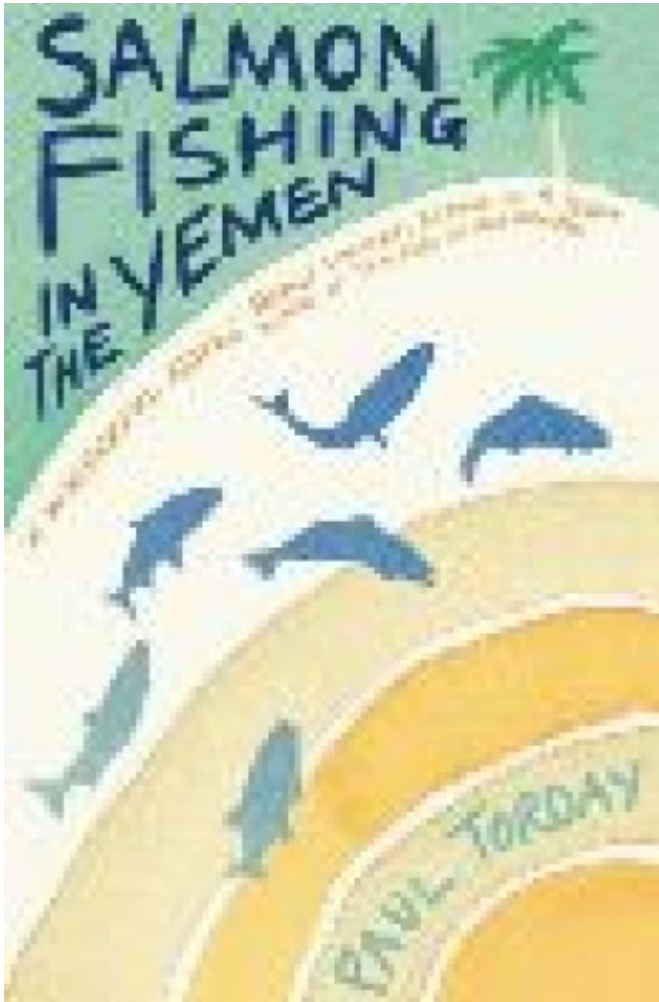


CC recommends

Books in the [December 11, 2007](#) issue

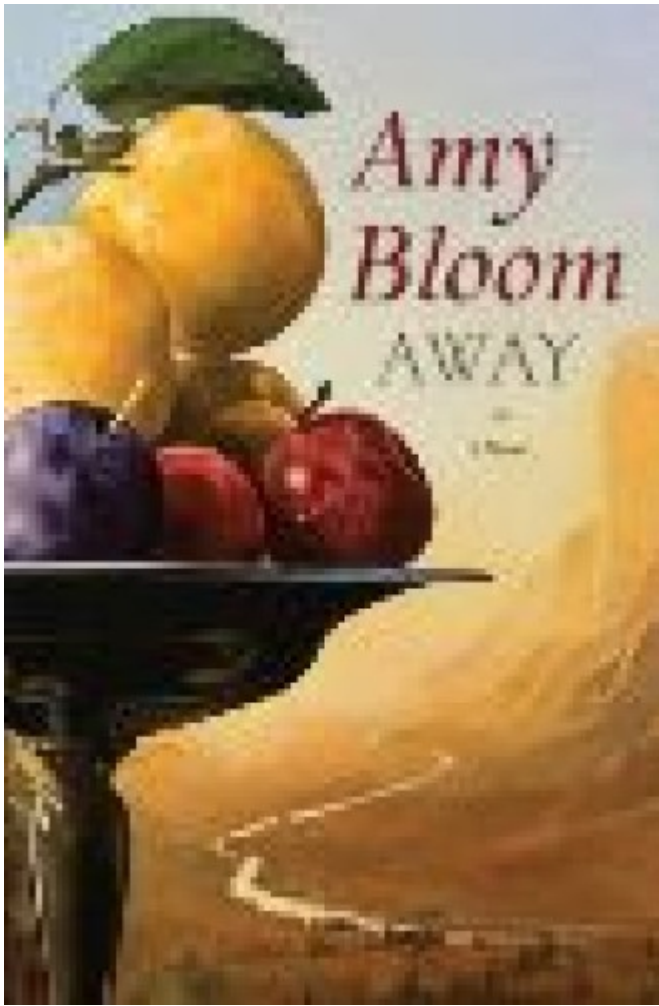
In Review



Salmon Fishing in the Yemen

Paul Torday

Harcourt



Away

Amy Bloom
Random House

“Magical” — *McSweeney’s*
and *After This* has been called “a masterpiece”

