



CAROUSEL COURT

Joe McGinniss Jr.

Simon & Schuster | Hardcover | \$25.00 | August 2, 2016

****An August 2016 Indie Next Pick****

"[A] novel of unrelenting tension. ... Doomed and doughty, [Phoebe's] a lexicon of contradictions, a kind of update on Maria Wyeth of Joan Didion's *Play It as It Lays*. McGinniss also recalls Nathanael West's *Day of the Locust* in depicting their road, *Carousel Court*, as a catalog of strangeness and dangers: from coyotes and marauding home invaders to weird neighbors and crying, screaming cicadas. McGinniss covers familiar territory in the marketplace and marriage but injects it with an urgency, a sense of constant, inescapable threat that all adds up to a taut page-turner." —*Kirkus Reviews*, **starred review**

"Powerful. ... May have some readers recalling Yeats' poem 'The Second Coming.' ... Along with Yeats, there are echoes here of Martin Amis' similarly pre-apocalyptic *London Fields*." —*Booklist*, **starred review**

"Propulsive. ... The novel's nearly 100 vignettes—many of them gems of concision and electric prose that lay bare the darker sides of Nick and Phoebe, as well as the handful of coworkers and eccentric neighbors who swirl down the drain with them—mirror the discontent seething just beneath the surface of an ersatz American dream. ... McGinniss is at his best when describing, with anthropological intensity, the throes of a broken relationship." —*Publishers Weekly*

"Tension is always high. ... Gripping. ... A propulsive page-turner." —*Arrive (Amtrak Magazine)*

"Harrowing, smart, wickedly accurate about the third world of the contemporary United States, and very well written." —*Lionel Shriver*, author of *We Need to Talk about Kevin*

"*Carousel Court* showcases a domestic circus of the most compelling kind: a kaleidoscopic train-wreck of a marriage set ablaze by the bright white hyperreality of a California suburb in decline. Joe McGinniss Jr. writes with wit and scorching honesty about adultery, addiction, and financial ruin, never losing sight of his characters' humanity and their fractured hope that redemption might be possible after all."

—*Carolyn Parkhurst*, author of *Harmony* and *The Dogs of Babel*

Published almost ten years after his critically acclaimed debut *The Delivery Man*, Joe McGinniss Jr. returns with **CAROUSEL COURT (Simon & Schuster; Hardcover; \$25.00; August 2, 2016)**: an unforgettable and deeply affecting novel about the total collapse of house and home. Set against the backdrop of the housing crisis, “this scathing novel of our strange new century” (Walter Kirn) is one of those rare books where, as the pages fly by, readers are as unnerved by the characters’ actions as they are sympathetic to them.

When we first meet Nick and Phoebe Maguire, they’ve recently moved from Boston to Los Angeles in search of a fresh start for themselves and their infant son. Both naïve in their actions and victims of the recent economic crisis, they quickly find themselves suffocating in the dark heart of foreclosure alley. As Nick struggles to keep himself and his family safe in their new neighborhood, described by *Booklist* as “a plausible Ground Zero for a society slouching toward Armageddon,” Phoebe proves to be one of the most fascinating female literary figures of recent memory—“a lexicon of contradictions” reminiscent of “Maria Wyeth of Joan Didion’s *Play It as It Lays*” (*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review). Broke and increasingly desperate, and as hesitant to accept blame as they are unable to forgive each other for the hell they’ve together created, both devise their own crude plan to claw their way back into the middle class where they feel they belong. Plotted in secret but under the same roof, when their separate agendas collide in spectacular fashion to turn their marriage into blood sport, readers will be left wondering what they—or their partner—might be capable of when desperation looms.

The son of the late writer Joe McGinniss, Joe McGinniss Jr. has been embraced by both readers and critics for his ability to bring difficult contemporary issues to life through his writing. With an accessible and stylish voice reminiscent of Bret Easton Ellis and Joan Didion—McGinniss Jr. has been compared to both—it’s no wonder that **CAROUSEL COURT** has been called everything from “a novel of unrelenting tension” (*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review) to “propulsive [and] electric” (*Publishers Weekly*) to, quite simply, “powerful” (*Booklist*, starred review).

About the Author

Joe McGinniss Jr. is the author of *Carousel Court* and *The Delivery Man*, a *New York Times Book Review* “Editor’s Choice” that is being turned into a feature film by Highland Films. The son of the late writer Joe McGinniss, he lives in Washington, DC with his family.

About the Book

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By Joe McGinniss Jr.

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In Conversation with Joe McGinniss Jr. about **CAROUSEL COURT**

CAROUSEL COURT is an unforgettable and deeply affecting novel about the total collapse of house and home. Why did you decide to write a novel set against the backdrop of the housing crisis?

