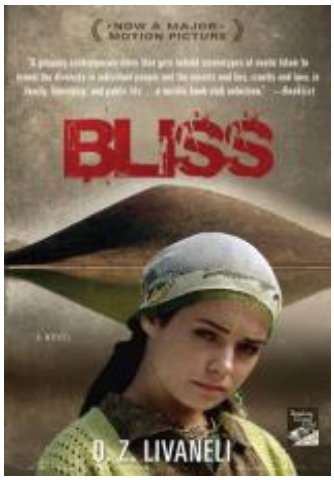
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

Bliss: A Novel

by O. Z. Livaneli



About the Book

An international bestseller, **Bliss** embodies the sweep and contradictions of modern Turkish society and the place of women in it.

Bliss is the story of Meryem, a young village girl who is raped by her uncle. An outcast for shaming her family, she is locked in the cellar and expected to kill herself. Whe she refuses to do her duty, her cousin and childhood playmate Cemal is charged with carrying out the honor killing, to "take her to Istanbul? as the village euphemism goes. By chance, their paths cross with Irfan, an older and sophisticated professor from Istanbul who has abandoned his elite existence. Together they embark on a journey that sets them free.

Beautifully wrought and simply told, **Bliss** brings attention to the difficult situation of women in Turkey, and captures universal truths forged in the space between people from opposite ends of a complicated culture.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the reasons why the author may have chosen the title **Bliss** for his novel. What is its significance?

2. Did you have any ideas or opinions on Turkey before reading the novel? Take a moment to talk about your collective knowledge of Turkish history and culture before and after reading **Bliss**.

3. Who is your favorite character in **Bliss** and why? Are there those you like who are, in fact, ?unlikable?? Take a moment to talk about the cast of characters??and range of personality types??in the novel.

4. Discuss the two distinct settings of the novel??the small rural village and the larger-than-life city. What does each locale mean to each of the main characters?

5. In what ways do Meryem and Cemal?s encounters with different people on the train shed light on the problems of identity that characterize contemporary Turkey? Also, in what ways is sailing the Aegean Sea symbolic for them both?

6. What are the themes of tradition and modernity, religion vs. secularity, and male domination and female empowerment that resonate throughout **Bliss**?

7. Each of the main protagonists in **Bliss** experiences tragedy on a profound, indeed existential level. How would you describe each character?s personal transformation? What unites them in their struggle to overcome their demons?

8. How do you interpret Irfan?s final resolution at the end of the novel about what kind of a life he?s to lead? And what about Meryems?

9. How would you describe Irfan?s relation to Hidayet, a character who never appears in the novel but who?s always in Irfan?s thoughts?

10. One of the chapters in the novel is titled ?At Night Don Quixote, Sancho Panza in the Morning.? Were there times in your life when you felt the same? Please discuss.

11. At one point in the novel Irfan likens himself and all Turkish intellectuals to ?trapeze flyers.? Why?

12. Why is Irfan?s relationship with his parents marked with deep feelings of guilt?

13. What are the differences between Irfan?s and Cemal?s attitudes about national identity and belonging?

14. Discuss the ambassador?s comment that there are three phases in the life of an individual: camel phase, lion phase, and childhood phase.

15. There are numerous references to mythical figures and stories in the novel. Why do you think the idea of myth has such an important place in **Bliss**?

Author Bio

O. Z. Livaneli, one of Turkey?s most prominent authors, is also an accomplished composer, and previously served as an elected member of the Turkish Parliament.

Critical Praise

"A gripping contemporary story that gets behind stereotypes of exotic Islam to reveal the diversity in individual people and the secrets and lies, cruelty and love, in family, friendship, and public life. This will make a terrific bookclub selection when it reaches paperback."

Bliss: A Novel

by O. Z. Livaneli

Publication Date: September 4, 2007
Paperback: 304 pages
Publisher: St. Martin's Griffin
ISBN-10: 0312360541
ISBN-13: 9780312360542