Alice
McDermott



AFTER
THIS

AFTER THIS IS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL AND MOST
POWERFUL STORY I HAVE EVER READ

After This

Alice McDermott

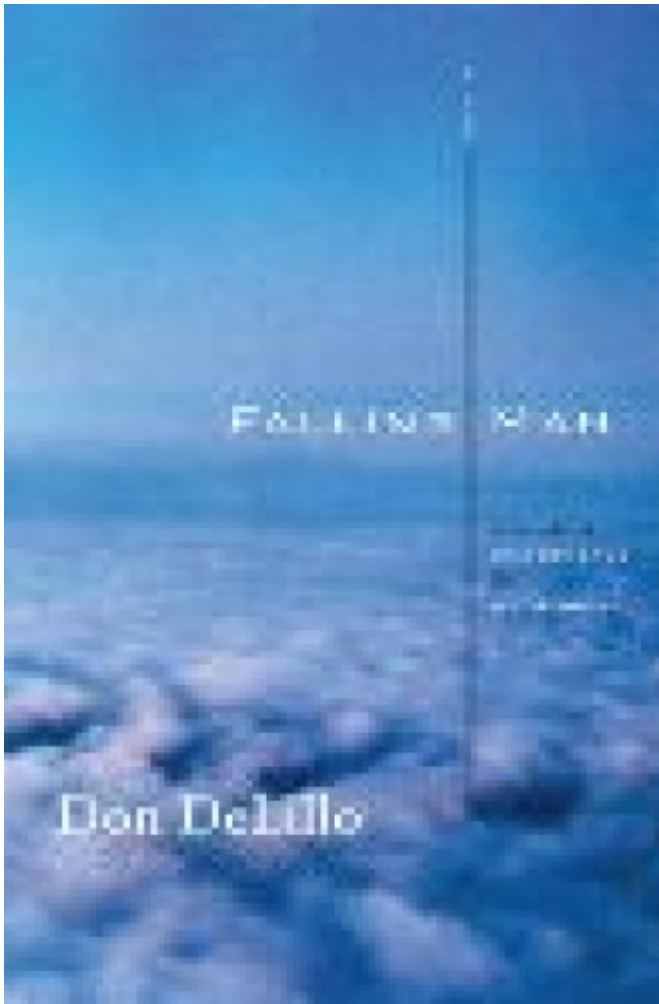
Farrar, Straus & Giroux



The End of Mr. Y

Scarlett Thomas

Harcourt



Falling Man

Don DeLillo
Scribner

Political forces are pressing British National Fisheries scientist Alfred Jones into helping a wealthy Yemeni sheikh introduce salmon fishing to his home *wadi*. Jones is a man of reason and logic, yet he is emotionally stunted and unsure of himself. In the evenings he gives lectures on “Why God Cannot Exist.” He is in a cold marriage to a calculating financial analyst who is deeply invested in the success of both of their careers. The Yemeni fishing project eventually sinks both Jones’s marriage and his career, but Jones himself is gradually transformed. By the end of the book, he believes that he understands something about the nature of faith—both its risks and its rewards. Torday weaves his unlikely plot through diaries, e-mails, interviews and television transcripts—it’s something like reading a file marked “confidential.” Torday combines political satire and, perhaps too often, caricature with the intimate

portrait of a man who becomes an unexpected pilgrim.

Bloom's second novel begins in New York, where Lillian Leyb arrives from her native Russia. Her family has been murdered in a pogrom. Lillian finds work as a seamstress in a theater and eventually befriends and then begins affairs with both the theater owner and his son. Despite the material rewards of her new life, Lillian is dead inside. Then she learns that her daughter, Sophie, whom she thought dead, may be alive and living in Siberia. Lillian undertakes a journey to Alaska and attempts a crossing into Siberia. Bloom's depiction of 1920s America is so vivid and convincing, and Lillian's voice so compelling that the reader is willing to travel anywhere with her.

Alice McDermott is a master of realism and a gifted portrait artist. In this novel she is in familiar territory—that of Irish Catholic families on Long Island. The book follows Mary Keane and her husband and children through the decades following World War II. The novel is arranged as a series of interwoven vignettes of everyday life, with glimpses of transcendence. Despite the deft economy of the writing, the book recalls the best of James Joyce: the reader has access simultaneously to conscious and unconscious levels of the characters and to their physical realities. In one early scene, Mary eats a sandwich in a cafe, an act that McDermott renders both sacramental and sensual, a meditation on faith and desire. The book is far more than the sum of its sparsely told parts.

Ariel Manto, a Ph.D. student in literature at a British university, is studying an obscure Victorian fiction writer—Thomas E. Lumas, author of a book, *The End of Mr. Y*, that few people have ever even seen. Manto finds a copy in a used bookstore, and the discovery takes this philosophically sophisticated but troubled student on a dangerous journey through a realm of the imagination called the Troposphere. This book is an edgy, cultish and effective fantasy about time, space and reality. The introduction of Adam, a theology student and ex-priest, provides a counterpoint to the strident secularism of most of the characters, and prayer plays a surprising role in the Troposphere. Even with its discussions of Heidegger, Derrida and Einstein, the novel manages to be fast-paced and intriguing. It also elicits compassion for Manto and raises genuine questions about the universe.

Don DeLillo's much-anticipated novel about September 11 follows a man who narrowly escapes death at the World Trade Center, Keith Neudecker, and his estranged wife, Lianne, and son, Justin. Stumbling blindly out of the World Trade

Center wreckage, Neudecker stumbles equally blindly back into his life. DeLillo has an exquisite ear for the contemporary moment and—as he showed in novels like *White Noise* and *Underworld*—a fine-tuned understanding of the political in the personal and the intimate in the global. Keith is frustratingly self-absorbed, and Lianne is a passive accomplice in his narcissism. Unable to break out of their own worlds to grapple with what has happened, they are emblems of a lost, numb and rigid America.

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