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Reading Group Gold

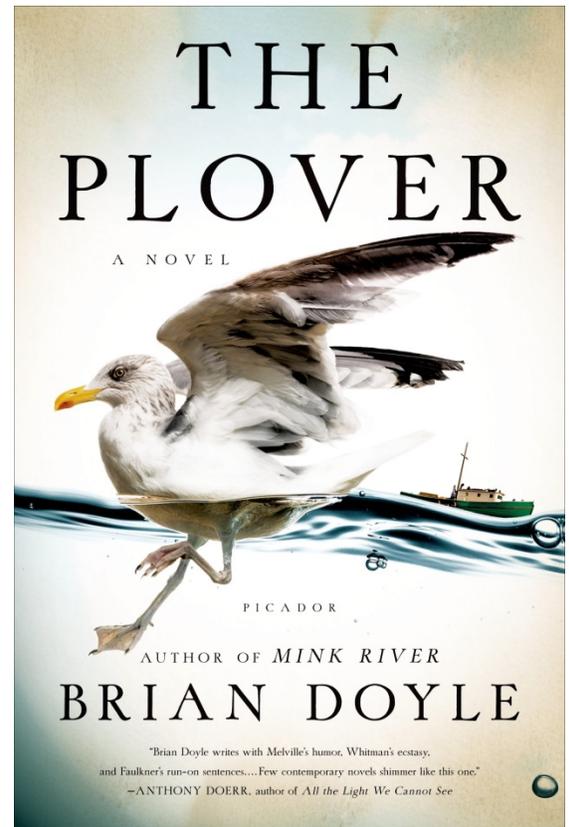
The Plover: A Novel

By Brian Doyle

Declan O Donnell has sailed deep into the vast, wild ocean, having had just finally *enough* of other people and their problems. He will go it alone, he will be his own country, he will be beholden to and beloved of no one.

But the galaxy soon presents him with a string of odd, entertaining, and dangerous passengers, who become companions of every sort and stripe. *The Plover* is the story of their adventures and misadventures in the immense blue country one of their company calls Pacifica. Hounded by a mysterious enemy, reluctantly acquiring one new resident after another, Declan O Donnell's lonely boat is eventually crammed with humor, argument, tension, and a resident herring gull.

Brian Doyle's *The Plover* is a sea novel, a maritime adventure, the story of a cold man melting, a compendium of small miracles, an elegy to Edmund Burke, a watery quest, a battle at sea—and a rapturous, heartfelt celebration of life's surprising paths, planned and unplanned.



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QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Let's be honest: doesn't everyone at some point, or twice a year all your life, want to just get on a boat or a plane and sail away from your existence as currently conceived? Isn't there some Declan in everyone? Discuss at length, expostulating and grudgingly admitting it's so.
2. Readers of Doyle's novels *Mink River* and *The Plover* often use the words 'magical realism' to describe actions and characters; the author himself has often said, however, that he thinks we are all too confident about understanding what we call reality, and that vastly more is going on than we can understand. What are your thoughts on this perspective?
3. Were you startled to discover that Taromauri is a woman?
4. The minister's soaring idea for the nation of Pacifica—is that all at possible, sensible, conceivable?

5. The author casually refers to, but never thoroughly explains, the idea of the thirteen blessed beings on earth at any one time, one of them being the gull. What in heaven's name was he after there?
6. It would be so easy to detest and hate Enrique; did you? Why or why not? Does the author make his actions at all dimly understandable?
7. The maritime flavor of the book, the sailing and storms, the navigation and voyaging—believable, enjoyable, alluring? Or merely the background for the more interesting story of this group of beings?
8. Doyle's prose style has been both lauded and ridiculed for its sentence length and addiction to cadence and rhythm and lists; did you enjoy the unusual style?
9. The author has said that surely much of his unconscious motivation to write *The Plover* are the wonderful books of the sea he read as a boy—Stevenson, Kipling, Conrad, Thor Heyerdahl, C.S. Forester, Jack London. What are the books you read when young that still glow in your memory?

About the Author

BRIAN DOYLE edits *Portland Magazine* at the University of Portland, in Oregon. He is the author of thirteen books: six collections of essays, two nonfiction books, two collections of "proems," the short story collection *Bin Laden's Bald Spot*, the novella *Cat's Foot*, and the novel *Mink River*. He is also the editor of several anthologies, most recently *Ho`olaule`a*, a collection of writing about the Pacific islands. Doyle's books have seven times been finalists for the Oregon Book Award, and his essays have appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*, *Orion*, *The American Scholar*, *The Sun*, *The Georgia Review*, and in newspapers and magazines around the world, including *The New York Times*, *The Times of London*, and *The Age* (in Australia). His essays have also been reprinted in the annual *Best American Essays*, *Best American Science & Nature Writing*, and *Best American Spiritual Writing* anthologies. Among various honors for his work is a Catholic Book Award, three Pushcart Prizes, the John Burroughs Award for Nature Essays, *Foreword Reviews'* Novel of the Year award in 2011, and the Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2008 (previous recipients include Saul Bellow, Kurt Vonnegut, Flannery O'Connor, and Mary Oliver).

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