

Pink Cadillac

by Robert Dunn



About the Book

A runaway girl
A down-at-its-heels roadhouse
A hotheaded sax player
A tormented record man
A drop-in by Elvis Presley
A magical car. . . .

Pink Cadillac is a secret history of the great lost 45 *Pink Cadillac* ? a record cut by a bluesy white girl in 1956.

A love story, a mystery, a book tinged with magic and mojo, **Pink Cadillac** tells one of the great unknown stories of rock and roll.

Discussion Guide

1. Pink Cadillac is set in Memphis in the mid-'50s, the birthplace of rock and roll, and the book is concerned with the forces that come together to create this new musical/art form. What are these forces, and which characters represent them? What are the various sparks that bring about the birth of rock and roll?

2. In the novel the young singer Daisy Holliday is referred to as "a female Elvis." Was there anyone close to that in real life? How might the world be different if there had actually been a girl singer "who right now might have the glory afforded Elvis?" Was it possible in the '50s for a woman singer to be that powerful and famous for something other than pure sex appeal? Is it possible now? Compare Daisy's experiences in the music world with, say, current women stars such as Madonna and Britney Spears.

3. Also, discuss what makes Daisy a remarkable woman. What is her struggle? How does she fare with it? Why does she leave the roadhouse when she does, and what lessons does she learn by being away from it?

4. The novel uses the unusual tactic of the main story framed by the present day story of the record label owner Colin Stone. How does having this frame enrich the novel? Does it help or hinder the unraveling of the mystery of the lost 45 record that's at the heart of the book?

5. Elvis Presley makes a cameo appearance in **Pink Cadillac**. What is his role in the book? How does the author see Elvis?

6. The Pink Cadillac in the novel is a gift from Elvis to Daisy Holliday. Follow the path of the Pink Cadillac from the point at which she's given it. How does the action in the novel change because of the ownership of the car? What at bottom does the Pink Cadillac represent?

7. The white character Dell Dellaplane purposely sets the black character Bearcat up as his mentor. What does he hope to learn from Bearcat? Was this unusual in that time period, to have a white boy apprenticed to a black man? What change in society does this presage? Indeed, it can be useful to explore all the ways that the advent of rock and roll changed America, especially in terms of race relations.

8. John Sebastian of the Lovin' Spoonful wrote: "I'll tell you about the magic that will free your soul / I'll tell you about the magic of rock and roll." **Pink Cadillac** is a book centrally concerned with the magic of rock and roll, as well as other forms of magic, including African-American hoodoo. Discuss all the forms of magic, and their meanings, in the novel.

9. At the center of **Pink Cadillac** is Bearcat's roadhouse outside of Memphis. What makes the place special? What happens when characters enter the roadhouse, and what happens when they leave it? Is it possible that the great lost 45 *Pink Cadillac* could only have been recorded in the roadhouse? Discuss.

10. If the definition of a tragic character is someone who 1) reaches too far; and 2) has a flaw that brings about a tragic fall, then which character in **Pink Cadillac** can best be considered tragic? Why? What is his or her great flaw?

11. All the characters exhibit great strengths and weaknesses over the course of the book. Is there one character whose strengths you most admire? Which character is that? What makes him or her so quietly powerful?

12. The resolution of the book solves the mystery of who killed the Bearcat. Who are the various "suspects" throughout the book? Does the true story of the lost 45 and Bearcat's death feel right to you? Discuss the way society in the book sees Bearcat and his death versus what in truth happens.

Author Bio

Robert Dunn is a writer, teacher, and musician. He has published widely, including an O. Henry Prize-winning story, as well as fiction in *The Atlantic*, *Redbook*, *Omni*, and numerous literary journals, a poem in *The New Yorker*, and a front-page essay in the *New York Times* Book Review. His novel **The Sting Rays** is in print through Electron Press (www.electronpress.com). He has worked for *The New Yorker* magazine, as well as teaching at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pa. For the last years of the writer Bernard Malamud's life, Dunn was his assistant in New York City.

For the past 16 years Dunn has taught fiction writing at The New School in New York City, which he continues to do. For the past 20 years he has worked for *Sports Illustrated* magazine. Dunn is the founder of the musical group Thin Wild Mercury, as well as its guitar player and principle songwriter. Thin Wild Mercury plays often around New York City. Dunn is married to a set designer/film art director and lives in New York City.

Critical Praise

'Real rock 'n' roll literature -- a book with all the wily literacy of a Chuck Berry song.'

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