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Widowland

by C. J. Carey



About the Book

For readers of Margaret Atwood's THE HANDMAID'S TALE comes a thrilling feminist dystopian novel set in an alternative history that terrifyingly imagines what a British alliance with Germany would look like if the Nazis had won WWII.

To control the past, they edited history. To control the future, they edited literature.

London, 1953. Thirteen years have passed since England surrendered to the Nazis and formed a Grand Alliance with Germany. It was forced to adopt many of its oppressive ideologies, one of which was the strict classification of women into hierarchical groups based on the perceived value they brought to society.

Rose Ransom, a member of the privileged Geli class, remembers life from before the war but knows better than to let it show. She works for the Ministry of Culture, rewriting the classics of English literature to ensure there are no subversive thoughts that will give women any ideas.

Outbreaks of insurgency have been seen across the country with graffiti made up of seditious lines from forbidden works by women painted on public buildings. Suspicion has fallen on Widowland, the run-down slums where childless women over 50 have been banished. Rose is given the dangerous task of infiltrating Widowland to find the source of the rebellion before the Leader arrives in England for the Coronation ceremony of King Edward VIII and Queen Wallis.

Will Rose follow her instructions and uncover the criminals? Or will she fight for what she knows in her heart is right?

Discussion Guide

1. Early on in the story, it?s stated that the Leader once said, ?Women are the most important citizens in this land.?

Discuss the irony of this statement that becomes evident as the story unfolds.

2. Rose?s job was to ?correct? literature that was degenerate, subversive, or didn?t align with the Protectorate?s values and teachings. What purpose did this serve for the Protectorate, and what does this say about the power of books and story?

3. What regulations imposed upon women --- particularly in the lower castes --- by the regime did you find most egregious? Now think about your current situation: What regulations would you be at risk of breaking in such a society?

4. Why do you think there was such a monumental celebration for the coronation of Edward VIII and Queen Wallis when it was largely ceremonial and they had no legitimate power over the UK?

5. Rose?s six-year-old niece is part of a generation with no prior knowledge of life before the Alliance, while Rose?s father remembers it clearly. Discuss the generational impact of important historical events and how our perceptions of history change over time, depending on whether we lived through an event or merely read about it in history books.

6. Rose appears to have conflicting feelings about Martin Kreuz. She is attracted to him ?despite herself.? Why do you think this is? Do you think she had genuine feelings for him? Or did she enter a relationship with him out of obligation because of his position and influence?

7. Citizens of the Alliance were encouraged not to think sentimentally about the past, and any suggestion that the past was better than the future was strictly outlawed as a ?nostalgia crime.? The idea that a government could control people?s thoughts seems outlandish, but imagine a world where that could happen. Under these laws, would you ever be guilty of a nostalgia crime?

8. Oliver tells Rose, ?No good society can exist without mutual trust.? Do you agree with this statement? Discuss the ways in which the theme of trust plays out in the book.

9. Why do you think Helena agrees to give up her baby, that that?s the only choice she has?

10. Rose mostly seems to fall in line and play by the rules and regulations set forth by the regime. But her beliefs are quickly challenged upon meeting with the Friedas in WIDOWLAND. Why do you think they had such an influence on her? In what ways did they instill courage in her to take a stance?

11. When do you think is the moment Rose turned into a resistor? When she neglected to turn over her report on the Friedas to the minister? When she agreed to help Oliver break into Martin?s office to procure the agenda for the convention? When she gave the vial to one of the Friedas? Or had she always been one?

12. With travel to the mainland banned, international news censored, and most foreign mail forbidden, citizens of the UK were effectively shut off from the rest of the world. Imagine you lived in this kind of society. How do you think you would fare (or not)?

13. Throughout the story, it was evident that not everyone supported the Alliance and the regime?s governing style. This is also true in our modern world. Why do you think some people become resistors, who speak up and take action in the

face of oppression, while others follow along blindly?

14. While this version of history did not come to fruition, women and people of other marginalized groups are still sometimes reduced down to their reproductive status, heritage or racial characteristics. Why do you think this happens, and what are the repercussions for our modern-day society?

15. The idea of a government or a country attempting to erase or rewrite certain parts of history is not unheard of. In what ways has this happened in real life?

Author Bio

C. J. Carey is a novelist, journalist and broadcaster. She has worked at the *Sunday Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* and the BBC, among others. She also writes novels under the name Jane Thynne and lives in London. As C. J. Carey, she has written the novels WIDOWLAND and QUEEN WALLIS.

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