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## Dorothy Gladys Smith

1896-1990

Entry Updated : 10/15/2004

**Birth Place:** Whitefield, Lancashire, England

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**Personal Information:** Family: Born May 3, 1896, in Whitefield, Lancashire, England; died November 24, 1990; daughter of Ernest Walter and Ella (Furber) Smith; married Alec Macbeth Beesley, 1939 (died, 1987). Education: Attended Manchester School and St. Paul's Girls' School, London; studied for the stage at Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, London. Hobbies and other interests: Reading, music, dogs, donkeys.

**Career:** Actress, 1915-22; Heal & Son (furnishing company), London, England, buyer, 1923-32; full-time writer, 1932-90.

**Awards:** *I Capture the Castle* was voted 'one of the nation's 100 best-loved novels' by the British public as part of the BBC's The Big Read, 2003.

## WRITINGS BY THE AUTHOR:

**PLAYS; UNDER PSEUDONYM C. L. ANTHONY**

- *British Talent*, first produced in London at Three Arts Club, 1924.
- *Autumn Crocus* (three-act comedy; first produced in London at Lyric Theatre, April 6, 1931; produced on Broadway at Morosco Theatre, November, 1932; also see below), Samuel French, 1931.
- *Service* (three-act comedy; first produced in London at Wyndham's Theatre, October 12, 1932; also see below), Gollancz, 1932, acting edition, Samuel French, 1937.
- *Touch Wood* (three-act comedy; first produced in London at Theatre Royal, Haymarket, May 16, 1934; also see below), Samuel French, 1934.

**PLAYS; UNDER NAME DODIE SMITH**

- *Call It a Day* (three-act comedy; first produced in London at Globe Theatre, October 30, 1935; produced at Morosco Theatre, 1936), Samuel French, 1936, acting edition, 1937.
- *Bonnet over the Windmill* (three-act comedy; first produced in London at New Theatre, September 8, 1937), Heinemann, 1937.
- (And co-director) *Dear Octopus* (three-act comedy; first produced in London at Queen's Theatre, September 14, 1938; produced on Broadway at Broadhurst Theatre, 1939; revived at Theatre Royal, Haymarket, 1967), Heinemann, 1938, acting edition, Samuel French, 1939.
- *Autumn Crocus, Service, and Touch Wood: Three Plays*, Heinemann, 1939.
- *Lovers and Friends* (three-act comedy; first produced on Broadway at Plymouth Theatre, November 29, 1943), Samuel French, 1944.
- *Letter from Paris* (three-act comedy adapted from Henry James's novel, *The Reverberator*; first produced in London at Aldwych Theatre, October 10, 1952), Heinemann, 1954.
- *I Capture the Castle* (two-act romantic comedy adapted by the author from her novel of the same title; first produced at Aldwych Theatre, March 4, 1954; also see below), Samuel French, 1952.
- *These People, Those Books* (three-act comedy), first produced in Leeds at Grand Theatre, 1958.
- *Amateur Means Lover* (three-act comedy; first produced in Liverpool at Liverpool Playhouse, 1961), Samuel French, 1962.

**NOVELS; UNDER NAME DODIE SMITH**

- *I Capture the Castle*, Atlantic/Little, Brown, 1948, St. Martin's, 1998.
- *The New Moon with the Old*, Atlantic/Little, Brown, 1963.
- *The Town in Bloom*, Atlantic/Little, Brown, 1965.
- *It Ends with Revelations*, Atlantic/Little, Brown, 1967.
- *A Tale of Two Families*, Walker, 1970.
- *The Girl from the Candle-lit Bath*, W. H. Allen, 1978.

#### **FOR CHILDREN; UNDER NAME DODIE SMITH**

- *The Hundred and One Dalmatians*, illustrations by Janet Grahame-Johnstone and Anne Grahame-Johnstone, Heinemann, 1956, Viking, 1957, reprinted with illustrations by Michael Dooling, Viking/Puffin Books, 1989.
- *The Starlight Barking: More about the Hundred and One Dalmatians*, illustrations by J. Grahame-Johnstone and A. Grahame-Johnstone, Heinemann, 1967, Simon & Schuster, 1968, St. Martin's Press (New York, NY), 1997.
- *The Midnight Kittens*, illustrations by J. Grahame-Johnstone and A. Grahame-Johnstone, W. H. Allen, 1978.
- *A Dalmatian Day*, First Years (Avon, MA), 1996.

