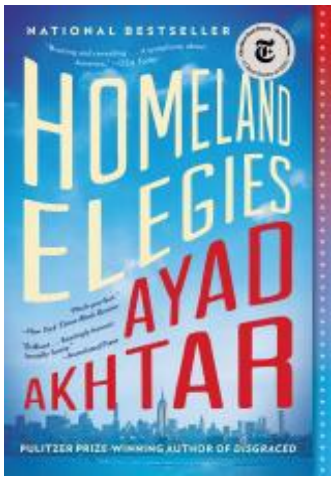
Homeland Elegies

by Ayad Akhtar



About the Book

From the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of DISGRACED and AMERICAN DERVISH: an immigrant father and his son search for belonging --- in post-Trump America, and with each other.

A deeply personal work about identity and belonging in a nation coming apart at the seams, HOMELAND ELEGIES blends fact and fiction to tell an epic story of longing and dispossession in the world that 9/11 made. Part family drama, part social essay, part picaresque novel, at its heart it is the story of a father, a son and the country they both call home.

Ayad Akhtar forges a new narrative voice to capture a country in which debt has ruined countless lives and the gods of finance rule, where immigrants live in fear, and where the nation?s unhealed wounds wreak havoc around the world. Akhtar attempts to make sense of it all through the lens of a story about one family, from a heartland town in America to palatial suites in Central Europe to guerrilla lookouts in the mountains of Afghanistan, and spares no one --- least of all himself --- in the process.

Discussion Guide

1. The narrator of HOMELAND ELEGIES is Ayad Akhtar, a playwright who shares the same name as the author. How did this affect your experience of reading the novel?

2. How does Akhtar?s choice of part titles (?Overture,? ?Coda,? etc.) bring additional meaning to the story? Are you familiar with these terms as they relate to musical works?

3. In the Overture, the narrator?s professor describes America as ?a place still defined by its plunder, where enrichment was paramount and civil order always an afterthought.? Do you agree with this criticism? When the characters in the novel are focused on becoming rich, does this striving make them happy?

4. How would you describe the difference between Ayad?s parents, in terms of their views on being in America? Is the narrator?s own view a synthesis of these ideas? Or its own thing?

5. Many Americans can easily recall where they were when they first learned of the events of September 11, 2001. Can you? Does that day stand out to you in your memory as one marking the end of one era and the beginning of another?

6. Ayad tells a story about wearing a cross necklace in New York post-9/11 as an attempt to assimilate. Asha has a strong reaction to this story. What was your own reaction?

7. The narrator wonders if what his father sees in President Trump is ?a vision of himself impossibly enhanced, improbably enlarged, released from the pull of debt or truth or history.? Do you think this assessment accurately describes why so many Americans turned to the unlikely candidate in 2016?

8. Akhtar opens and closes the novel in the same setting: the college campus. Why do you think he did this?

9. In the novel, Ayad?s father returns to Pakistan. Ayad says the words, ?America is my home.? An elegy is a song or poem for the dead. Which ?homelands? in the novel are the characters mourning?

Author Bio

Ayad Akhtar is a novelist and playwright. His work has been published and performed in over two dozen languages. He is the winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, the Edith Wharton Citation of Merit for Fiction, and an award in literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, among other honors. Akhtar is the author of the novels AMERICAN DERVISH, a *Kirkus Reviews* Best Book of the Year; HOMELAND ELEGIES, named one of 10 Best Books of 2020 by *The New York Times*; and THE RADIANCE. He has also authored the plays *McNeal*, *Junk*, *Disgraced*, *The Who & The What*, and *The Invisible Hand*. Akhtar was named the New York State Author in 2021.

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