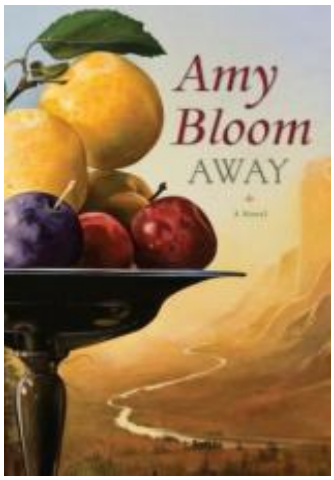
Away

by Amy Bloom



About the Book

Panoramic in scope, **Away** is the epic and intimate story of young Lillian Leyb, a dangerous innocent, an accidental heroine. When her family is destroyed in a Russian pogrom, Lillian comes to America alone, determined to make her way in a new land. When word comes that her daughter, Sophie, might still be alive, Lillian embarks on an odyssey that takes her from the world of the Yiddish theater on New York?s Lower East Side, to Seattle?s Jazz District, and up to Alaska, along the fabled Telegraph Trail toward Siberia. All of the qualities readers love in Amy Bloom?s work --- her humor and wit, her elegant and irreverent language, her unflinching understanding of passion and the human heart --- come together in the embrace of this brilliant novel, which is at once heartbreaking, romantic, and completely unforgettable.

Discussion Guide

1. Dreams are a recurring theme in the novel. What are Lillian?s dreams, both literal and metaphorical? How do these illustrate or inform the larger subject of the American dream?

2. Much of the novel centers around self-invention and reinvention. Can you identify some characters who invent themselves over the course of the novel? Which characters are successful? Which characters are unable to complete the process?

3. According to folktales, ?when you save the golden fish, the turbaned djinn, the talking cat, he is yours forever? (p. 43). Which characters in the novel are saved, in one way or another? Which characters do the saving?

4. ?Not that she is mine. That I am hers,? Lillian says, describing her love for Sophie (p. 79). In many ways, love is the primary engine of the plot. How does love define, inspire, and compel characters in the novel? What are some of the things characters do for love? Do you think that love is portrayed in the novel as a wholly positive force?

5. Contrast Yaakov?s story with Lillian?s. How do they each handle the loss of spouse and children, and how are they changed?

6. Mythology --- both the mythology of individuals and of cultures --- is an important motivator in the novel. Which stories or beliefs drive different characters? How do established myths inform the journeys taken and the challenges faced by Lillian as she crosses the American continent?

7. During Lillian?s journey, there are key points at which she is required to demonstrate her allegiance as either a native or a foreigner, insider or outsider. Can you identify some of these moments? At the end of the novel, how complete is Lillian?s assimilation?

8. Relationships between family members, particularly parents and children, play an important role in the novel. Compare and contrast the relationships between Lillian and Sophie, Reuben and Meyer, Chinky and the Changs. What is distinct about each family? Are there similarities?

9. How are sexuality and physical love portrayed in the novel? Consider Lillian?s relationship with the Bursteins, Chinky?s relationship with Mrs. Mortimer, and Gumdrop?s relationship with Snooky Salt, as well as Lillian?s relationship with John Bishop and Chinky?s relationship with Cleveland Munson.

10. What kind of person is Lillian? What do we learn, throughout the novel, about her passions and prejudices? Do you think Lillian is right when she says that she is lucky (p. 4)?

11. The omniscient third-person narrator of the novel is able to jump forward and backward in time and between parallel narratives. What is the purpose of this technique? Why does the author want us to know what happened to Sophie, even though Lillian herself never learns? Do you think Lillian ever stopped looking for Sophie?

12. The metaphors and descriptive images in this novel are unique. Can you point out a few effective metaphors that helped the novel come alive for you as a reader?

13. What significance do the chapter titles have? What are they derived from, and what do they tell the reader about what happens in the novel? Why did Bloom title her novel **Away**?

Author Bio

Amy Bloom is the *New York Times* bestselling author of novels, short stories, memoir and nonfiction. She has written for magazines such as *The New Yorker*, *New York Magazine*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Vogue*, *Elle*, *The Atlantic*, *Slate* and *Salon*. Her work has been translated into 17 languages. BLUNT INSTRUMENT is her first crime novel.

Amy resides in Connecticut and recently retired as Wesleyan University?s Shapiro-Silverberg Professor of Creative Writing, while continuing to work as a psychotherapist and a novelist.

Critical Praise

"Outstanding?A sweeping saga of endurance and rebirth. Encompassing prison, prostitution and poetry, Yiddish humor and Yukon settings, Bloom?s tale offers linguistic twists, startling imagery, sharp wit and a compelling vision of the past. Bloom has created an extraordinary range of characters, settings and emotions. Absolutely stunning."

Away

by Amy Bloom

Publication Date: August 21, 2007
Genres: Fiction
Hardcover: 256 pages
Publisher: Random House
ISBN-10: 1400063566
ISBN-13: 9781400063567