#### **AUTOBIOGRAPHIES; UNDER NAME DODIE SMITH**

- *Look Back with Love: A Manchester Childhood*, Heinemann, 1974.
- *Look Back with Mixed Feelings*, W. H. Allen, 1978.
- *Look Back with Astonishment*, W. H. Allen, 1979.
- *Look Back with Gratitude*, Muller Blond and White, 1985.

#### **SCREENPLAYS**

- (With Frank Partos) *The Uninvited* (adapted from the novel by Dorothy Macardle), Paramount, 1944.
- (With Lesser Samuels) *Darling, How Could You!* (adapted from *Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire* by James M. Barrie), Paramount, 1951.

Also author of screenplay "Schoolgirl Rebels" (under pseudonym Charles Henry Percy), 1915.

### Media Adaptations: MOVIES

*Autumn Crocus* was filmed in England, 1934; *Call It a Day* was made into a movie by Warner Brothers, 1937; *Service* was filmed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in 1944 as *Looking Forward*; *Dear Octopus* was also filmed in England, 1945; *The Hundred and One Dalmatians* was filmed by Walt Disney Productions as *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*, 1961; *I Capture the Castle* was filmed by Samuel Goldwyn Films, 2003.

### BOOKS

Fran Manushkin, *Walt Disney's 101 Dalmatians: A Counting Book*, illustrated By Russell Hicks, Disney Press (New York City), 1991.

*Walt Disney's 101 Dalmatians*, adapted from the film by Ann Braybrooks, illustrated By Gil DiCicco, Disney Press, 1991.

Ronald Kidd, adaptor, *101 Dalmatians*, art direction by Paul Wenzel, illustrated by Ron Scholefield, Western Pub. Co. (Racine, WI), 1991.

Anne Mazer And Lucy Dahl, adaptors, *Disney's 101 Dalmatians: Special Collector's Edition*, Disney Press, 1996.

Sue Kassirer, adaptor, *Disney's 101 Dalmatians: The Puppies' Story*, Disney Press, 1996.

Sue Kassirer, *Wizzer's Bad Day*, illustrated By Julia Gorton, Disney Press, 1997.

### "Sidelights"

Often remembered as the author of *The Hundred and One Dalmatians*, the children's story that Walt Disney Studios filmed as the animated *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*, Dorothy Gladys Smith was primarily an author of works for adults, including plays, novels, and several autobiographical works. Smith, better known by the name Dodie Smith, first gained recognition as a playwright, going by the name of C. L. Anthony until 1935, when she began to write under her own name. Her plays are generally light comedies about middle-class life that earned enough popular and critical praise in their time for *Dictionary of Literary Biography* contributor Martha Hadsel to deem Smith "one of the few successful women dramatists in England and American during the first half of the twentieth century."

Smith credited her early family life as the greatest factor in determining her future career. "When I was eighteen months old," Smith once told *CA*, "my father died, and after that my mother and I lived with her family--my grandparents, three uncles and two aunts--in an old house with a garden sloping towards the Manchester Ship Canal. It was a stimulating household. Both my mother and grandmother wrote and composed. Almost everyone sang and played some musical instrument (we owned three pianos, a violin, a mandolin, a guitar and a banjo) and one uncle, an admirable amateur actor, was often to be heard rehearsing, preferably with me on hand to give him his cues. Although I had been taken to theatres long before I could read, it was

this hearing of my uncle's parts which really aroused my interest in acting and in playwriting; the cues I gave got longer and longer and, by the age of nine, I had written a forty-page play. When I read this aloud to my mother she fell asleep--to awake and say apologetically, 'But darling, it was so dull.'"

Her mother's reaction did not discourage Smith in any way. Nevertheless, her original plan was to become an actress and not a playwright. After studying at the Royal Academy of Art, she performed professionally with some of her fellow students before becoming a member of the Portsmouth Repertory Theatre. During World War I, Smith went to France to help entertain the soldiers there, and she also played a role in a Zurich performance of John Galsworthy's *Pigeon*. But in 1923 the young actress decided to leave the theater and work as a buyer for Heal and Son, a furniture company where she was employed for the next eight years.

