



The Submission by Amy Waldman

About the author:

The Submission, Amy Waldman's first novel, was published in 2011. It won the Janet Heidinger Kafka Prize and an American Book Award and was named a finalist for the Hemingway Foundation/PEN First Fiction Award. It was a *New York Times* Notable Book for 2011, one of National Public Radio's Ten Best Novels, *Esquire's* Book of the Year, *Entertainment Weekly's* #1 Novel for the Year, a *Washington Post* Notable Fiction Book, and one of Amazon's Top 100 Books and top ten debut fiction. It was a finalist for the Guardian (UK) First Book Award and was long listed for the Orange Prize. It has been or will be published in Brazil, Italy, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, India, Indonesia, South Africa, Canada, Japan, Portugal, Sweden, Norway, and the Netherlands.

Amy's fiction also has appeared in the *Atlantic*, the *Boston Review* and the *Financial Times*, and was anthologized in *The Best American Non-Required Reading 2010*.

Amy was a reporter for *The New York Times* for eight years, including three as co-chief of the New Delhi bureau. She was also a national correspondent for the *Atlantic*.

She graduated from Yale University and has been a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study and at the American Academy in Berlin. She lives with her family in Brooklyn.

Source: Author's website (<http://www.thesubmissionnovel.com/>)



About this book:

A jury gathers in Manhattan to select a memorial for the victims of a devastating terrorist attack. Their fraught deliberations complete, the jurors open the envelope containing the anonymous winner's name—and discover he is an American Muslim. Instantly they are cast into roiling debate about the claims of grief, the ambiguities of art, and the meaning of Islam. Their conflicted response is only a preamble to the country's.

The memorial's designer is an enigmatic, ambitious architect named Mohammad "Mo" Khan. His fiercest defender on the jury is its sole widow, the self-possessed and mediagenic Claire Burwell. But when the news of his selection leaks to the press, she finds herself under pressure from outraged family members and in collision with hungry journalists, wary activists, opportunistic politicians, fellow jurors, and Khan himself—as unknowable as he is gifted. In the fight for both advantage and their ideals, all will bring the emotional weight of their own histories to bear on the urgent question of how to remember, and understand, a national tragedy.

In this deeply humane novel, the breadth of Amy Waldman's cast of characters is matched by her startling ability to conjure their perspectives. A striking portrait of a fractured city striving to make itself whole, *The Submission* is a piercing and resonant novel by an important new talent.

Source: Author's website (<http://www.thesubmissionnovel.com/>)

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think the purpose and message of a national memorial should be? Would you have voted for the Void or the Garden?



2. Reread the epigraph. What do its words suggest about the relationship between nature and human nature?
3. As Claire tries to explain the tragedy to William (and, in a way, to Penelope), what does she discover about her own beliefs and feelings?
4. Mo is under considerable pressure to give the “right” reasons when asked why he entered the competition, but he defies simplistic answers. What does his design communicate on its own? For any creative work—including novels—should the author’s biography matter to us? Do you think he was obligated to explain himself and his design? Why or why not?
5. Chapter 16 begins with a depiction of Mo’s hunger and thirst during Ramadan. We’re told, “The truth was he didn’t know why he was doing it.” How does it affect him, a secular skeptic, to join Muslims worldwide in observing the fast?
6. How did your reactions shift as Sean’s story unfolded, especially as he struggled with conflicting feelings after pulling Zahira’s scarf? Is bigotry excusable if it’s coming from someone whose loved one was the victim of a horrific crime? What are the limits of a survivor’s rights?
7. Asma’s memories of Inam are her private inheritance, and she must rely on translators to convey her messages in English. Did anyone in the novel have a truly accurate understanding of her suffering? How was her mourning experience different from Claire’s and Sean’s? What common emotions do all of the novel’s survivors share?
8. Many of the characters desperately want someone to blame for their loss. The final line of chapter 22, referring to Alyssa, reads, “She is responsible.” Ultimately, who is responsible for the tragedies depicted in the novel?
9. What would you have done in Paul Rubin’s situation? Was it courageous or insensitive of him to permit Mo’s submission to move forward?



10. A journalist, Amy Waldman had special insight into Alyssa’s world. What does the novel tell us about the role of the media (exploited by all parties involved) and the impact of a free press in the information age?
11. How does Claire’s sense of self change when Jack reappears in her life? Did Cal, despite his wealth, cost her an important part of her identity?
12. Discuss the novel’s title. To what (and to whom) must the characters submit? Who are the novel’s most and least submissive characters?
13. An uproar erupted in 2010 when Park51, a community center housing a mosque, was proposed for construction two blocks from Ground Zero. What does this conflict—and the one described in *The Submission*—suggest about how 9/11 might have transformed American society? (Note: Amy Waldman began writing *The Submission* several years before Park51 was announced.)
14. What makes fiction a powerful way to explore events that shaped our lives? What can a novel achieve that journalism and testimonials can’t?
15. In the final “dialogue” between Claire and Mo, orchestrated by Molly and William, is anything resolved? What does the closing image of a cairn show us about the heart of the novel, and the role of future generations in resolving history?

Source: Author’s website (<http://www.thesubmissionnovel.com/>)

Other formats available at Halifax Public Libraries:

- eBook