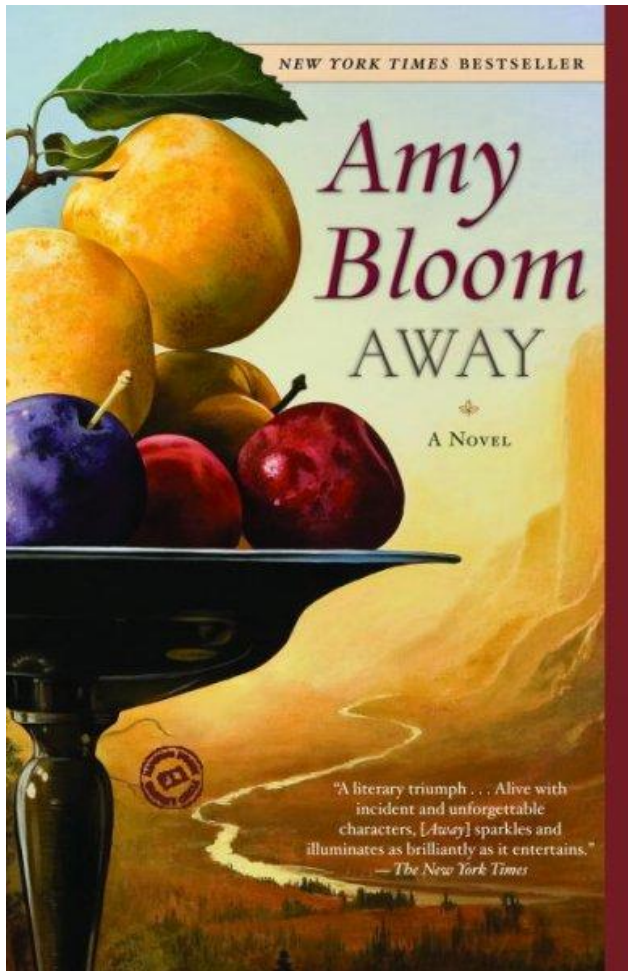


About the book...



Away is both an 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.

About the author... (<http://www.amybloom.com>)



A psychotherapist for more than 20 years, Bloom is the author of two novels, two collections of short stories, and a nominee for both the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award. Her stories have appeared in *Best American Short Stories*, *Prize Stories: The O. Henry Awards*, and numerous anthologies here and abroad. She has written for the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times Magazine*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Vogue*, *Slate*, and *Salon*, among many other publications, and has won a National Magazine Award. Her first book of nonfiction, *Normal: Transsexual CEOs, Crossdressing Cops, and Hermaphrodites with Attitude*, is an exploration of the varieties of gender. A native New Yorker, she now lives in Connecticut and teaches at Yale University. Recently, she closed her therapy practice and cut back her teaching to devote more time to her novels and screenplays.

REVIEWS

Publishers Weekly:/*Starred Review*/

Life is no party for Lillian Leyb, the 22-year-old Jewish immigrant protagonist of Bloom's outstanding fifth novel: her husband and parents were killed in a Russian pogrom, and the same violent episode separated her from her three-year-old daughter, Sophie. Arriving in New York in 1924, Lillian dreams of Sophie, and after five weeks in America, barely speaking English, she outmaneuvers a line of applicants for a seamstress job at the Goldfaden Yiddish Theatre, where she becomes the mistress of both handsome lead actor Meyer Burstein and his very connected father, Reuben. Her only friend in New York, tailor/actor/playwright Yaakov Shimmelman, gives her a thesaurus and coaches her on American culture. In a last, loving, gesture, Yaakov secures Lillian passage out of New York to begin her quest to find Sophie. The journey—through Chicago by train, into Seattle's African-American underworld and across the Alaskan wilderness—elevates Bloom's novel from familiar immigrant chronicle to 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.

Booklist

With the same mesmerizing grace she brings to her award-winning short stories, Bloom's new novel sweeps the reader along from page one. The story begins in Russia in the 1920s. Lillian Leyb survives the massacre of her family and runs away to New York City to live with a cousin. Ever practical, she allows herself to become the mistress of a star of the Jewish theater, and although she's not happy, life is not so bad. However, when she finds out that her daughter Sophie may still be alive in Siberia, she leaves everything she has and begins the arduous journey home. She rides trains hiding in broom closets and servicing conductors. She climbs on boats and walks the Yukon trail headed for the Bering Strait and probably death. But she has to try. Full of pathos, humor, and often heartbreaking beauty, this novel tells the story of immigrant life and the caring of others without being maudlin or didactic. All characters are brilliantly and compellingly drawn.

New York Times

AWAY is a modest name for a book as gloriously transporting as Amy Bloom's new novel. Alive with incident and unforgettable characters, it sparkles and illuminates as brilliantly as it entertains... clumsy moments are far outnumbered by the elegant and surprising moves of Bloom's plot. Not least of these is her demonstration of how plausibly love is found in unexpected corners, for different reasons — and sometimes for no reason at all. AWAY is a literary triumph, a

book-club must and a popular novel destined for wide readership. It is accessible to the point of pure enthrallment without compromising its eloquence or thematic strength. Yet it is also a classic page-turner, one that delivers a relentlessly good read. With every passing mile, "Away" gains traction and steam.

Discussion questions (http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides_A/away1.asp)

- 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**?

Readalike

Non Fiction

Destination America: the people and cultures that created a nation, David Grubin, producer [DVD], (2005)

A Bintel brief: sixty years of letters from the lower East Side to the Jewish Daily Forward, Isaac Metzker, compiler and editor (1990)

The woman who walked to Russia: a writer's search for a lost legend, by Cassandra Pybus (2002)

Fiction

The Law of Dreams by Peter Behrens (2006)

Baldwin Street by Alvin Rakoff (2007)

Call it sleep: a novel by Henry Roth (1934)

American Jewish fiction: a century of stories, Gerald Shapiro, editor, (1998)