



**Studies in the Hereafter**  
a novel  
Sean Bernard

*Studies in the Hereafter*

A Novel by Sean Bernard

ISBN 978-1-59709-995-0

Binding: Tradepaper

Size: 5 x 8; Pages: 272

Price: US \$15.95

**Pub Date: August 15, 2015**



Sean Bernard



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A warm and witty debut about a bored bureaucrat in heaven who compiles reports on the living.

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A disillusioned office bureaucrat in the afterlife has come to realize that maybe heaven isn't all it's cracked up to be. Bored by the endless routine of work, golf, and vegan food, he finds his one saving grace in his Field Studies: detailed reports he compiles on the living in order to determine their best fit in his world. While working on his 62nd Field Study, he begins to fall for Tetty, a detached Basque-American beauty living in Nevada, while struggling to understand what she sees in Carmelo, a clumsy scholar obsessed with the elusive Basque culture. When people start going missing from heaven for no apparent reason, the narrator learns that Field Study 62 may hold the key to explaining the disappearances.

## **Praise for *Studies in the Hereafter***

“A whimsical debut novel, in which Bernard makes heaven the setting for a story of love and self-actualization. Some say heaven is a place where everything is fine; others say it's a place where nothing ever happens. In Bernard's version of the afterlife, both of these things are true . . . it takes a good writer to populate the afterlife with flying people; it takes a true original to point out that, after a while, everyone gets sick of the flying people and the traffic jams they cause . . . highly enjoyable.”

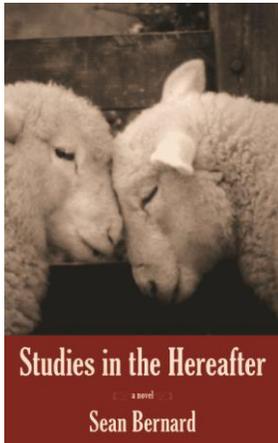
—*Kirkus Reviews*

“At once playful, philosophical and hopeful, this debut novel is a piece of work unbound by convention or structure. Wild and imaginative.”

—Charles Yu

## **Biographical Note**

Sean Bernard lives and teaches creative writing in southern California. He holds degrees from Arizona, Oregon State, and the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and his fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in journals including *CutBank*, *LIT*, *Glimmer Train*, *West Branch*, and *Santa Monica Review*. He's won grants and awards from groups including Oregon Literary Arts, the University of Arizona Poetry Center, *Poets & Writers*, and, in 2012, a literary fellowship from the NEA.



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**More Praise for *Studies in the Hereafter***

“In *Studies in the Hereafter*, reality grants us two equally puzzling lives—the afterlife and this one, both of them part poetry and part bureaucracy, part fantasy and part mystery. The opening pages of the novel are welcomingly comic, yet permeated with a sense of intrigue whose source is hard to locate. Gradually this sense gathers itself together in the form of a question: *How much of ourselves do we lose when we’re stripped of our memories?* The explorations Sean Bernard conducts into this riddle are never less than fascinating.”

—Kevin Brockmeier

“In *Studies in the Hereafter*, Sean Bernard has crafted a rare gift: a novel that makes us laugh while breaking our hearts; that is thought-provoking as it entertains; that is profoundly new, even while looking askance at old assumptions. Herein are vegan angels, time-hopping dead bureaucrats, and a love story for the ages, all the more affecting for being seen in fragments. Quite simply: this novel is a joy.”

—Christopher Coake, the author of *You Came Back*

**From *Studies in the Hereafter***

Today two men grapple and fall from the freeway, soaring down the sky.

These days I get so jaded—and yes, this is bad—that my response is annoyance.

The classification system used at my company begins with a simple binary, establishing whether people are complex enough to merit further study (uncommon) or aren’t (very common). I’ve occasionally come across uniquely complex field studies—rather than option A or option B, I can’t help but wonder if there might be better ways to accommodate these even more complex people, those rare occurrences of a galaxy-gathered-in-a-soul. (I have elitist leanings, is one problem. Another is that I’m still fairly new in the office—I haven’t earned the right to be listened to. Besides, likely all workers before me had that same thought: *How can I improve things?* Even if I did make changes, they’d just get changed by someone else. Human nature: the need to leave our mark. The more I study people, the more it seems that life is less about progress, more about individual vanity.)

So I keep quiet, do my job, and look forward to going home at the end of the day. Rushing home after work is a deeply coded imperative, a carryover from years of ancestral bureaucracy—we carry many such impulses here. Some, like violence, are wiped clean. Helps give this place its sheen of pleasantness. But annoyance and frustration still exist, unfortunately, and 5:00 p.m. is quitting time, and I don’t care how interesting a given file might be on a late afternoon: the end of the day is the end of the day.