GLORIOUS BOY

READING GROUP GUIDE

"The most memorable and original novel I've read in ages. Aimee Liu… evokes every side in a multi-cultural conversation with sympathy and rare understanding."

 **– Pico Iyer**

**ABOUT THE BOOK**

A tale of family devotion, war, and survival set in India's remote Andaman Islands before and during WWII, *Glorious Boy* revolves around a mysteriously mute 4-year-old who vanishes on the eve of Japanese Occupation. Little Ty's parents, Shep and Claire Durant, will go to any lengths to rescue him, but neither is prepared for the brutal and soul-changing odyssey that awaits them.

**CRITICAL PRAISE FOR *GLORIOUS BOY***

One of *Good Housekeeping’s* [20 Best Books of 2020 to Add to Your Reading List ASAP](https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/entertainment/g30456677/best-books-of-2020/?slide=19)

One of Brit+Co’s [12 Books That Will Take You on a Literary Vacation](https://www.brit.co/best-summer-reads/)

One of *Travel & Leisure’s* [20 New Books to Gift This Mother's Day](https://www.travelandleisure.com/culture-design/books/mothers-day-book-gifts)

One of *Parade’s* 30 [Best Beach Reads of 2020](PARADE%20-%20https%3A/parade.com/1037584/ashley_johnson/best-beach-reads-2020/)

”A riveting amalgam of history, family epic, anticolonial/antiwar treatise, cultural crossroads, and more, this latest from best-selling author Liu is a fascinating, irresistible marvel.” **—**[***Library Journal,* starred review**](https://www.libraryjournal.com/?reviewDetail=glorious-boy)

”This fascinating novel examines the many dimensions of war, from the tragedy of loss to the unexpected relationships formed during conflict. The Andamans are a lush and unusual setting, a sacred home to all kinds of cultures and people, and Liu’s prose is masterful. A good choice for book groups and for readers who are unafraid to be swept away.” **—**[***Booklist,* starred review**](https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.booklistonline.com%2FGlorious-Boy%2Fpid%3D9729681&data=02%7C01%7C%7C9662c526e4104428981308d7ed3a4e38%7C84df9e7fe9f640afb435aaaaaaaaaaaa%7C1%7C0%7C637238706976030429&sdata=DAji54RgOtreTrtCxmaUdR5XaK2WaI2uScNhcyfOBZI%3D&reserved=0)

“With nuanced descriptions of diverse characters, and a wrenching portrait of the well-meaning Durants’ limited power, Liu upends the clichés of the white savior narrative…[a] sharp take on a lesser-known part of WWII history.” **—**[***Publishers Weekly***](https://www.publishersweekly.com/978-1-59709-889-2)

“In *Glorious Boy*, Liu’s superb writing brings alive the strange days at the end of empire, from the torpid heat of the Andamanese jungles, to the bustle of metropolitan Calcutta. She carries the reader in an epic drama of a family caught up in events beyond their control all the way through to the nail-biting ending.” — [**Authorlink**](https://authorlink.com/bookreview/glorious-boy-by-aimee-liu-2020/)

“Reminiscent of the tone and atmosphere of Somerset Maugham and George Orwell’s Asia-set novels, *Glorious Boy* is a Second World War story of adventure and loss, uniquely set in the Andaman Islands, one of India’s farthest flung territories” – [***Asian Review of Books***](https://asianreviewofbooks.com/content/glorious-boy-by-aimee-liu/)

“An absolutely gorgeous historical novel about ambition, culture clash, love, atonement, and one silent boy, set against the backdrop of a tribe in the Andamans struggling with British rule. So blisteringly alive, you feel the swampy heat and the bugs; so emotionally true, it grips at every page. Just magnificent and not to be missed.”

—**Caroline Leavitt,** author of *Pictures of You* and *Cruel Beautiful World*

“In *Glorious Boy*, Aimee Liu tears a forgotten footnote from the history books and brings it to life in an epic tale of a family caught in a clash of cultures and loyalties during World War II….Liu’s heartbreaking new novel of love, betrayal, and sacrifice is also a testament to the lengths we will go for the ones we love.”

