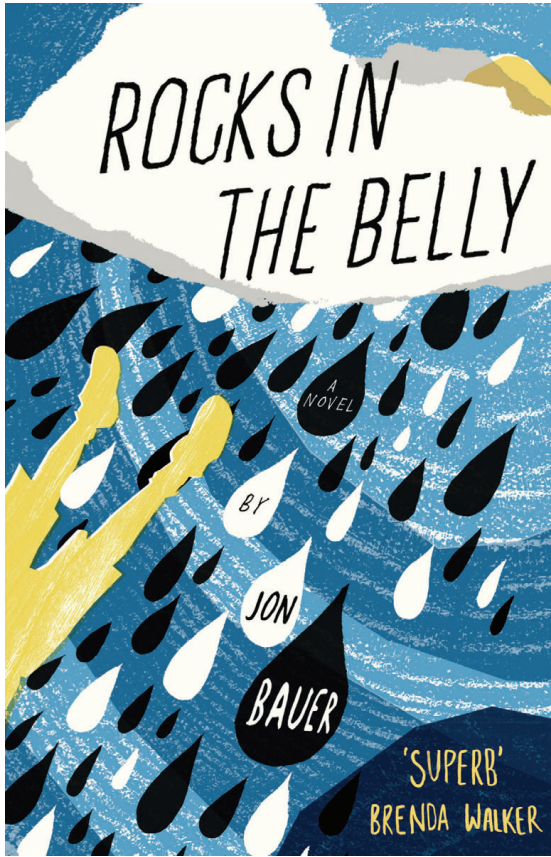


Rocks in the Belly

JON BAUER



BOOK DETAILS

Format: Paperback
 ISBN: 9781921844539
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AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Jon Bauer has written short stories and plays for stage and radio. *Rocks in the Belly* is his first novel and won the 2011 Indie Award for Best Debut Fiction. It was shortlisted for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award and longlisted for the Miles Franklin Literary Award.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. At one point in the novel the man realises he's unsure of what is real in his past; "*Just like when I think back to childhood I don't know what's real anymore, the neglect or the jealousy. Which really happened?*" Is this uncertainty part of how memory works? In his case, which do you think is more accurate: neglect or jealousy?
2. For much of the book the man blames his childhood for his behaviour. He is torn between resenting his mother and reconciling with her. Do you think the man's actions can be explained or excused by his childhood? Why or why not?
3. What role do you think the father played in the boy's childhood torment? Was he a benevolent force — the peacemaker — or did his passivity make things worse?
4. The letter the man finds from his mother reads in part "*I always asked myself if a child is born good, and I know you were.*" Do you think everyone is born with a capacity for good and evil, or are some born with more of one than the other? Where would you place the boy on this spectrum? Does he strike you as a typical eight-year-old boy?
5. Do you think the structure of the book — the divided narrative — influenced how you felt about the protagonist? If yes, in what way?
6. The protagonist is never named — how did this affect your reading of the novel?
7. Do you think the boy meant to hurt Robert? Is the accident his fault? At what age do we become responsible for our actions?

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REVIEWS

‘Blown away. Disturbing, intense, great psychological insight, brilliant inhabiting of the characters, both then and now. Moving but not sentimental. Dark and affecting. Great sense of foreboding throughout. Also loved the unreliable narrator — the constant uncertainty, having to read between ...the lines to judge the gap between perception and reality, which is never entirely resolved for you. Impressive that I empathised so strongly with and felt connected to a character who was so often deeply unlikeable.’

— JO CASE, *The Big Issue*

‘This is compelling reading, and provides great scope for discussions about the nature of good, evil and love. The narrative voices are superb, as is the characterisation; ‘damaged Robert’, in particular, and the loving, disintegrating father, are sometimes so realistic as to be almost painful...Rocks in the Belly is a beautiful and profoundly disturbing novel. It presents a dark world filled with toxic emotions that many of us choose to ignore. But it’s a world well worth entering.’

— *Good Reading*

8. Which character do you most blame, and which do you most sympathise with? Why?
9. The police investigation raises the possibility that the man’s mother may still have been alive when he placed her in the bath. How did you feel when it looked like he might be to blame for her death?
10. What could the mother have done differently to balance the needs of her young child and her need to foster? Why do you think she needed to foster boys?
11. What do you think the rest of the man’s life will be like? How do you think he deserves to spend the rest of his life?
12. Do you think adulthood is very distinct from childhood, or do parts of us remain children? The boy has much ‘unfinished business’ from childhood to deal with. What from your own childhood have you carried into adulthood and does much still feel ‘unfinished’?



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