

OFF THE SHELF BOOKS ABOUT NEW YORK
PETER ADAMSON

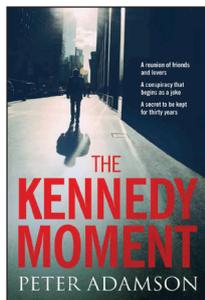
You round the corner into 5th Avenue and see, spread-eagled across the bonnet of a police car, a Santa Claus being frisked for weapons. Where else but New York City? Where else would every block you walk, every turn you take, hold the possibility of fascination, humour, sadness and surprise?

For all New York's mega tourist attractions, the greatest attraction of all is just to walk its streets, watching the world change from block to block; Chinatown to Little Italy, Chelsea to the Bowery, Soho to Greenwich Village, Murray Hill to the Lower East Side. This – the sense that “all the world is here and everything is possible” – is what has always attracted writers to this city of cities. This, plus the liberating power of anonymity – “a place where one can weep on the sidewalk in perfect privacy”, as William Maxwell described it in **So Long, See You Tomorrow** (Vintage Classics).

Francis Spufford shows us the beginnings by setting **Golden Hill** (Faber) in a small town on the southern tip of Manhattan with a population already “wild, suspicious, combustible, and the devil to govern.” Jay McInerney's **Bright Lights Big City** (Vintage Books) shows us what has become of the small town two hundred years later as millions from all over the world crowd its canyons and its youth discovers Bolivian marching powder. Bringing us right up to date, Tom Connolly's **Men Like Air** (Myriad) is a love letter to New York in which the city is not the focus but an ever-present character in the lives of the four lost men at the centre of the novel.

Most of my own political thriller *The Kennedy Moment* is set in the New York of the 1980s, a decade in which I visited the city several times a year. But in revisiting in 2017, I realised that this city of a thousand novels is now changing in a new way – a way that reduces rather than adding to the variety. The never-ending fascination of its contrasts is steadily being levelled by a homogenising wave of wealth. Forget Bob Dylan, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and the Chelsea Hotel. You practically have to be a millionaire to live anywhere at all in today's Manhattan. To run a hand over the texture of an earlier time, read Saul Bellow's **Seize the Day** (Viking Press) and its “gathering of every age, of every genius, possessors of every human secret, antique and future”. That Manhattan is fast disappearing.

The Kennedy Moment by Peter Adamson is out on 22 Feb (Myriad)

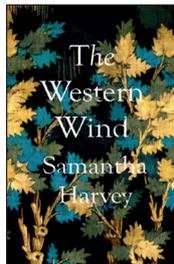


THE WESTERN WIND

Samantha Harvey

(Jonathan Cape, £16.99)

In 1491 a small village in Somerset is shaken by the disappearance of Thomas Newman, the wealthiest man in the village. In the early hours of Shrove Tuesday Newman's body is spotted in the river before it disappears again, and superstition surrounding his death spreads through the community.



Told through the lens of the local priest John Neve, who is privy to the confessions of guilty villagers, Harvey's narrative offers a unique and intimate glimpse into life in a medieval parish cut off from the rest of the world. Most interesting is Harvey's portrayal of the tension between Neve and the rural dean, who attempts to meddle in Neve's role as judge and sheriff. *The Western Wind* is a gripping mystery novel that explores the struggle between religion and superstition while showing the humanity of an unusual protagonist.

SASKIA MURPHY



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