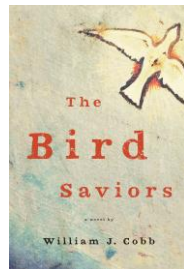




Reading Guide for
THE BIRD SAVIORS

by William J. Cobb



"A stark modern-day Old Testament story in which the evil that men do is barely balanced by the good that a few manage to achieve. It's a gritty harrowing story set in a dust-blown Colorado town that seems filled with vivid characters. Cobb's expert story-telling compels us forward scene by scene to a final satisfying redemption."—[Kent Haruf](#)

"A novel told with an unexpected and appealing warmth; the characters in *The Bird Saviors* become increasingly memorable, page by page, and the story pulled me in without hullabaloo or fuss-- this is good, confident storytelling."—[Aimee Bender](#)

From the Author:

"The Lost Novel": A Note to Readers

"*The Bird Saviors* originated in an anecdote I heard about a young woman who was engaged until her fiancé called it off and asked for the engagement ring back; when she refused, he broke into her apartment and stole it. That story set the ball in motion, as I became fascinated at the idea of someone who would do such a thing, and why. At the same time I was living in a small town in Colorado, noticing crowds of children who would pile out of a van when arriving at the local park, at a time of day when they should be in school. I learned of the huge number of home-schooled kids, and that some of them were the children of polygamist families.

The voice of Ruby Cole then popped into my head, much as it does in the beginning of the novel, talking about her domineering father, whom she nicknames Lord God and whom I imagined as a home-schooling polygamist. I wrote the first draft fairly quickly, over a summer, while my wife was pregnant with our soon-to-be darling daughter, Lili. Between writing the novel and trying to plan for our new baby my mind was admittedly a bit frazzled. Many of the things on my To Do list did not get done, the most important of which was “backup novel ms.” So right before my daughter was born—wouldn’t you know it—my laptop’s harddrive crashed, the entire novel manuscript was lost, with no backup or hard copy. Not being one to sulk or pout too much, I rewrote it from memory, recovered the “lost” novel, and am now teaching my daughter to read (when she’s home from her Montessori school). She looms in the background of the story, in the softness of Ruby’s voice, and in the way Lord God’s heart turns when the time comes to defend his girl.”

—*William J. Cobb*

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think will happen next?
2. In the face of destruction and epidemics, what do you think gives these characters hope? Are there traits in common among the main characters that allow them to maintain strength and moral standards?
3. Birds are, of course, key in this book. How do you see Cobb using birds to tell his story, both in the plot and as metaphors?
4. What do Ruby’s bird names reveal about her character?
5. How does this book treat religion?
6. What landscape matters most in this novel?
7. What do you think this book says about family—be it marriages, relationships between parents and children, or family structure?
8. Is this book part of the new “Armageddon Lit”? If so, what do you think the authors of such fiction hope to achieve?
9. This book is filled with hope. Is that heartbreaking, affirming, or both?
10. Whose story is this?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William J. Cobb is the author a book of stories and two previous novels, including the critically acclaimed *Goodnight, Texas*. His short fiction has appeared in *The New Yorker* and many other magazines. He has received numerous awards, including a National Endowment for the Arts grant, a Dobie-Paisano Fellowship, and the Sandstone Prize. He was raised in Texas and currently lives in Pennsylvania, where he teaches in the writing program at Penn State, and in Colorado.



HONORS AND KUDOS
for
William J. Cobb's debut novel,
GOODNIGHT, TEXAS
(available in paperback and as an ebook from Unbridled Books)

A BOOK SENSE PICK, October 2006
A 2006 BOOK SENSE PICKS HIGHLIGHT
A TEXAS MONTHLY Featured Author, November 2006
Official Bonus Pulpwood Queen Book Club Selection
An Austin Chronicle Best Book of 2006

"It's a gratifying thing to see a writer put warmth, lyricism, love of place, and a deeply observant naturalism to use as beautifully as William Cobb does in "Goodnight, Texas." The result, for me anyway, was a renewed love of the things and people of this world -- a working definition of a wonderful book."—**George Saunders**

"Poignant and memorable."—**Bookpage**

"Quirky and likable...charming."—**Texas Monthly**

"... Cobb has created such a **strong sense of place** that the town vies for favorite-character status. It wouldn't be fun to live there, but it's fun to visit for the local color.... In a **sweet twist of surprise ending**, Goodnight catches a break and seizes the day."—**Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**

"I found myself turning the pages as fast as I could read them."
—**Arkansas Democrat-Gazette**

"...**delightful** ...oblique.... Global warming (and greedy overharvesting) have killed off the shrimp fishery, and the heating of the planet, along with a menacing hurricane, serves as anxious backdrops to Cobb's story.... **The pages turn quickly** But the really significant climax is atmospheric...
[and] **Cobb's prose reaches new levels....**"
—**San Francisco Chronicle**

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