece of reading enjoyment. It's a quick read, but oh so atmospheric. Set in París. On Christmas. Though all is not cheery nor bright.

Apparently Frédéric Dard wrote 284 thrillers, about 3-5 per year of his career. And this was my first. He also used 17 aliases, but this is his actual name.

Up next maybe Dard's The Wicked Go to Hell.

Zuberino says

I've loved Simenon since I was 16. So when I read about his contemporary Fred Dard, another prolific practitioner of postwar French noir, the name went straight away into the mental filing cabinet. And then finding this, a few weeks ago, in the used bookshop in Notting Hill... the thrill of discovery!

But Dard is no copycat. He has his own dark angle. Existential noir. I can think of no better description for

this book. As if Camus met Chandler. It's the work of the devil himself! The plotting is fiendish, masterful. The prose spare, no more than exactly what is needed. Although very different books, it gave me the same feeling of reading an airless allegory, of being caught in a trap out of time, the feeling that I felt so strongly when I read Buzzati's *The Tartar Steppe*.

Paris 1961. Christmas Eve. A man returns to his childhood home, after six years in prison. His mother has died in his absence. The flat is empty. He goes out to eat. He meets a single mother, as lonely as him. He follows her to the cinema. They go back to her place. They have drinks, they go out. To his place, then to a cafe, then back to hers.

Only now there's a corpse on the sofa in her living room. The woman's husband. He's blown his brains out. The man needs out of this situation, he's got very bad trouble in his past. So he leaves. But then he sees that, INSTEAD of calling in the police, the woman is leaving the flat with her child! He follows them unseen, to the midnight mass at the neighbourhood church. The woman appears to faint from the heat of the crowd. With the help of a Samaritan with a car, he brings her back to her flat.

There is no corpse this time. The man is flabbergasted. The three of them have drinks, then the woman remembers she has left her purse behind in church. They leave yet again. The man is dropped off. He decides to spy on the woman and her Samaritan. They come back hours later, almost near dawn. And this time yet again, they discover the dead body in her lounge!

No corpse - corpse - no corpse - corpse. What the fuck is going on? By now, the reader is fully in the grip of bamboozled paranoia. The icy Paris night. The pitch-dark lift shaft that leads up to the dead silent flat. Repeated visits to this nightmare place, each time with a different outcome. An inscrutable femme, as fatale as they come. And a hapless protagonist who is so far out of his depth that, even as he believes he has escaped the clutches of fate, the steel trap is certain to spring shut on him.

Brilliant stuff. If this is Dard, give me more. If there is more of this existential noir out there, bring it to me now!

Susan says

First published in 1961, this is an atmospheric and dark novel, set over Christmas in Paris. Albert Herbin has returned to Paris after several years away, to visit his old apartment. His mother is now dead and, feeling he really needs to just get out, he heads out into the streets. There, in a restaurant, he comes across a young mother, and her daughter. The woman reminds him of Anna, a woman he once loved, and he begins to follow her. As the evening continues, Albert feels he is falling in love; but all is not what it seems. Suddenly, Albert finds himself involved in a bizarre series of events, which threaten to embroil him in the death of her husband.

If you enjoy dark noir novels, then you will find this a disturbing, slightly sinister read. This is not a typical Christmas mystery. The streets and bars are full of those celebrating, but, beneath the surface, are the lonely and the despairing. Most of this book takes place during the night, as Albert wanders the streets of his childhood and tries to come to terms with his past. This is an unusual read and I am pleased that Pushkin Vertigo are re-publishing so many crime classics from around the world. I am really enjoying discovering authors that I had never had the chance to read before and discovering wonderful crime novels that were, previously, out of print.

Melisende d'Outremer says

Classic French noir set in Paris in the 1960s. This is well executed and suspenseful, with enough plot twists and turns worthy of Hitchcock.

Narrated in the first person by one Albert Herbin, who returns home on Christmas Eve, after a absence of six years. A chance encounter over dinner with a mother and her child sparks off a strange series of events, which finds our man plumb centre in the middle of a murder. The crime is staged brilliantly and now Albert, the perfect pawn (or patsy), finds himself living within some sort of paranoid nightmare, where nobody is quite as they seem.

The story is more about plot and action rather than character development - so don't expect to learn too much about the protagonists. Enjoy the tale for what it is - the story of a man trapped within a prison of his own making.

Chris says

3.5 stars (4 stars for the story, 3 for the translation)

This took novella took me a short 90 minutes to read in two sittings. The story was fantastic with twists and turns; I love when I think I know where a story is going and it then goes in the opposite direction. The translation, though, ooph. Pretty bad. Not sure if it is the translator's part or the authors. But lots of !!! when they weren't needed!!!

Ryan says

This is one of the most random selections I've ever picked up and I'm so glad that I did. Described as the creator of the "French James Bond" and "The French Master of Noir" I was intrigued about this author I've never heard of before, and I thought I was somewhat familiar with French literature. I think of Dard as the equivalent of Agatha Christie in the English-speaking world, there's probably one on any bookshelf if you look hard enough.

The novella takes place on Christmas Eve after the main character returns to his mother's place after a long stint away. She has passed and he revisits his childhood home. What happens next is a roller coaster of fiction that compares to the masters of suspense and mystery. Why this isn't a Hitchcockian film yet is beyond me. I was blown away by these 120 pages. To say any more would spoil it all. If you're looking for something dark to fill a winter night, check this book out. • Trade Paperback • Fiction - Noir, Mystery, Crime • ?????????? • Purchased at Books Inc. in Campbell, CA.??

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Robin says

Stylish, smart, French noir story. Albert Herbin meets a mysterious woman and gets tangled in quite a situation of death and intrigue. A beautiful woman and child, a disappearing corpse. The whole story is very clever. I could see it being made into a movie. This novella is a quick read, is tough to put down, and has a great ending too.

I received a free copy of this book via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review. Thank you Pushkin Vertigo!