**—Rahna Reiko Rizzuto,** author of *Shadow Child* and *Hiroshima in the Morning*

“No doubt Aimee Liu’s ambitious novel, *Glorious Boy*, will be praised, deservedly, as historical fiction, an adventure novel, even a ripping yarn, but the heart of this book is what it means to be a mother.  Liu's sympathetic and complicated protagonist, Claire Durant, finds herself challenged when it comes to connecting with her atypical son, and the book asks us all to consider whose responsibility it is to be better with and to other human beings, especially those with whom we’re most intimate.  How do we learn what isn’t instinct?  How do we protect ourselves and others from our own best intentions?  With a generous and exacting eye, Liu explores these questions and more, and we, lucky readers, get to go along on the ride.

**—Karen Shepard,** author of *Kiss Me Someone*

**DISCUSSION GUIDE**

1. One of the epigraphs quotes the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore: “Man has in him the silence of the sea, the noise of the earth and the music of the air.” What is the significance of silence in this story, both as a metaphor and as an element in the plot?
2. As Claire contemplates evacuation in the opening of the novel, she muses: “She’d come to the Andamans mistaking youthful ambition as a virtue, and it took her a long time to realize that ambition is worthless unless it’s rooted in human understanding.” What are Claire’s regrets in this moment? How does this thought relate to the larger themes of colonization, war, and independence that are woven through the story?
3. While establishing herself on Ross Island, Claire observes, “Prejudice in British India…was actively transferable and widely embraced.” How does this transfer of prejudice shape Naila’s identity and affect her relationship with Leyo?
4. When Claire spies Naila feeding baby Ty a bottle of water, she likens Ty’s response to “a gesture of devotion.” Why is this moment significant? What are the dueling impulses that complicate Claire’s relationship with Naila, and with Ty?
5. On their first field trip into the forest, Shep offers to operate on the club foot of little Jodo. Why does Jodo’s mother refuse? Why does Shep’s offer remain a source of friction and distrust among the Biya later in the story?
6. “The nerve” is a phrase that Claire recalls her father whispering once as they gazed at a Gauguin painting of Polynesia. Why did he utter this phrase with envy? Why is this memory important to Claire as the story unfolds?
7. We meet two indigenous Andamanese tribes – the Biya and the Jarawa -- in this book. How does Claire’s view of these native islanders change as she interacts with them? How does her evolution as an anthropologist alter the fate of her son?
8. The spectres of Claire’s dead brother and Shep’s unyielding father loom over the Durants as they struggle to balance their respective passions while raising Ty. How do their childhood conflicts influence their decisions as parents?
9. Naila’s teacher Sen instills the lesson in her: “Master the map and you master the world.” How does Leyo’s sense of the world ultimately alter Naila’s understanding of “map mastery”?
10. Shep, Claire, and Naila each communicate differently with Ty. How do these differences reflect their own personalities and emotional needs?
11. As young parents in an era before modern insights into early childhood development, Claire and Shep are mystified and frustrated by Ty’s delayed speech. How does this frustration impact their marriage? How might you respond if Ty were your child today?
12. Why don’t Shep and Claire leave the Andamans with Ty after the earthquake and tsunami force them off Ross Island?
13. As a boy in Shanghai, Shep memorized many lines from Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*, a novel that seems to haunt him. Why does this story from his childhood have such a strong hold on him?
14. What makes Shep’s sister Vivian a vital character in this story?
15. How does Major Baird surprise Shep? What does Shep learn from him?
16. Why do many of Port Blair’s “local born” residents welcome the prospect of the Japanese occupation?
17. Why is Porubi both a pivotal and largely unnoticed character? In what ways does he embody the history of colonized indigenous people?
18. Why does Shep burn the overland map of his escape route?
19. Claire both needs and despises Denis Ward. Why does she ultimately conclude that he’s more “human” than she acknowledged? Do you agree?
20. Why does the narration switch to first person in the Epilogue? What does that tell us about the perspective that shapes this novel?
21. The theme of atonement runs through this story. What are the “original sins” that the primary characters feel compelled to atone for?

**AUTHOR BIO**

**Aimee Liu** is the best-selling author of the novels ***Flash House***; ***Cloud Mountain***; and ***Face*** and thememoirs ***Gaining: The Truth About Life After Eating Disorders*** and ***Solitaire***. Her books have been translated into more than a dozen languages*.* She’s received a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers award, a Bosque Fiction award, and special mention by the Pushcart Prize. A past president of the national literary organization PEN Center USA, she holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Bennington College and teaches in Goddard College’s MFA in Creative Writing Program at Port Townsend, WA. She lives with her husband in Los Angeles.

More at [www.aimeeliu.net](https://redhenpress.org/products/www.aimeeliu.net)

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by Aimee Liu

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