

Unwarranted: A Novel in Stories



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Abstract

My dissertation project is born of my interest in the lives of a familiar stripe of urban artist or professional—those who self-identify as “liberal,” ache for political or social engagement, and who, despite their best intentions, speed gentrification and displacement of the “original” residents with whom they never quite identify. They habitually listen in to the lives of these “Others” who remain at an uneasy distance. The project’s conceptual framework rises from another narrative concern: my investment in the formal structure of stories and novels and how they might be wed or webbed together. On its face, the structure of *Unwarranted* is not complicated: a novel in stories wherein each piece stands on its own yet contributes—in sequential fashion—to the arc of a traditional novel. What distinguishes it from the merely episodic or serial is a commitment to conceptual unity and specific, separate conflict within each given piece. Each story is governed by a unique thematic link, each its own distinct unit with its own distinct flavor, though a given general reader might only receive them as chapters. They are directly connected, ultimately—one comes after the other—and my aim is to create a unified whole, adding up to what John Gardner called a “vivid and continuous dream.” There is, I hope, an emotional logic at the core of this book. The protagonist and point of view character, Philip Palliard, is a stay-at-home father and failed playwright whose wife runs a research project studying the side effects of spinal cord injuries. Already an inveterate eavesdropper—and sometime voyeur—Palliard watches the other residents of his street, listens in on his near neighbors, and inevitably becomes entwined in their lives, often in compromising or embarrassing ways. In addition to Palliard’s more private inclinations, the book examines the pressures and limits of monogamy and parenting in the cultural context of the post-9-11 Bush era. While Palliard and his friends debate the nuances of the war on terror, gangbangers roam the streets. Ultimately what the novel tries to get at are the limits of truth-telling, seeing truthfully, and the unreliability of memory.

Subject

Unwarranted

Unwarranted: A Novel in Stories

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