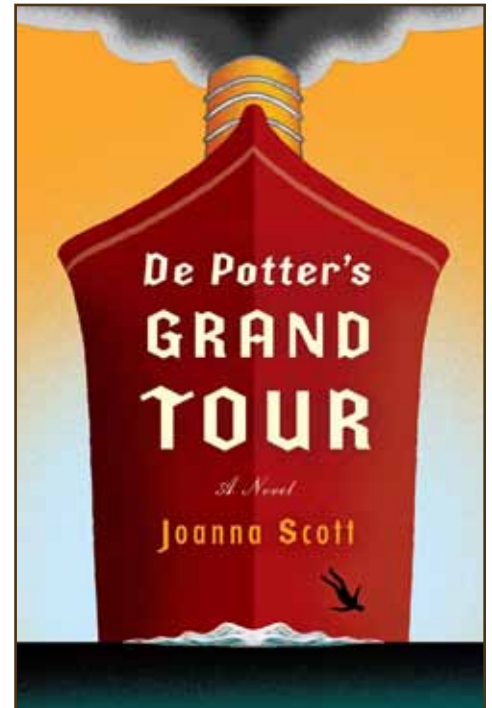


# Reading Group Gold

## *De Potter's Grand Tour* *A novel* by Joanna Scott



ISBN: 978-0-374-16233-7 / 272 pages

From the acclaimed novelist Joanna Scott comes a sumptuous tale of an enduring marriage—and the masquerade that sustained it. Armand de Potter left his Belgian homeland in the 1870s without a penny in his pocket. An ambitious, imaginative young man, he crafted a new life for himself in New York as an international tour guide and a trusted dealer in antiquities. His earnest wife joined him in these endeavors, helping him build a thriving tourism business. As the crowning achievement in his quest for prosperity, he moved his family to a luxurious village in Cannes, steeped in aristocratic refinements. But in 1905, Armand mysteriously disappears at sea off the coast of Greece. His body is never recovered, and his wife begins to piece together the truth about his identity, along with his financial entanglements. Transporting us to intriguing locales through intricately woven history, *De Potter's Grand Tour* is itself a grand voyage that raises as many provocative questions as it answers.

We hope that the following discussion topics will enrich your reading group's sojourn.

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## QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What does the novel reveal about the nature of marriage? How well can we ever know another person, even a life partner?
2. What were your theories about Armand's disappearance? How did your impressions of him shift?
3. What is at the heart of Armand's financial woes? Does he crave elevated social status because he's an illegitimate grandson of Louis de Potter, or is it simply part of his personality?
4. What motivates De Potter's customers to travel abroad, despite the potential hazards and discomforts? What do vacationers seek when they choose to visit a foreign country?
5. How were you affected by the photographs that appear throughout the novel? What realities do they capture in this work of fiction?
6. In his dealings with Professor Hilprecht and Mrs. Stevenson, what does Armand discover about the way antiquities are valued? What would he say about recent controversies over whether museums in Britain and America should return antiquities to their countries of origin? What ordinary objects from your home could be of interest to an archaeologist a thousand years from now?
7. Why was Amy Beckwith willing to transform herself into Aimée de Potter? As a widow, what new purpose in life does she find?
8. Discuss Armand's experiences in North Africa when he traveled with the photographer Alexandre Bougault. As Armand grew older, did he become more world-wise, or more naïve?
9. What does Armand try to teach his son, Victor, about becoming a successful man? When Aimée takes Victor to visit Armand's brother (also named Victor), what do we discover about the legacies of the de Potter men? How has your family history shaped your life?
10. In some ways, De Potter Tours is in the business of theater, with guides who dramatize history and a founder who impersonates a scholar. What does the novel say about the roles we all play as a part of everyday life?
11. What did the villa in Cannes mean to Armand, and to Aimée? What is your own ultimate symbol of success?
12. What is unique about Joanna Scott's approach to homelands and history? How does *De Potter's Grand Tour* enhance your enjoyment of her previous novels and short stories?
13. If you were to book a De Potter tour, where would you want to go? What would you want to learn from the guides?

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## PRAISE FOR *DE POTTER'S GRAND TOUR*

“An artful mystery set in an era of steamer ships and steam trains, when tourism was new and world travel was a glamorous and sometimes-perilous adventure.” —*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

“Joanna Scott’s writing is always a wonder, but *De Potter’s Grand Tour*, with its hints of Hawthorne’s ‘Wakefield,’ is her best yet: a wizardly dialogue between fact and fiction, the known and the unknown. I’ll be haunted by her elusive, touching, and deluded hero for a long time.” —Andrea Barrett, author of *Ship Fever*

“Only one of our most knowing prose stylists at the height of her powers could have invented the utterly beguiling experience that is *De Potter’s Grand Tour*. Joanna Scott has given us a daringly original and serious novel that in its magical rendering of the interior voices of a Gilded Age European adventurer and his American wife is as credible and moving as it is historically astute. One of the most delightful books I’ve read in years.” —Jaimy Gordon, author of *Lord of Misrule*

“Joanna Scott is a writer to treasure, and her beguiling new novel is an intrepid exploration of the world, the past, and the human heart.” —Peter Ho Davies, author of *The Welsh Girl*

“What a whirl of a book, full of secrets and surprises. Joanna Scott is among the handful of American writers I will always want to read, and in *De Potter’s Grand Tour* she offers a capacious circumnavigation of a world tinged by melancholy, love, mystery, shimmering beauty, and unlikely passion. A lovely and strangely affecting read.” —Jay Parini, author of *The Last Station: A Novel of Tolstoy’s Final Year*

“Joanna Scott is the great tour guide of contemporary American fiction, navigating us across oceans of memory and longing. In the company of Aimée de Potter as she intrepidly searches for her husband’s ghost and secrets, Scott charts here one of her grandest tours yet, one more utterly singular story only she could have written.” —Steve Erickson, author of *These Dreams of You*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Joanna Scott** is the author of ten books, including *The Manikin*, which was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize; *Various Antidotes* and *Arrogance*, which were both finalists for the PEN/Faulkner Award; and the critically acclaimed novels *Make Believe*, *Tourmaline*, *Liberation*, and *Follow Me*. She has received a MacArthur Fellowship, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and a Lannan Award.

Guide written by Amy Clements