



Montenegro

By Starling Lawrence
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Introduction

In this epic, richly imagined novel, a young English traveler named Auberon Harwell enters the valley of Montenegro. It's 1908, and World War I is a dark prophecy on the horizon. Under the cover of studying native flowers, Harwell explores the region for a powerful English peer, Lord Polgrove, who hopes to assess the possible advantages and threats in the region.

Harwell comes to live with the Pekočevićs, whose stoic paterfamilias, Danilo, is revered as a local hero for his freedom-fighting efforts. Harwell falls in love with Sofia, Danilo's wife, and reluctantly agrees to help secure her only son's passage to America. But when the son, Toma, becomes entangled in a relationship with a young girl from a neighboring Muslim family, Harwell gets drawn into personal conflicts that erupt with disastrous political consequences. Bound by obligations of honor and duty, Harwell is eventually forced from a position of careful neutrality into a confrontation that will forever

change the world he thought he knew.

Questions for Discussion

1. When Draško tells Harwell: "[T]his is a small country, so the enemy can never be far away," what exactly does he mean? In a country like Montenegro, how do citizens define the enemy?
2. What does Harwell's correspondence with Lord Polgrove reveal about the nature of his mission and the respective ambitions and the characters of the two men?
3. After Harwell comes to live with Danilo, Sofia, and Toma Pekočević, how and why do his impressions of the region and its inhabitants change?
4. How does Sofia's vision of America shape her hopes for her son, Toma, and how does her plan for him dictate the choices and sacrifices she must make with respect to her own life?
5. How do Harwell's feelings for Sofia Pekočević compare with his feelings for Lydia Wadham, and how is each of these relationships complicated by Harwell's memories of his encounter with the prostitute, Ariana?
6. What role do Harwell's flower-gathering expeditions play in *Montenegro*?
7. What does Toma's illicit relationship with Esad Bey's daughter, Aliye, and its aftermath reveal about ethnic tensions in Montenegro?
8. How does the Pekočevićs' initial encounter with Captain Schellendorf at the feast in Rožaj set in motion the crisis that follows in the wake of Toma's relationship with Aliye?
9. How does the earthquake in Montenegro affect the Pekočević family, and what does it enable Toma and Harwell to accomplish?
10. What explains Harwell's decision to turn back and seek out Lydia at the end of *Montenegro*, and to what extent was that choice a surprise to you?

About the Author

Starling Lawrence is the author of a novel, *The Lightning Keeper*, and a collection of stories, *Legacies*. He is the editor-in-chief and vice chairman of W. W. Norton. He lives in New York City and northwestern Connecticut.