One of the ultimate symbols of American status is the home. Do you own one? What kind of neighborhood is it in? How many square feet? What was the asking price and how much has it appreciated? The home is foundational, as well, in the psyche of so many young families. When the housing market crashed, it was mostly young families who bore the brunt of it, those without the financial safety nets provided by family trusts. Instead of leaning on family money, they looked elsewhere for loans—only to be duped by predatory lenders and left to fend for themselves when things went south.

When researching *Carousel Court*, I spoke at length with those at the heart of foreclosure alley in southern California. Their stories were all so familiar and wholly sympathetic: they had a vision for their lives and central to this vision was children, and a home in which to raise them. I spoke with a young couple who moved from Riverside to Lake Elsinore when their zero-down loan was approved. Their new home wasn't just symbolic of their move up the ladder, but also validation of their worthiness. They bank had put its trust in them, and they had put their trust in the bank that their new home was a safe bet. They've been stuck in that home since 2006, having seen its value drop more than \$200,000. When relaying their story to me, the couple summed it up in two shorts words: "We lost."

Despite their obvious dysfunction, Nick and Phoebe Maguire are both willing to do anything necessary to claw their way back into the middle class, no matter how it might affect the other. Why did you write them as you did—a couple so fractured that they're unafraid to hurt each other—rather than as loving partners experiencing and surviving a shared trauma together?

We're all heard the statistic: more than half of all marriages end in divorce. My parents were divorced, and I have friends whose weddings I attended not even ten years ago who are now divorced. (And others who are struggling mightily). In real life, every couple—married or not—is pushed to the limit and I'm sure there are many sound, functional relationships that thrive under the pressure. And while some of those might make for a damn good novel, that isn't that story, or marriage, I wanted to write. I wrote Nick and Phoebe the way I did because writing them any other way—quietly struggling, pushing forward, always in sync—didn't feel right for me. There's something so compelling about adults struggling with the loss of ambition, not reaching goals, forced readjustment of priorities and the ever-changing definition of happiness. That is the relationship I wanted to explore in *Carousel Court*.

In a starred review, *Kirkus Reviews* calls Phoebe "a lexicon of contradictions, a kind of update on Maria Wyeth of Joan Didion's *Play It as It Lays*." What was it like to write a female character like Phoebe—one as equally unforgivable as she is misunderstood?

In my first novel *The Delivery Man*, I wrote about a young woman named Michele, a Salvadoran immigrant living in Las Vegas who realized that the most direct path between where she was—relatively impoverished, intelligent, and ambitious—and where she wanted to go was a straight line. The fact that the shortest path between the two points had her cross moral boundaries, including exploiting young girls for profit, didn't deter her. Some consider her ruthless and cruel, but she was entirely predictable: once you knew Michele, you knew exactly what she would do in any situation.

Phoebe Maguire is different in that she is unpredictable, and therefore frightening. But also mesmerizing, I think. Like Didion's Maria Wyeth and April Wheeler in *Revolutionary Road*, or so many of Ann Beattie's protagonists, Phoebe wants so much for not only herself, but also for her child and family. And what she wants is not necessarily material, but also holistic. She wants to live an important life, to make a mark. She has boundless energy and ambition, and when she's dropped into a cul-de-sac in the middle of nowhere, drowning in debt and forced to shoulder the burden of keeping her family afloat financially, she is revealed.

The housing crisis and the recession have been discussed at length in the news, but CAROUSEL COURT offers readers a fresh perspective on what it was really like for those who found themselves drowning in debt. What can fiction tell us about this time in American history that nonfiction writing and reporting cannot?

The best reporting tells a story, and the best story emphasizes character, tone, setting, and the little details. It takes a special type of writer—my father happened to be one of them—who can bring scenes to life for those not there to experience them firsthand. Other masters include Tom Wolfe, Joan Didion, and David Foster Wallace. But you don't have to be famous to possess this talent: I regularly read a certain reporter/writer/artist in Las Vegas – Stacey J. Willis – because she has a similar gift.

Fiction allows for an amalgamation of the details and tone and character without the burden of journalistic reporting—laying out the facts, the numbers, the statistics and two-dimensional that can suck the life and momentum out of what would otherwise be a great piece. Writing a novel about a real-life situation, in this case the housing crisis, gave me the opportunity to experience it in a variety of ways and write accordingly.

Much like your father, the late writer Joe McGinniss, you've been embraced by both readers and critics alike for your supreme ability to bring difficult contemporary issues to life through your writing. Is there a common thread woven through your work and his?

Fatal Vision, Blind Faith, Heroes, The Selling of the President... They all share an overarching theme I suppose both my father and I share in our writing: a cynicism about institutions or public faces, the façades constructed that mask an inner dysfunction or worse.

