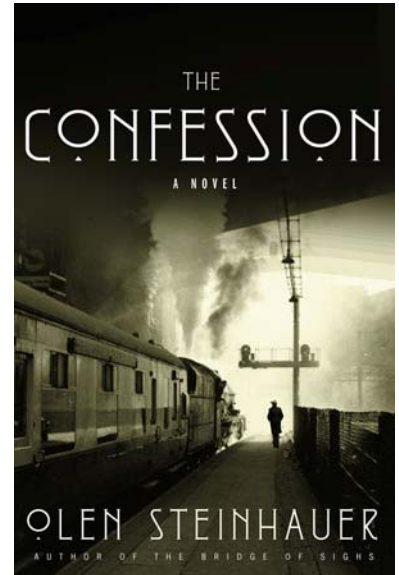


READING GROUP GUIDE

The Confession by Olen Steinhauer



St. Martin's Press
ISBN: 0-312-30328-9 (hardcover)

Reading Group Guide Questions

1. Discuss the concept of right and wrong in Olen Steinhauer's Eastern Europe. Consider how each main character defines right and wrong, and how those definitions change over the course of each novel, and the series.
2. Explore how Olen Steinhauer plays with the conventions of the genre in each book, i.e., following the form of a police procedural in *The Bridge of Sighs*, a psychological thriller in *The Confession*, a spy novel in *36 Yalta Boulevard*. Are his heroes—Emil Brod, Ferenc Kolyesz, and Brano Sev—traditional crime novel heroes? Why or why not?
3. How does setting contribute to the success of the books as crime novels? How do the realities of life at each time—political, economic, social—change the nature (or difficulty) of a policeman's job? Consider the question for each book in the series.
4. Contrast Emil's youth in *The Bridge of Sighs* with Brano's experience in *36 Yalta Boulevard*. How does Emil's naïveté and Brano's world-weariness influence the course of their investigations? How are Emil's youth and Brano's experience related to the country's politics at that particular time? How do their respective ages shed light on their respective times?
5. What does Lena represent for Emil in *The Bridge of Sighs*? What about Vera and Magda for Ferenc in *The Confession* and Djana for Brano in *36 Yalta Boulevard*? Compare and contrast the women's roles in each novel.
6. In *The Confession*, do you believe that Ferenc has done something wrong in helping Svetla Woznica to escape? Or in causing the death of Malik Woznica? Is Ferenc to blame, and should he have been punished? How would Brano Sev answer these questions?

7. How does the Afterword in *The Confession* change your feeling about the novel, if at all? How does it change the story to know that Ferenc is its author? Learning what happened to Ferenc in the years after the events took place, are you surprised?
8. In *36 Yalta Boulevard*, how do Brano's feelings about family influence his actions? About his father in particular? Do his feelings affect him more than he admits? What about Emil, in *The Bridge of Sighs*—how are his feelings about his family similar or different from Brano's? How have his grandparents and their experiences influenced him?
9. Brano Sev is a secondary character in *The Bridge of Sighs* and *The Confession*, but the main viewpoint character in *36 Yalta Boulevard*. How does the reader's opinion of him change from book to book? Does the more intimate viewpoint in *36 Yalta Boulevard* increase the reader's sympathy for Brano or simply intensify her distrust of him?
10. Why does Brano return to the capital at the end of *36 Yalta Boulevard*? Is it the right thing to do?
11. How do the various characters pay for their loyalty—or disloyalty—to the government? How does the government's power change over the course of the three novels? How do the characters' expectations about their country change?
12. Over the course of the three novels, how surprised have you been about the turns taken in the lives of the recurring characters?
13. To what extent are the criminal acts in Steinhauer's novels influenced by the politics—by turns either the revolution, or the government? When the party protects Malik Woznica, is the party to blame? When an innocent man is sent to the camps for a decade, who is to blame for his acts of revenge? How much do the politics cloud the question of justice?
14. The relationships between colleagues in the People's Militia play an important role in Steinhauer's novels. Examine the ways in which they trust each other, and the ways in which they betray each other. How do the dynamics of the group change from book to book? How are their relationships altered by the injury or death of one of the department's members, as happens several times?