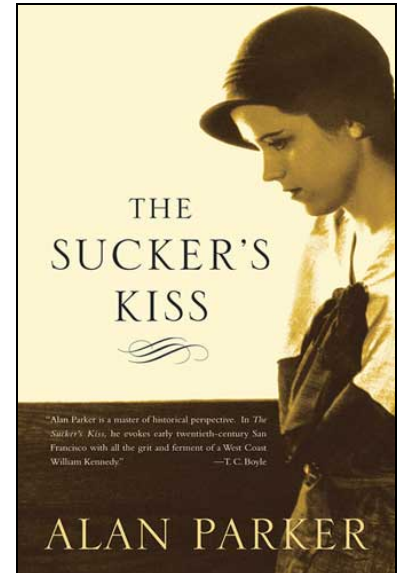


# READING GROUP GUIDE

## *The Sucker's Kiss* by Alan Parker



**St. Martin's Press**

ISBN: 0-312-32975-X (hardcover)

### Introduction to *The Sucker's Kiss*

During the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, seven-year-old Thomas Moran finds himself accidentally embarking on a career in pickpocketing. In the following years he becomes a master of his dubious craft and grows to manhood traveling from state to state across America.

His picaresque journey takes him through Prohibition and the Depression; into the desperate highs of the Hootchy-Kootchy and the dying vineyards of California, accompanied by an array of richly drawn characters frantically clutching at the crumbling American dream. Italian and Chinese gangsters, con artists, corrupt clergy, and speakeasy bootleggers all have a part to play in Tommy's destiny, but it is Effie, the great love of his life, who offers him the chance to change his future, and tries to save him from himself.

Colorfully written, engaging, and richly evocative of an extraordinary period in American history, *The Sucker's Kiss* marks the literary debut of a master storyteller.

### Praise for *The Sucker's Kiss*

"Alan Parker is a master of historical perspective. In *The Sucker's Kiss*, he evokes early twentieth-century San Francisco with all the grit and ferment of a West Coast William Kennedy."

- T. C. Boyle

"Alan Parker has written an engaging, entertaining romp. . . . His rogue's story is funny, ebullient, and ultimately poignant."

- Kevin Baker, author of *Paradise Alley*

"Memo to Writers Guild of America and the Screen Actors Guild: Please go on strike more often. Why? Well, while you were picketing and protesting, a director and writer, Alan Parker, decided to write a hell of a novel, *The Sucker's Kiss*. You might expect Sir Alan to take as his territory England, particularly North London. He might have written of highwaymen and he chose instead the forty-eight states. There goes his picaresque hero, Thomas Moran, goaded into pickpocketing by the San Francisco earthquake of 1906. After that the sky is the limit and two oceans his borders."

- Frank McCourt, author of *Angela's Ashes*

"Triumphant . . . Parker has created a splendid character, an amiable, amoral rogue whom the reader cannot help rooting for."

- *Daily Mail* (U.K.)

"A gripping, entertaining, and finely wrought story to match the best of his films."

- *The Independent on Sunday* (U.K.)

"A thrilling and enjoyable read, filmic and brilliantly paced. As you might expect, Parker is a gifted storyteller."

- *Scotland on Sunday* (U.K.)

"A vivid, colorful, fast-paced, literary, and cinematic work, full of strong characterizations and wonderfully textured prose."

- *Nottingham Evening Post* (U.K.)

## Reading Group Guide Questions

1. Tommy starts stealing when he is seven, during the San Francisco earthquake, and continues for the rest of his life. Do you agree with his rationale for stealing? Is it ever morally acceptable to steal?
2. At the end of the novel, Tommy chooses to save his sister and go to jail rather than spend his life with Effie. In the same situation, what choice would you make?
3. The author, Alan Parker, is British, but he has made several movies about America, including *Mississippi Burning*. In *The Sucker's Kiss*, do you think he creates a believable picture of America and Americans?
4. Do you think Prohibition was a good idea? If Prohibition existed today, would you sympathize with bootleggers or would you feel it was your responsibility to turn them in?
5. Because he is a director, does Alan Parker have a different way of looking at the world than most writers? Could you picture *The Sucker's Kiss* as a movie?
6. In the novel, Chinese and other immigrant groups live in separate communities and are often subject to prejudice. Do you think that today America is more integrated and Americans are less prejudiced towards recent immigrants?
7. Tommy and Effie reunite after years of separation, but after Tommy goes to jail Effie decides she has to move on. Why do you think she is no longer willing to wait for him?
8. If you traveled across the United States today, how would the country differ from the land Tommy saw?

9. Do you think Father Cathain should have remained a priest after he and Effie had a child? Christians believe in the power of repentance, but should Cathain's responsibility to his daughter have overridden his calling to the priesthood?
10. At heart, do you think Tommy Moran is an honest person?

## About the Author

**Alan Parker** — director, writer, and producer — directed his first film, *Bugsy Malone*, in 1975. His other films include *Midnight Express*, *Fame*, *Birdy*, *Mississippi Burning*, *The Commitments*, and *Angela's Ashes*. The numerous accolades for his work include nineteen British Film Academy awards, ten Golden Globe awards, and six Oscars. Parker was knighted in 2002 for services to the British film industry.