My father's work and general worldview wasn't complicated, and it came into focus for me as I grew up. In short, it was driven by a simple guiding principle: everything is bullshit and everyone is, for lack of a better term, a phony. He started with his columns calling out the racist mayor and thuggish cops in Philadelphia. Vietnam was a disaster. America in 1968, after the cities burned and Kennedy was killed, was a cesspool. Politics in the television age are bullshit. Supposed heroes—Green Beret surgeons named Jeffrey MacDonald, idyllic families like the Marshalls of Toms River, OJ Simpson—were actually monsters. My father was driven to do one thing with his writing: expose the truth behind the façade.

When looking at my own work, I like to think that I, too, help breakdown some of today's biggest façades: with *The Delivery Man*, it was the idea of "Sin City" Las Vegas and with *Carousel Court*, it is the housing bubble and contemporary marriage. Before the housing crisis, everyone accepted on faith—with significant data to back it up—that housing values always rise and home ownership, ala marriage, is the cornerstone of stability and the foundation on which to build a truly meaningful and fulfilling life. When the housing market failed, it proved that what so many of us believed in and built our lives around was actually a façade.

The housing crisis obviously hit the entire nation, but you decided to set the story in the fictional town of Serenos. What drew you to Southern California?

In literature, contemporary Los Angeles and how life there is depicted is extremely varied and always compelling. My father never had a chance to read *Carousel Court* before he died, but knowing the novel was set east of Los Angeles, he sent me some fantastic works about the city and literature of and about the region. My favorite was *The Misread City: New Literary Los Angeles* edited by Scott Timberg and Dana Gioia. In it, a number of very smart people wrangle with issues surrounding the classic stereotypes of Los Angeles: rich Anglo kids, coked-up zombies, nihilistic heroines whose lives are devoid of meaning, all of whom followed Raymond Chandler, Aldous Huxley, and Nathanael West. In it, you can find a wonderful essay by David Fine about fictional apocalyptic renderings of the city. And it makes sense, since the place lends itself to disaster: the earthquakes, the fires, the floods, the wildlife, the winds, the disconnection of communities because of zoning and freeways and the transient population. I appreciate fiction that utilizes the surroundings, natural and otherwise, to help set a mood and give the reader real feeling. If a writer can make me feel a place, whether it's the stark, brittle cold of New Hampshire in the winter that Russell Banks offers in *Affliction* or the sun as an orange monster of Bret Easton Ellis's *Less Than Zero*, I'm all in.

Additional Praise for *Carousel Court*

“Here it is, the leveraged, frayed, unfaithful, buzzed America that all the baloney entertainment products, including a lot that pose as literature, are designed to cover up. Can you handle the truth? Then step inside. This scathing novel of our strange new century is like nothing else I’ve read in years.”

—Walter Kirn, author of *Up in the Air*

“*Carousel Court* pulls no punches, taking on nothing less than marriage, and the false promises of our American Dream. These are great big subjects and Joe McGinniss Jr. is more than up to them. Mature and smart and in control of his arsenal, he writes tenderly about family and parenthood, and is every bit as clear-eyed when the subject is underwater mortgages or secret sexting. The result is a hell of a roller coaster. Strap yourself.” —Charles Bock, author of *Beautiful Children*

“In urgent, kaleidoscopic prose, Joe McGinniss Jr. diagnoses the American Dream with a high fever, jaundice, and severe heartburn. Set in a simmering suburban Los Angeles, *Carousel Court* is the portrait of a disastrous but thoroughly modern marriage whose young wife, Phoebe Maguire, is hurtling toward a pill-fueled implosion that’s impossible to look away from. The pitch-perfect ending reverberates like a handbell after a hurricane.” —Kate Christensen, author of *The Great Man*

Bookseller Quotes for *Carousel Court*

“A brilliant, raw, unflinching novel. ... I read it in one sitting and still feel shaken by it days later.”

—Allison Hill, *Vroman’s and Book Soup*

“I cannot remember the last time I read such a brutally perfect portrayal of modern American life. ... This is a powerful book that should not be missed.” —Luisa Smith, *Book Passage*

“Searing. ... *Carousel Court* is at its core a tale of redemption that manages to maintain the perfect tension between despair and hope.” —Adrian Newell, *Warwick’s*

“Impossible to put down. ... Nick and Phoebe’s plight is recognizable and deeply affecting.”

—Mark Laframboise, *Politics & Prose*

“A major moment in contemporary fiction. ... McGinniss displays a master’s touch.”

—Geoffrey Jennings, *Rainy Day Books*

“Man is it compelling.” —Annie Philbrick, *Bank Square Books*

“Breathtaking. ... Desperate, provocative, and palpable.”

—Jessica Sweedler DeHart, *BookPeople of Moscow*

“Convincing and very frightening.” —Richard Howorth, *Square Books*

“Terrifying but tantalizing...*Carousel Court* is a Molotov cocktail of a novel, lit and ready to explode. All that it needs is a match.” —Kelly Morton, *Joseph-Beth*