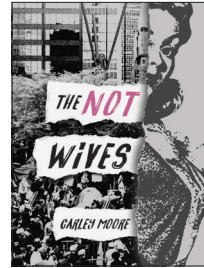


READING GROUP GUIDE

THE NOT WIVES by Carley Moore

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1. The novel opens with “Perhaps fucking was a road map for those of us who no longer believed in directions. Or maybe it was just another way to get lost” (5). In what ways does sex function for each protagonist throughout the novel? How does it inspire or reduce intimacy between these characters and their partners?
2. Set in 2011 New York City, the novel explores many cultural, political, and environmental changes that lead up to the Occupy Wall Street movement. What are these major transitions? How do they factor into the characters’ personal lives throughout the story?
3. Consider Stevie’s role as a mother throughout the novel. In what ways does the author reconcile Stevie’s sexuality and humanity with her responsibilities as a mother and (ex-)wife?
4. Madison’s suicide acts as the driving force of the novel, with her perspective told in three short, distinct flashbacks (Wanting, Portals, Mise-En-Scène); however, Madison’s rape is separately confirmed by her poem that Johanna and Stevie read at the novel’s end. How do these flashbacks affect your reading? What is added to the narrative through Madison’s point of view?
5. Mel’s bisexuality causes tension with her girlfriend, Jenny, especially as they decide to explore polyamory. Do you think they have a healthy relationship, despite their struggles? Did Mel’s pregnancy (and Jenny’s reaction) surprise you? Why or why not?
6. What are the different prejudices that Johanna and Butch face as homeless people? How do they defy those prejudices? How do they reinforce them?
7. Class and wealth are major sources of stress for all three protagonists—Stevie fears being evicted and worries about caring for her daughter; Mel suffers the loss of her family cabin; Johanna experiences resentment and abuse as she navigates life as a homeless woman. How do these individual struggles work with the larger movement of Occupy Wall Street? To what extent are these problems resolved if at all?
8. The novel incorporates brief sections throughout about The Wives and The Husbands that describe, in contradictory ways, what these groups are doing and how they’re feeling. Why do you think the author chose to write from the perspective of The Wives and The Husbands, especially in this manner?
9. In the aftermath of Madison’s sexual assault, she takes her own life. Stevie and Johanna are both deeply affected by her suicide; Stevie notes that her writing class is “ruined” (31) after witnessing Madison fall. How else is trauma explored throughout the story?
10. The epilogue is ambiguous, leaving open many different possibilities of what happens in Stevie’s life. Does it matter that readers are left with this uncertainty? Why or why not? What do you think follows the events in this book for the different characters?

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