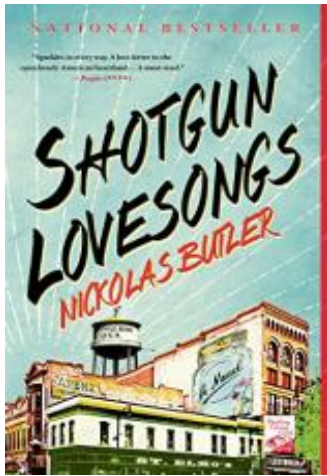


# Shotgun Lovesongs

by Nickolas Butler

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## About the Book

Hank, Leland, Kip and Ronny were all born and raised in the same Wisconsin town --- Little Wing --- and are now coming into their own (or not) as husbands and fathers. One of them never left, still farming the family's land that's been tilled for generations. Others *did* leave, went farther afield to make good, with varying degrees of success; as a rock star, commodities trader, rodeo stud. And seamlessly woven into their patchwork is Beth, whose presence among them --- both then and now --- fuels the kind of passion one comes to expect of lovesongs and rivalries.

Now all four are home, in hopes of finding what could be real purchase in the world. The result is a shared memory only half-recreated, riddled with culture clashes between people who desperately wish to see themselves as the unified tribe they remember, but are confronted with how things have, in fact, changed.

There is conflict here between longtime buddies, between husbands and wives --- told with writing that is, frankly, gut-wrenching, and even heartbreaking. But there is also hope, healing, and at times, even heroism. It is strong, American stuff, not at all afraid of showing that we can be good, too --- not just fallible and compromising. SHOTGUN LOVESONGS is a remarkable and uncompromising saga that explores the age-old question of whether or not you can ever truly come home again --- and the kind of steely faith and love returning requires.

## Discussion Guide

1. Many of the characters in SHOTGUN LOVESONGS regret specific moments in their life, moments that (perhaps) other people may not regret at all. Do you feel regret is a useful emotion? What do you regret? Which characters (and their regrets) do you identify with?

2. 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?

3. Many critics and early readers of SHOTGUN LOVESONGS have remarked that it is a novel that explores adult male friendships. 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? Was it accurate?

4. Fame seems to be an important theme or consideration throughout SHOTGUN LOVESONGS. Do you feel that the novel critiques fame? Celebrates fame? What do you think about the cult of personality in America? Do you care about celebrity? Read tabloids? Why?

5. Some critics have said that SHOTGUN LOVESONGS is overly sentimental, even "precious"? Do you think this novel is sentimental? Is sentimentality something to be altogether avoided in fiction?

6. 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? Could you relate to characters and their reactions?

7. There is a kind of dichotomy in this novel between city and country. Has your own life been subject to the push-pull of living rural vs. living urban? What have you had to sacrifice to live where you live? Do you see it as a sacrifice?

## Author Bio

Nickolas Butler was born in Allentown, Pennsylvania, raised in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and educated at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop. He is the winner of France's prestigious PAGE Prix America, the 2014 Great Lakes Great Reads Award, the 2014 Midwest Independent Booksellers Award, the 2015 Wisconsin Library Association Literary Award, and the 2015 UW-Whitewater Chancellor's Regional Literary Award. He has been long-listed for the 2014 Flaherty Dunnan Award for First Novel and short-listed for France's FNAC Prix.

Along the way, Nickolas has worked as: a Burger King maintenance man, a tutor, a telemarketer, a hot-dog vendor, an innkeeper (twice), an office manager, a coffee roaster, a liquor store clerk and an author escort. His itinerant work includes: potato harvester, grape picker and Christmas tree axe-man. He lives on 16 acres of land in rural Wisconsin adjacent to a buffalo farm. He is married and has two children.?

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