



FRIENDS OF THE PALM SPRINGS LIBRARY BOOK CLUB

FOPSL Book Club: February 19, 2021

Book: *The Hare with Amber Eyes*

Author: Edmund de Waal

Discussion leader: Pearl Moskowitz

The Good Lord Bird Discussion Led by Don Markley



Last month, Don Markley presented *The Good Lord Bird* by James McBride which won the National Book Award for fiction in 2013. An African American graduate of Oberlin College, McBride was already well-known for his first book, a best-selling memoir titled *The Color of Water* (1995). His 2002 novel *Miracle at St. Anna* based on the black 92nd Infantry Division of World War II was later adapted as a film by

director Spike Lee. His most recent novel *Deacon King Kong* won the 2021 Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction. McBride is also an accomplished tenor saxophonist, composer and songwriter.

The Good Lord Bird focuses on events leading up and including John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry on October 16, 1859. The book ends with John Brown waiting to be hung. The club discussion focused on the character of Onion, a young black boy who disguises himself as a girl. Through Onion's eyes the reader examines the relationships between slaves and masters, free blacks and white abolitionists, black women and white men—the combinations are many and each tells a different part of antebellum life.

Among the club comments: the *John Brown's Body* song, a marching song popular in the Union during the Civil War, was sung in Austria! It turns out the song's melody was later used for *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* (or *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory* outside of the United States). The novel is well-known for its humor and many identified with the lighter moments in the book. One club member described McBride as the "master of the metaphor." Another described his style of writing as derived from Jazz as if the structure would evolve into what it was going to be.

The feather of a Good Lord bird was considered a good luck charm. The character, Onion, may have embodied the same good fortune for others in the book, particularly John Brown. The club was certainly fortunate to be introduced to the talented writing of James McBride.

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Friends of the Palm Springs Library Book Club meets online

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