



The Adjustment League

Mike Barnes

Biblioasis (Aug 23, 2016)

Softcover \$14.95 (352pp)

978-1-77196-082-3

The Adjustment League is both a literary tour de force and a deft psychological thriller.

Mike Barnes's *The Adjustment League* weaves together elements of a psychological drama and a noir thriller as it follows a nameless man who feels compelled to right the wrongs inflicted on the helpless.

He's known only as the Super, tending an apartment building in a gentrifying neighborhood of Toronto. After his "Hurricane Years"—a youth and early manhood of mental storms, criminal trespasses, jail and institutions—the Super copes on his own, but he has never lost a passion for "adjustments"—rectifying the wrongs he perceives according to his peculiar moral code. However, he can do so only during "hyper-time," periods of severe mania, which are generally followed by "hyper-black," catatonic depression and episodic amnesia.

The story begins when the Super receives a note with three letters, "TAL," spurring him to trace a friend from the days when he was institutionalized. He learns that Maude Wyvern, the matriarch of a prominent family, has died. The Super believes she was left warehoused after descending into dementia, and he intends to make an "adjustment" among the Wyverns accordingly. Instead, he discovers a bizarre tale of perversion spanning two generations.

Barnes's characters fascinate, especially the Super, a damaged soul in a damaged body, who is angry yet self-aware. The Super is a brilliant man, warped by a foster-care childhood and driven by a self-inflicted personal tragedy. His obsessions lend a surrealistic air to the descriptions of people and places, and there are near-poetic descriptions within his thoughts, such as "silences rubbing against one another in endless consolation." Also interesting are the drug-addled schizophrenic daughter of the Wyvern clan, her self-aggrandizing brothers, and an autistic child in the Super's building who brings out his compassion and empathy.

The dialogue flows naturally within a narrative that tightens, flares, and grows intense with perceptive descriptions, references, and allusions. Themes of mindless consumerism, the concept of being possessed by possessions, and a deeply troubled Toronto politician all make the book more interesting.

Barnes's *The Adjustment League* is both a literary tour de force and a deft psychological thriller.

GARY PRESLEY (Fall 2016)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.