

BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

Shotgun Lovesongs by Nickolas Butler

About the Author

Nickolas Butler (b. 1979)

Book Discussion Dates:

Monday October 9th, 1-2pm

Wednesday October 18th, 6:30-7:30

Location: Community Room

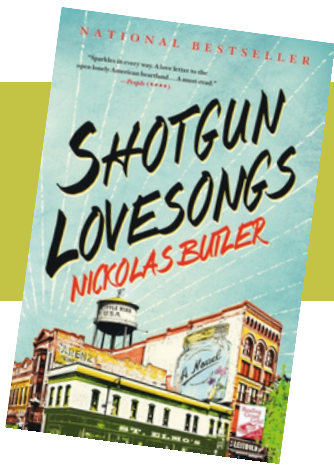


Nickolas Butler was born in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and was raised in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. He graduated with a degree in English from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and earned his MFA from the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop. His first novel was the internationally best-selling and prize-winning *Shotgun Lovesongs*, which has been optioned for film development and has been translated into ten languages. Butler attended high school alongside Justin Vernon, frontman of the indie folk band Bon Iver, which partly inspired the character Leland in *Shotgun Lovesongs*. *Beneath the Bonfire*, a collection of short stories, followed a year later. In 2017, he published *The Hearts of Men* which was short-listed for two of France's most prestigious literary prizes even before its American publishing. In 2019, his fourth book, *Little Faith* was published, and his most recent book, *Godspeed*, came out in 2021 and is set in the mountains of the American West. Butler is the recipient of many literary prizes and commendations and has published articles,

reviews, short stories, and poetry in publications such as: *Ploughshares*, *Narrative*, and *The New York Times Book Review*, to name a few. Prior to publishing *Shotgun Lovesongs*, Butler worked a long list of jobs including: coffee roaster, liquor store clerk, office manager, hot-dog vendor, author escort, meatpacker, bed-and-breakfast manager, telemarketer, and Burger King maintenance man.

Nickolas Butler is married and lives with his wife and two children on sixteen acres of land adjacent to a buffalo farm in rural Wisconsin.





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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.) *Shotgun Lovesongs* is the first novel of Nickolas Butler and it became an internationally best-selling and prize-winning book. What did you think of it? Did you like it, why or why not? What did you think of the representation of WI in the book?
- 2.) Many critics and early readers of *Shotgun Lovesongs* have remarked that it is a novel that explores adult male friendships. Did you find male friendships well represented by the different characters? Did you like certain characters more than others? And yet, perhaps at the heart of the story is Beth (and she is given her own voice in the novel). How did you feel about Butler's representation of women?
- 3.) Fame seems to be an important theme or consideration throughout *Shotgun Lovesongs*. Do you feel that the novel critiques fame? Celebrates fame? Did you find that there was jealousy toward Lee and his fame from the others? Do you think Lee enjoyed his fame? Did fame bring Lee happiness?
- 4.) Beth and Leland share one night of romance. This incident happened when neither character was married or even dating someone. And yet, it is enough to unravel lifelong friendships. What do you think about this? Why was it such a difficult thing for all of them to overcome and should they overcome it?
- 5.) There is a kind of dichotomy in this novel between city and country. How would you describe it? Do you think the author tried to represent one as better than the other? How do you think relationships may differ in rural living vs. urban living? Do you see a sacrifice in living either way?
- 6.) Late in the novel, Lee makes a particular observation about what he thinks America is. Do you feel that his perspective is at odds with your own notions of what America is? Or do you agree with him?
- 7.) Some critics have said that *Shotgun Lovesongs* is overly sentimental, even "precious"? Do you think this novel is sentimental? Should fiction avoid sentimental observations, or is it needed to express the story?