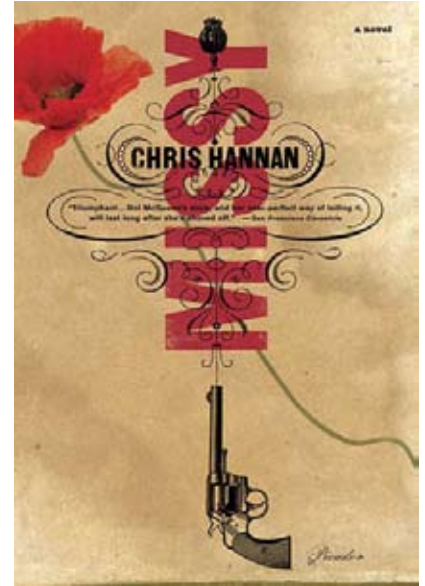




Reading Group Gold

Missy A Novel by Chris Hannan



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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Missy* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Missy*.

About the Book

In Chris Hannan's *Missy*, the reader is drawn into a version of the wild west that is almost void of romanticism and mythology. It's narrator, Dol McQueen, is a prostitute and an opium addict, and through her eyes we see the everyday hardships and violence of the period. She and her friends, Ness, Sadie, and Cordelia head east from San Francisco to the newest boom town, and when they reach Virginia City, Nevada, the girls find no shortage of miners to part from their money. But Dol has an ulterior motive for traveling to Virginia City: her mother, Isobel, a self-destructive alcoholic with delusions of grandeur, has spiraled out of control, and Dol is obsessed with finding and saving her.

Along the way, Dol runs into Pontius, a brutal pimp and thief who is on the run with a crateful of opium. He forces her to stash the "missy" while he figures out what to do with it. In the meantime, Dol has her own plan for the missy; with hopes of starting a new life, she and her friends retreat further east to try and sell the opium "in the states." But it's not an easy road. She has to contend with a gang sent after her to retrieve the stolen opium, as well as her own addictions.

At once lyrical and brutal, *Missy* presents a vision of the old west that offers many avenues for discussion.

About the Author

Chris Hannan is the author of several award-winning plays. He lives in Edinburgh, Scotland. This is his first novel.



Reading Group Gold

Discussion Questions

1. At the beginning of the story, Dol seems content with her life as a prostitute. In her opinion, to leave the fast life and find a husband would constitute selling-out. Why is Dol so attached to this life? Is she in denial? What about her lifestyle perhaps provides greater satisfaction than marriage and settling down?
2. Dol's mother neglected her and treated her with contempt. Yet Dol still seems bent on saving her at all costs, sacrificing both her friends and herself. Why is her mother so all-important to her?
3. How is Hannan's portrayal of the west different from other films and books you may have experienced? Does the west retain any of its adventurous qualities in this story? Does Hannan's old west seem like a place you could ever want to visit?
4. What kind of a person is Pontius? Is he driven only by greed? What makes his character different from the other characters in the story?
5. Describe Dol's voice, what are its qualities? She uses many period turns of phrase what are some of your favorites? What is the tone of her voice, and how do you think Hannan accomplish her peculiar balance of exuberance and melancholy?
6. Why does Sadie have such a soft spot for Cordelia? Is she the only one of the girls capable of sympathy? Does her relationship to Cordelia tell us anything about her suicide? How is her devotion to Cordelia different from Dol's devotion to her mother?
7. When Dol discovers that her mother was not from a good family in Scotland, but rather worked as a maid, does this revelation in some way explain her mother's character? Does it fuel Dol's desire to help her mother, or merely inspire pity in her?
8. How is being an alcoholic or a drug addict in the old west different than being an addict in modern times? At a time when there was no Alcoholics Anonymous and no drug treatment centers, was there any avenue of recovery?
9. How are Native Americans portrayed in this book? Do the settlers have any understanding of their plight?
10. Why do you think that Dol's mother is unable to change? Is she simply too proud to see herself for what she is? How is Dol ultimately similar to her mother? Why is she able to quit opium and make a fresh start while her mother is not?
11. Do you think Dol went into the woods with her mother knowing that she might kill her? Why would she want to kill her mother? Was it because she wasn't able to save her, or because she wasn't able to make her mother love her?



Reading Group Gold

12. Why does Cordelia decide to give Dol a chance in spite of all the terrible things she had done? Why wouldn't Cordelia simply escape from her and start a new life with decent people? In what ways are Cordelia and Dol similar?

13. What do you think is going to happen to Dol now? Will she go back to her old life as a prostitute and opium addict? How might Dol's final break with her mother have changed her outlook on life?