Then, in 1931, Smith sold her play *Autumn Crocus* to one of her former stage directors. Although she had written a screenplay and a stage play before, *Autumn Crocus* was the work that turned her career around. The "romantic comedy brought Smith immediate success because of its winning combination of an Alpine setting, humor, music, and a love story," according to Hadsel. The next two plays that Smith published under the C. L. Anthony pseudonym, *Service* and *Touch Wood*, were also critically acclaimed, and Hadsel notes that some reviewers even compared *Touch Wood* to the work of the famous nineteenth-century Norwegian dramatist, Henrik Ibsen.

*Call It a Day* was the first play Smith wrote under her own name, as well as her most financially rewarding work. It ran for almost two hundred performances in New York City and had over five hundred performances in London. "By this time," related Hadsel, "she had purchased The Barretts, a cottage near the village of Finchingfield, Essex, and had made writing her full-time occupation." Traveling to the United States in 1938 to help with a New York City production of her *Dear Octopus*, Smith decided to remain in America, where she married her business manager, Alec Macbeth Beesley. During the next fifteen years she lived mostly in California and did some writing for Paramount Studios. It was while she was living in Pennsylvania, however, that she published her first--and most popular--novel, *I Capture the Castle*.

After returning to England, Smith continued to write plays and novels, but she also began writing stories for children, including *The Hundred and One Dalmatians* and its sequel, *The Starlight Barking: More about the Hundred and One Dalmatians*. The owner of a number of pet dalmatians herself, it is not surprising that Smith chose to make her main characters--Pongo, Missis Pongo, and their myriad puppies--dalmatians, and the adventures they have while foiling the plans of the evil furrier's wife, Cruella de Vil, have entertained many young readers. The last years of Smith's life were spent working on her autobiography, the four volumes of which, entitled *Look Back with Love: A Manchester Childhood*, *Look Back with Mixed Feelings*, *Look Back with Astonishment*, and *Look Back with Gratitude*, relate her experiences from childhood to the years she spent in the United States.

Although some critics have at times complained about what they considered Smith's "superficiality" in her work, Hadsel noted that her characters have appealed to audiences because they are "close enough to reality that ... [people] feel comfortably

at home with them, yet they are imaginative enough that her audience could find refreshment." Having made a successful career for herself as a writer in several genres, Smith nevertheless once revealed to *CA*: "I consider myself a lightweight author, but God knows I approach my work with as much seriousness as if it were Holy Writ."

**Obituary:** --Born May 3, 1896, in Whitefield, Lancashire, England; died November 24, 1990. Actress, furnishings buyer, playwright, screenwriter, and author. Widely known for her children's book *The Hundred and One Dalmatians*, adapted as the classic animated Walt Disney film *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*, Smith wrote her first screenplay, *Schoolgirl Rebels*, under the pseudonym Charles Henry Percy while a student at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. The film was bought and produced by a small film company. She was an amateur actress as a child, and from 1915 to 1922 she acted on the British stage, then worked briefly as a buyer for a furnishing company. Her first play, *British Talent*, was produced in London in 1924. Smith's theatrical works, often about daily life, include *Autumn Crocus* and *Call It a Day*, which was also filmed. Using the name C. L. Anthony until 1935, Smith wrote novels after World War II under her own name, achieving particular success with *I Capture the Castle*. She also penned autobiographical volumes such as *Look Back with Love*.

#### **Obituary and Other Sources:**

#### **BOOKS**

- Smith, Dodie, *Look Back with Love*, Heinemann, 1974.
- Smith, *Look Back with Mixed Feelings*, W. H. Allen, 1978.
- Smith, *Look Back with Astonishment*, W. H. Allen, 1979.
- Smith, *Look Back with Gratitude*, Muller, 1985.
- *Who's Who*, 143rd edition, St. Martin's, 1991.
- *The Writers Directory: 1988-1990*, St. James Press, 1988.

#### **PERIODICALS**

- *Times* (London, England), November 27, 1990.

### **FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

#### **BOOKS**

- *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Volume 10: *Modern British Dramatists, 1900-1945*, Gale, 1982, pp. 158-162.
- Grove, Valerie, *Dear Dodie: The Life of Dodie Smith*, Chatto and Windus (London, England), 1996.

