

Mademoiselle Chanel

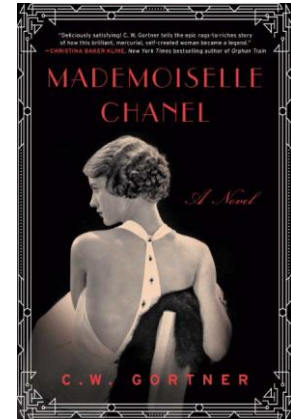
William Morrow

By C.W. Gortner

ISBN: 9780062356406

Introduction

Based on the life of iconic fashion designer Coco Chanel, *Mademoiselle Chanel* imagines the rise of the daughter of a laundrywoman who, through driving ambition and talent, would become one of the most influential (and controversial) figures of the 20th century, creating revolutionary styles for women and building an international empire—overcoming tragedies, setbacks and the choices forced by world war.



Questions for Discussion

1. As a teenager at the convent of Aubazine, Coco admits that “Fear had become my enemy because it might take root inside me and never leave.” Does she seem like a fearful person to you? What do you think were Coco’s greatest fears? Did she find a way to use them as motivation for success or did they drive her to make bad decisions?
2. After nearly starving in Vichy, Coco gives in to Etienne Balsan and becomes his mistress. Was this out of character for her? Did she compromise her principles by moving in with him? What do you make of her relationship with Balsan, both in their early days together and much later in her life?
3. Coco reflects that during her relationship with Boy, “Yes, I was happy. It was not a comfortable feeling for me.” Why does happiness—especially domestic or romantic happiness—so unsettles her? Does she ever get comfortable with happiness?
4. What do you make of Coco’s relationship with her family, especially her siblings and her aunt Adrienne?
5. Coco says of herself, “...it appeared I did not work at all, when in truth I worked harder than ever to maintain the illusion that success was effortless.” Why was this so necessary? Do working women today try to maintain the same illusion?
6. Is Misia Sert a good friend to Coco? Why does Coco love her so much, and what does their relationship say about each of them?
7. *Vogue* wrote that “Chanel’s little black dress will become standard for the masses, much like Ford’s motorcars.” How many little black dresses do you own? Why has that

particular garment become such an enduring classic? Why is it the quintessential Chanel garment?

8. How do Coco's business dealings with the Wertheimers say about her personally as well as professionally? What motivates her to take such drastic action, and to create such a personal vendetta? Who do you think was in the right?
9. What is the true nature of Coco's relationship with Hans von Dincklage? Do you approve of their liason?
10. Coco Chanel has acquired a reputation as someone who collaborated with the Nazis during their occupation of Paris. Does this seem fair to you? Should she have behaved differently during those years?
11. Did you admire Coco Chanel once you'd read this novel about her life? Is she a good role model for women?