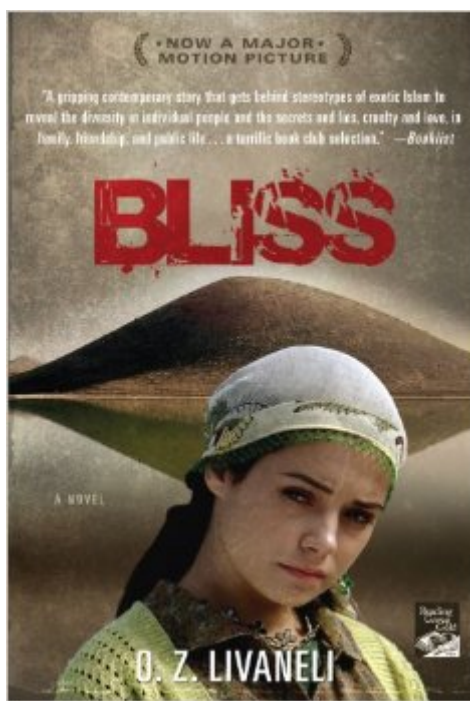


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Bliss: A Novel



Synopsis

Fifteen-year-old Meryem lives in a rural village in Eastern Anatolia, Turkey. Her simple, conventional way of life changes dramatically after her uncle, a sheikh in a dervish order, rapes her and condemns her to death for shaming the family. Asked to carry out the "honor killing" is his son Cemal, a commando in the Turkish army. So begins a long, mystifying voyage for Meryem as her shell-shocked cousin ushers her to the shining metropolis of Istanbul where another troubled soul, the Harvard-educated professor Irfan, embarks on his own journey of transformation—one that catapults him into the heart of Meryem and Cemal's conflict. The crossed-paths and interwoven destinies of these three characters makes for an affecting, by turns brutal and life-affirming portrayal of traditional and modern-day Turkey that no reader will soon forget. "Livaneli is an essential force in Turkey's musical, cultural, and political scene."--Orhan Pamuk, Nobel Prize Winner and author of *Snow* "Bliss is eye-opening and deeply moving."--Kirkus Reviews (starred) "Compelling [for] American readers & hard to put down."--The Cleveland Plain Dealer "With lush scenes of Turkish life and nuanced depictions of the [characters'] inner lives. . . a convergence of lost, likable souls."--Entertainment Weekly 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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Bliss by O.Z. Livaneli is a novel about culture, class, and destiny. The main characters, Meryem, Cemal, and Irfan are all struggling with their own destiny when magically their paths intersect. Cemal, is the soldier, the village hero, who has been suffering and fighting in the Turkish mountains.

When he finally cracks under the pressure of warfare, it is obvious that he is a suffering soul within his shell of silence. Meryem is a young girl who is raped by Cemal's father, the village Sheikh who afterwards banishes Meryem to death. The village of Lake Van is one that is so far behind the times regarding exploitation of women, and actually, not necessarily behind in the time, more, backwards as far as how women are treated that it is shocking to know that some of this horrible treatment still goes on today. The way that the women treat each other, with shame and punishment for being women, seems awkward and is almost embarrassing to read about. That anyone would want Meryem to suffer for what has happened to her is just so wrong. I found myself getting emotionally involved with the story and had to extract myself when I put the book down. Its that real and it gets to you. As Meryem travels, there are people who reach out to her and this is an accurate translation of a culture in Turkey that is at odds with itself; actually, of the many cultures that are at odds with each other. Once Meryem travels outside of Lake Van and see's there are women who don't have to have their heads covered and who wear shorts and are allowed to be beautiful, well, her eyes are opened. Meryem's transformation is a beautiful thing to watch, especially when Meryem comes full circle with her destiny. Have some Kleenex handy.

This novel was extremely moving in its portrayal of all 3 main characters, and the further I read, the more it occurred to me that this book is relevant to people from ALL societies, not just Islamic ones. The extreme sexism portrayed, especially in regard to rural Turkish society, does not seem all that shocking when one thinks about how women and girls are treated everywhere in the world . . . our main character, Meryem, feels shame and anguish over how she's been treated (and she's bought into a lot of it, too; she's come to believe that as a female she is "evil"). But when we think about the experiences of teenage girls everywhere (and, yes, including here in the States!!!!) aren't their experiences rife with sexual objectification (and abuse), shame, etc.? Aren't they being told everyday that they are defined only by their bodies? The objectivation of one young girl in a Turkish village is really no different from the objectivation of others worldwide (true, the kind of extreme physical violence - and the reality of so-called "honor" killings - are not typical worldwide, but they ARE just other examples of sexism, albeit much more brutal). The character of Irfan, the professor, interested me as an example of someone fed up with a materialistic (and un-REAL) lifestyle, and in his case, that experience also is not strictly a Turkish one. His decision at the end of the novel to give up his materialistic (and phony) lifestyle, and also to give up on his vague, far-fetched dream of "freedom" is a decision which makes him one of the most outstandingly human characters I've met in any novel, anywhere. Cemal interested me less than the other 2, since I

cannot really relate to him.

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