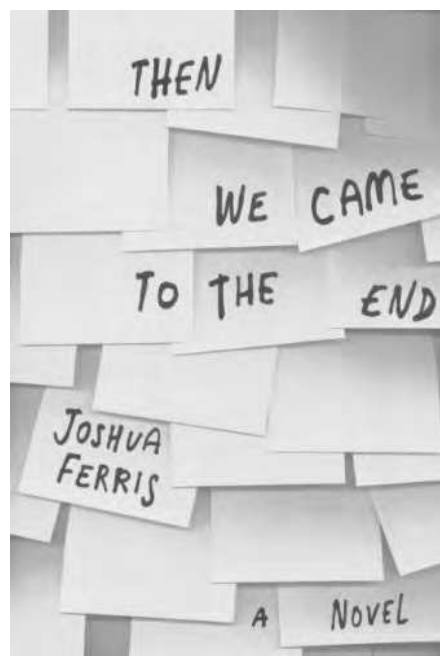


that Woolf also wrote into *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Waves*. One assumes that Christensen won't be writing several more books about Oscar Feldman, the man of the title, who resembles no one so much as an oddly idealized vision of a Picasso-esque male abstract expressionist, all sex and brio with no feel for consequences. He's all about virility, obsessed with painting only female nudes and screwing a variety of different women — not that we ever hear Oscar's inner life from himself. He's also not there. Through a postmodern textual wrinkle, the book opens with his (fictional) *Times* obit. From there, the narrative dives into the interactions of two Oscar Feldman biographers with the three main women in his life: his wife Abigail, his mistress Teddy and his sister Maxine, also a painter.

But Christensen's intent isn't really to build an image of Oscar; instead, she shows the lives of the three elderly women and their different, rarely overlapping New York worlds. Abigail, consistently providing care for their middle-aged autistic son, recalls Oscar in a much more gentle fashion than Teddy, who is the mother of two adult women, also Oscar's children. Teddy's best friend Lila enters into the narration as well, her reflections on Teddy and Oscar giving heft to the self-interested accounts of the other women and also shining a light on some of Oscar's irresponsible behavior, which left Teddy in poverty. And Maxine — she's what's often known as a battle-axe, a formidable character whose heart the reader gets to see. She always yearns after those she can't quite have and finds, so late in life, that her art may finally eclipse that of her brother. Christensen deals with the erotic and internal lives of the middle-aged and elderly with a kind of thoughtful yet humorous detail that comes home most strongly in the differences among the meals these women serve to the biographers. That's literal, of course, but also figurative: Abigail deals handily with one of them, serving him a tempting trade that essentially destroys his integrity. *The Great Man* ends with fictional book reviews of the two biographies, and readers see that the male writers concentrating on the "great man" have lost their

chance to write about the great women he knew. Thankfully, for that we have Christensen. — *Suzi Steffen*



### Dot-Com, or Bust

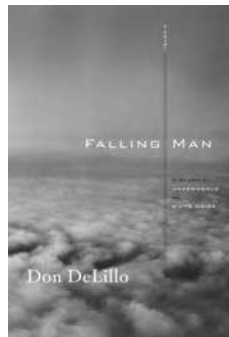
**THEN WE CAME TO THE END** by Joshua Ferris. LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY, 2007. HARDCOVER, \$23.99. FINALIST, 2007 NATIONAL BOOK AWARD FOR FICTION. A NEW YORK TIMES BEST BOOK OF 2007.

