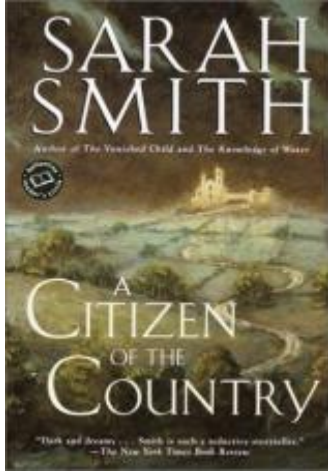


A Citizen of the Country

by Sarah Smith



About the Book

An eccentric count who runs a famous Paris horror theatre...A beautiful young heiress and aspiring leading lady who may be involved in the dark arts...An enigmatic gentleman whose shadowed past will at last be exposed...Their fates and hidden agendas intertwine in Sarah Smith's compelling novel of an ancient house, dark arts, murder, love gone wrong, secrets, betrayals, and the shadow of the guillotine...

Discussion Guide

1. At the beginning of this novel, Alexander announces his distrust of Perdita, his blind and "risky" wife. Do you think he truly learns to trust and accept her? Why or why not?
2. Perdita has sacrificed a great deal in the name of her family. Does Alexander truly appreciate the extent of her sacrifices? Can Perdita reconcile herself to these sacrifices and move forward?
3. Will Perdita ever think of Paris as home?
4. Alexander and Andre are both struggling to find their home in the world. How do you define home?
5. This novel opens with a quote from Rainer Maria Rilke: "We are born, so to speak, provisionally, it doesn't matter where. It is only gradually that we compose within ourselves our true place of origin." Do you agree? Or do you think we are prisoners of our past?
6. Alexander and Gilbert are both haunted by William Knight. Do you think they finally manage to exorcise his ghost?
7. Alexander tells Perdita, "I am sorry. I am more than you bargained for." Have you ever felt this way? How did you

deal with it?

8. After overhearing Perdita tell their son his secrets, Alexander vows to teach his son "that one can be wrong without being vile and right without being God." What has Alexander finally learned?

9. The families in this novel have been fractured and reconstituted in many different ways--death, adoption, rediscovery. How do you de-fine family?

10. Do you think Toby will have the happy family that his parents and uncle want so desperately for him?

11. Andre is very cruel to a wife who truly loves him. What do you think of Andre's treatment of Sabine? Does she deserve it?

12. What do you make of Sabine? Is she a monster or a spoiled child or a gifted witch?

13. Why did Andre's mother make that fateful final decision?

14. Will Andre be able to carry on with his role as Necrosar at the Grand Necropolitan? Or has the reckoning with his past robbed him of the need and ability to be Necrosar?

15. How do you define a citizen of a country? Is it based purely on legal documentation?

16. Cyron has become a national hero and symbol, but at what cost?

17. What do you think Cyron's intentions were when Alexander confronted him in his office? Do you think Cyron would have shot Alexander if Gilbert had not intervened?

18. Many characters in this novel are forced to choose between their personal lives and their duty to their nation. Under what circumstances does duty to country supercede duty to family and vice versa?

19. Did you figure out the secret of Montfort?

20. One reviewer has commented, "Smith defines even her minor characters clearly and crisply." Which of the minor characters was most memorable for you?

21. When this novel ends, the outbreak of World War I is only a few years away. What do you imagine will be the fate of these characters in the midst of this devastating war?

22. This novel is the concluding volume in a trilogy. Have you read the other novels? How does this one compare? If not, do you plan to read the other volumes?

23. Overall, how does your group rate this novel? How does it compare with other works your book group has read?

24. What is your group reading next? How do you decide what books to read?

Author Bio

Sarah Smith grew up in Boston, Massachusetts, and has lived in Japan, London, and Paris. She is a graduate of Radcliffe College and Harvard Graduate School, where she got her Ph.D. in English. A former manager at a computer firm, Smith--who was also a Fulbright Fellow at the Slade Film School, University of London--has taught film and eighteenth-century literature at Tufts University, Boston University, and Northeastern University.

Smith's critically acclaimed first novel, **The Vanished Child**, was selected by the *New York Times* as one of the nine best mysteries of 1992 and has appeared on local, regional, and national bestseller lists. It has become an all-time bestseller at one of San Francisco's leading bookstores, outselling **The Bridges of Madison County** and **The Firm**. Critical praise continues for Smith's latest novel, **The Knowledge of Water**, a *New York Times* Notable Book. It is the second book in a proposed trilogy and follows the fortunes of three central characters from **The Vanished Child** when they find themselves in Paris on the eve of the worst flood the city has ever experienced. The *Boston Sunday Herald* said, "Smith--who has resided in Paris--uses her firsthand knowledge and convincing research to depict the city during its 1910 flood. Dark and engrossing, this production is magnifique."

Smith, a hypertext and science fiction author whose work has appeared in several anthologies, including Best New Horror, has served as a judge for the Philip K. Dick Award. She is also on the Regional Board of Directors of the Mystery Writers of America and Sisters in Crime, and on the board of the Archives of Detective Fiction.

Sarah Smith lives in Brookline, Massachusetts, with her husband, two children, their twenty-two pound cat, Vicious, and Gracie, the assistant cat!

Critical Praise

"An atmospheric tale full of detail and unexpected twists . . . [that] unfolds with careful deliberation. It is rich in characters, relationships, and subplots."

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