

Doc By Mary Doria Russell

Questions are from the author with some additions from Helen

Everyone in Dodge has come from someplace else. Given the realities of the frontier, would you have gone west or would you have tried to stay in the East in the 1870s?

Doc Holliday spent nearly all of his 36 years struggling with` life-threatening medical conditions, starting with his cleft palate as a baby. How do you think this affected his personality and the way that others saw him?

What did you think of the way Russell described the ravages of tuberculosis? At its peak in the 1800s, TB was responsible for 25% of all deaths in Europe. Even though we can cure TB today, it still causes a large number of deaths, especially in Africa and Asia.

Young Doc arrived in Texas just as the Crash of 1873 wrecked the nation's economy. Do the circumstances at the time you start your career make a great deal of difference in your long-run prospects? Did the start of your own career get a boost or get held back by economic circumstances at the time?

Have you watched Tombstone or any of the other movies depicting Doc? How would you compare the way he was portrayed in the movie(s) versus the book? Did having seen the movies affect your reading of the book?

Did your feelings about Kate Harony change as the novel went on? Was her relationship with Doc dysfunctional? Or were they a good match? Did you find any of the other couples to be interesting? (Mattie and Wyatt, Morgan and Lou, Bessie and James, Alice and Bob Wright)

Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday are often portrayed as best friends, but Russell places Morgan Earp at the center of this novel's relationships. Why do you think so many movies and books overlook Morgan?

Holliday was a skilled and gentle dentist, an accomplished pianist, a loyal friend, and an educated man who was often generous and habitually courteous. He was also easily offended, quick to anger, a heavy drinker, a spendthrift and a sarcastic snob. Do you think you would have liked or disliked him in real life?

The novel touches on many legal and moral issues that are still debated today- prostitution, gambling, abortion, drug and alcohol abuse, gun violence, etc. Did your opinions about regulation, legislation or prohibition of such behaviors become more nuanced as you read?

In the South, “ a gentleman is judged by the way he treats his inferiors.” Whom did Holliday consider his inferiors? Do you think this changed when he went west? What’s the difference between courtesy and respect? What role does race play?

Nearly all the women in the novel were prostitutes at some point in their lives. Doc says that’s because “some man failed them.” Do you believe that? What alternatives did women have in the 1870s?

Margaret Mitchel said that the character Melanie in *Gone with the Wind* was based on John Henry Holiday’s childhood sweetheart, Martha Anne Holliday, who later became a Catholic Sister of Mercy, Sister Mary Melanie. She never mentioned Doc directly, but which character do you think might have been based on Holliday?

Both Doc Holliday and Wyatt Earp had inflated reputations as dangerous men thanks to widely circulated and exaggerated stories about their exploits. How does a situation like this affect someone? Would you like for people to fear you?

Doc hid from his family that he was gambling professionally.. How common do you think it is for people to hide their occupations from their families? Have you ever done that?

Russell chose to focus on the year Doc and the Earps were together in Dodge City rather than on their better-remembered time in Tombstone and the shootout at the OK Corral. What did you think about this choice? Was there enough drama in Dodge City? Later she wrote a sequel, **Epitaph**, with Wyatt Earp and Tombstone as the focus. Are you interested in reading the sequel?

Did the story of the traveling priest remind you of another book we read, *Death Comes for the Arch Bishop*? What similarities did you see?

So far as I can tell, Johnnie’s existence and death are fiction. What purpose did including the story of his life and death serve?