The story of a group of coworkers at a rapidly shrinking advertising agency — when someone gets fired, as keeps happening, they get "walked Spanish down the hall," a complicated and perfectly explained bit of office in-jokery — Joshua Ferris' debut novel, *Then We Came to the End*, is audacious, observant, funny, sympathetic and, above all, inclusive. His choice of voice — first-person plural — includes everyone in the office (as well as the reader) in its wry, dry, storytelling tone. On the one hand, it's very specific, as former ad agency employee Ferris details the work, the putting off of the work, the ways to spend time and waste time and perhaps, at some point, actually do some work; on the other, the peculiarities of office life are depicted in such a way that they become universal. Life at work, be that work in an office, a warehouse or a bookstore, is its own culture, with its own hierarchies and rules and sense of humor, and it's that culture that Ferris both relishes in and skewers with this book. There is no single

main character though Lynn Mason gets a middle segment that's quite different from the group narrative. The ongoing question of whether she has cancer gives her colleagues a focus, a way to worry about something outside themselves and their job, as does the firing of Tom Mota, whose inability to sustain a persona that will fit in with the office groupthink leads him to wear three company polos at once and email impassioned missives to the entire company late at night. What happens to those who get fired and can't leave their office self behind, or to those still working in this shrinking, nervous community, is endlessly funny and surprisingly touching, especially as Ferris brings it all together at the end. — *Molly Templeton*

### Little Lives of Greatness

**FALLING MAN** by Don DeLillo. SCRIBNER, 2007. HARDCOVER, \$26. A NEW YORK TIMES NOTABLE BOOK OF 2007.



Saying that now, six years later, 9/11 lingers in our public consciousness is a gross understatement. While the media frenzy inevitably dulled over time, we're still saturated with the imagery and

iconography of that day, not to mention the frequent reminders from the likes of Bush, Cheney and Giuliani. "9/11 literature" can almost justify its own section at the bookstore. So when DeLillo approaches the subject, even head on as he does, it's more than impressive that his efforts don't come off as tired or stale. In fact, *Falling Man* does what I thought impossible — it made September 11 real again, not just a dull wash of 24-hour cable news and American flag decals.

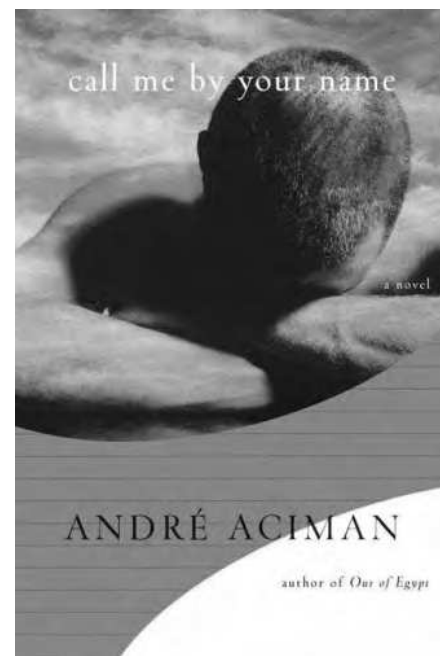
The title refers to a New York performance artist who dangles above passersby in business attire and a pose that imitates the famous photo by Richard Drew. Like DeLillo, the *Falling Man* — to better or worse effect — attempts to approach the tragedy by jarring us out of a haze fed by television reports and political posturing.

The book opens in the immediate aftermath and introduces us to Keith, a

businessman who worked in World Trade Center when the planes hit. Through his interactions — and often lack of interactions — with his family, fellow lower Manhattanites and ex-poker buddies, we begin to understand the difficulty of resigning oneself with nothing short of catastrophe.

As Keith eventually becomes singularly concerned with distancing himself from the event, we are introduced to another thread in which Hammad, one of the hijackers of Flight 11, becomes singularly obsessed with his own apparent destiny. "We are ready to sink into our little lives," Keith says — this seems to be a mantra throughout the work.

While the usual DeLillo detractors — those who view his characters as empty vessels for the author's own ideas — will likely not be appeased, *Falling Man* continues to make an argument that DeLillo is, sentence for sentence, the best novelist in America. — *Tony Perez*



### Love, Actually

**CALL ME BY YOUR NAME** by André Aciman. FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX, 2007. HARDCOVER, \$23. A NEW YORK TIMES NOTABLE BOOK OF 2007.

Bookslut.com says, "The hardest part of writing a review for André Aciman's powerful first novel, *Call Me By Your Name*, is trying not to turn it into a love let-

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