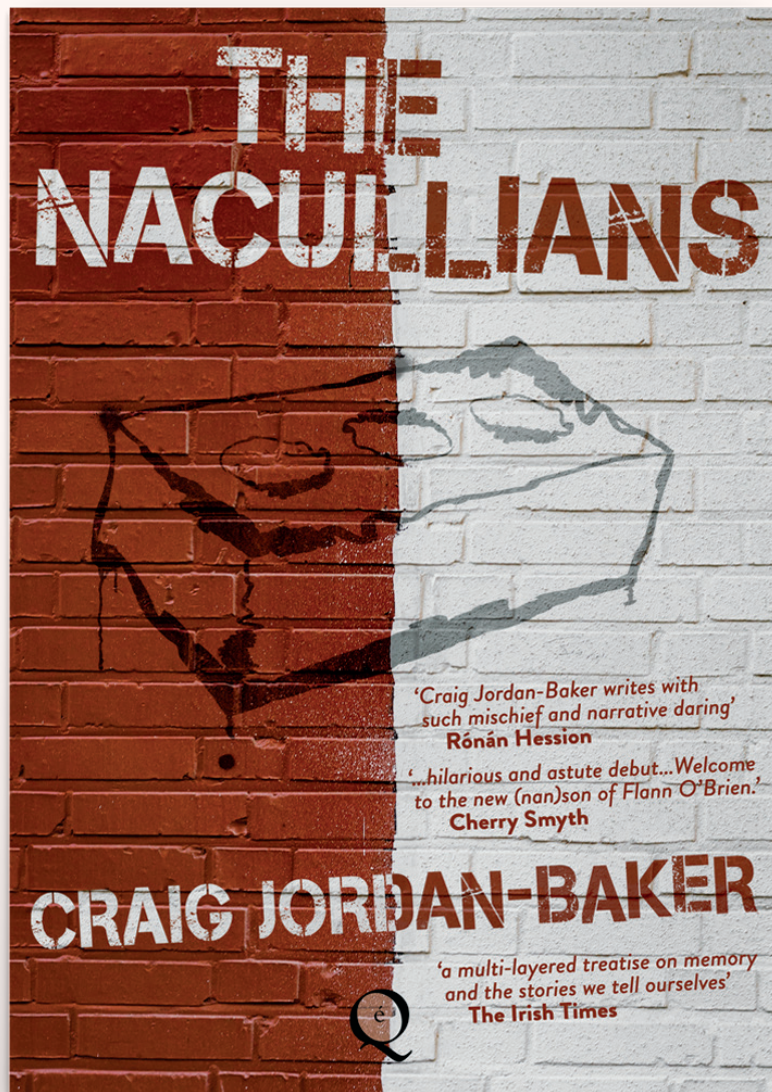


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BOOK CLUB AUTHOR Q&A THE NACULLIANS BY CRAIG JORDAN-BAKER



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Please see detailed below some questions and answers provided by the author in relation to their book.

1. How would you summarise the book and your motivations for writing it?

It's a non-linear family saga following three generations of an Anglo-Irish family living in a Southern English city. It has many gaps and silences because that is what families are, too. It's darkly comic because comedy allows us to approach darkness in a way that open lament does not. I wanted to approach those things.

2. What is the significance of the title?

The title is the family name of the people the book is about. I wanted to go for an Irish-sounding name, but one that wasn't real. Very roughly, 'Nacullian' to me means 'the dogs'. It at once animalises the family while also relating them to the mythic Irish hero Cú Chulainn.

3. What are the main themes of the book? What do these themes mean to you as the author?

The novel about inheritance. I don't mean financial or material inheritance, but more the inheritance we are given by the spaces we grow up in, the attitudes that seep into us, the mistakes and abuses of others that shape us. I think that most of us, most of the time, can't see this inheritance. That's why it's worth writing about.

4. Did you decide on a specific style of writing for this book, and if so, why? What are you trying to convey through your style?

Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City* claimed that in writing about class, there is a problem of language. A too-colloquial and informal style can blunt a book's ability to engage with wider issues, whereas a precise and philosophical style can remove us from the heat and energy of a human community. I developed my narrator to be a member of the community the narrator deals with, but that narrator had to be able to speak beyond the particular and daily. Dark comedy was the answer.

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5. Was the structure and layout of the book an important consideration? If so, why?

Absolutely. Each chapter deals with a different time period in the life of one or more of the Nacullians. We could be in 1970 in one chapter, then 1954 and then in 1997. This is not to frustrate a reader, but to emphasise that inheritance is not linear. How someone is acting or feeling or being at one point in history may be in part because of something that happened half a century before. My structure follows the exploration of my theme.