**About this Essay:** --Sketch by Kevin S. Hile

**Source:** *Contemporary Authors Online*, Thomson Gale, 2004.



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## Reading Group Guide

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### I Capture the Castle by Dodie Smith

**List Price:** \$13.95  
**Pages:** 343  
**Format:** Paperback  
**ISBN:** 0312201656  
**Publisher:** St. Martin's Griffin

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[Canadian Readers: Buy this book from Amazon.ca](#)



Other  
[St. Martin's Press](#)

More About This Book



## About This Book

The glorious return of one of the century's most beloved novels! **I Capture the Castle** is as brightly witty and adventuresome today as it was when it was first published fifty years ago. Long unavailable in American stores, it has been lovingly passed down from generation to generation. Until its reissue, it enjoyed the rare privilege of being one of the most requested items of used bookdealers.

**I Capture the Castle** tells the story of seventeen-year-old Cassandra and her family, who live in not-so-genteel poverty in a ramshackle English castle. Here she strives, over six turbulent months, to hone her writing skills. She fills three notebooks with sharply funny yet poignant entries. Her journals candidly chronicle the great changes that take place within the old castle's walls, and her own first descent into love. By the time she pens her final entry, she has "captured the castle"--and the heart of the reader--in one of literature's most enchanting entertainments.

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## Discussion Questions

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- 1. I Capture the Castle** was first published in 1948. How might readers have responded differently to the novel at that time? How might their responses have been the same? Why does the novel continue to appeal to readers today as it did in 1948?
- 2. I Capture the Castle** is told through Cassandra's entries in her journals, an exercise she has undertaken in order to teach herself how to write. Why do you think Dodie Smith chose the form of the diary to tell the story of Cassandra and the Mortmain family?
- 3.** Mortmain's celebrated novel is described throughout **I Capture the Castle** as a literary breakthrough, a predecessor to James Joyce's work, and meriting the analysis of famous literary critics. Yet beyond a few spare descriptions, Smith tells us little about the actual story. What do you imagine Jacob Wrestling to be about?
- 4.** A voracious reader, Cassandra compares her situation to that of the Bennets in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. How would you compare the situation of the Mortmain sisters to that of the Bennet sisters?
- 5.** Why does Mortmain encourage Cassandra to be "brisk" with Stephen? What does **I Capture the Castle** say about class in mid-twentieth-century England?
- 6.** What is the meaning of the book's title?
- 7.** Cassandra is fascinated by the Cottons and their American mannerisms, traditions and expressions, just as the Cottons are fascinated by the Mortmains and their English mannerisms, traditions and expressions. What does **I Capture the Castle** say about English preconceptions of Americans and America and vice versa?
- 8.** How does **I Capture the Castle** reflect society's changing views toward women during the first half of the century? How do the women in the novel view the roles and opportunities open to them both in the family and in the world at large differently? Consider Cassandra, Rose, Topaz, Mrs. Cotton, and Mrs. Fox-Cotton.
- 9.** Over the course of the novel, Cassandra comes to seem less a child "with a little green hand" and more a young woman. How is **I Capture the Castle** a story of Cassandra's coming of age?

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## Critical Praise

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"You'll love it, it has been one of my favorite novels. Cassandra Mortmain is one hell of a narrator, offering sharp wit, piercing insight and touching lyricism. She is a heroine we readers wish we could be, a young woman it is impossible not to adore. "

———**Susan Isaacs**

"To say that I couldn't put it down is hardly original, but true... I think it is a book that will be much lived in by many people, because you can live inside it, like Dickens. "

———**Christopher Isherwood**

"Dreamy and funny...an odd, shimmering timelessness clings to its pages. A thousand and one cheers for its reissue. A+ "

———**Entertainment Weekly**

" It's as fresh as if it were written this morning, and as classic as Jane Austen. I'm very happy to have met it. "

———**Donald E. Westlake**

"Much more fun than the reader has any right to expect "

———**The Weekly Standard**

"A delicious, compulsively readable novel about young love and its vicissitudes. What fun! "

———**Erica Jong**

"It is an occasion worth celebrating when a sparkling novel, a work of wit, irony and feeling, is brought back into print after an absence of many years. So uncork the champagne for **I Capture the Castle.** "

———**The Los Angeles Times**

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