6. What would you highlight as some of the pivotal scenes of the book, what is their importance to the narrative and to you on a personal level?

One scene a lot of people mention is in a chapter called 'The Battle of Bitterne'. It's a story about gangs of working-class kids beating each other up, and it captures what is for me a distinctive tension between heroic tribalism and pointlessness, of maddening cruelty and real bravery, of brutality and idle fun.

Another scene comes from the chapter 'Flames', which no one mentions ever. It's a scene when Shannon Nacullian challenges the father of her (illegitimate) child, because after leaving Shannon to raise the child on her own, he suddenly wants to claim his son. Shannon channels decades of frustration towards him with lots of screamed and repeated expletives. I was in tears as I wrote it, because I was hearing my mother's fierce sense of injustice at some of her own treatment, as well as her fierce sense of love for me.

7. How important was the time period or the setting to the story? What were you looking to evoke through this?

Time is more important to the novel than time period, I think. That said, there are many references to the late-20th Century: Milk delivery, the Good Friday Agreement, smoking in pubs, the Labour landslide of '97, council housing and the fears of the coming millennium. So I think its time period is highly recognisable, but less important than time and far less important than place.

8. Which location in the book would you most like to visit and why?

I've visited every location in the book, because it's a book that relates to my

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home city and the council estates I grew up on. Even today, a good part of my mental life is spent in places the book mentions. It's part of my inheritance.

9. What emotions are you hoping to evoke in the reader?

I don't believe in the separation of the head and the heart, of thought and emotion. So, I'd have to say that I'd like it if readers came away knowing something they didn't know, or knowing what they already knew, better.

10. As an author you are very close to your characters. Reflecting back on the book, which of your characters would you like to meet in real life and why?

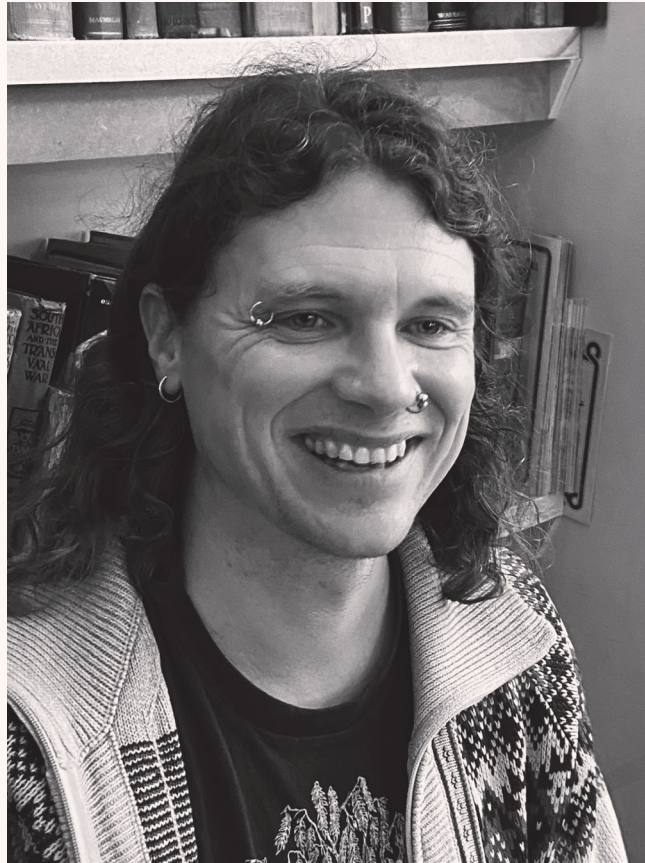
Tough one. In some sense I'd like to avoid the whole lot of them. But characters, like families, are unavoidable! I suppose I would have to say I'd like to meet Greg Nacullian, because for me, he is the person I should have become, or at least the person many people thought I would become. I'd like to better understand the differences between us.

Additional questions your book club may wish to consider:

- What impact do you think 'Nandad' Nacullian had on the rest of the family?
- Do you feel that the creation of self-focused myths, and the stories they tell about themselves, is an important aspect to how some of the characters think and act?
- Do you think if the novel were set in the present there would be any main differences to the experiences of the characters, and if so what?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Craig is a Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at The University of Brighton. He has published fiction in *New Writing*, *Text*, *Firefly Magazine*, *Potluck* and in the *époque press* é-zine.

His drama has been widely performed in the UK, including his adaptation of *Beowulf* and he has had dramatic work commissioned from The National Archives, The Booth Museum of Natural History and the Theatre Royal Brighton.