

Handmaidens of Rock

Linda Gould

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Handmaidens of Rock is an energetic and enjoyable exploration of the fears, hopes, and dreams of a wartime generation.

Linda Gould's *Handmaidens of Rock* reimagines the Summer of Love period, resulting in a pleasurable trip through an era of uncertainty, and affirming that there was not a right or wrong way to survive the late sixties and early seventies.

Through a series of chaotic, emotion-filled events, a troop of high school kids are transformed into a loose tribe of artistic adults, linked together forever by their adventures. This hazardous journey is rife with action, at times seeming almost too fantastic for one group of friends to experience in such a short span, but the result is an exciting narrative in the spirit of rock and roll.

The novel centers on a chorus of three contrasting women—Candy, Hope, and Theda—whose rivalry with one another in a male-oriented culture ultimately gives way to a kind of vague solidarity. Their presence on- and offstage shapes the book's trajectory as personal plans for fame and career satisfaction compete with their partners' aims of musical dominance and draft avoidance.

Dueling forces of love and violence hang in the air as the group travels to the United Kingdom under the guise of a student trip; soon they are caught up in a journey that includes writing an album at the famed Apple Records, setting off a riot, and seeking the shelter of a guru at his commune. Still further antics follow on the American West Coast, culminating in a bizarre and life-altering weekend festival.

Topics from the war to sexual and reproductive freedom are filtered through the creative and social exploits of the cast, generating friction and narrative conflict between God-loving American Christians, wild and possibly satanic Brits, and a broad swath of others seeking answers to life's mysteries, all in between concerts, plays, articles for alternative newspapers, and the characters' love lives.

Handmaidens of Rock examines the many options for rebellion that were open to artistic, middle-class women, offering insight into their push against authority. Gould's use of different voices allows space for divergent inner thoughts and interpretations to come through. Characters exist on a spectrum. None emerge as a pure moral compass or heroic icon.

Despite the populous cast, characters do not read as stereotypes, though depictions of their experiences with the drug culture surrounding the music scene are unenthusiastic, at times bordering on inauthentic.

Gould's writing is straightforward and to the point, colored with lively dialogue which is particularly evocative. The action-filled narrative, combined with Candy's, Theda's, and Hope's interpretations of these events, gives the novel greater depth. Two epilogue chapters bring the book back to where it began for a satisfying conclusion.

Handmaidens of Rock is an energetic and enjoyable exploration of the fears, hopes, and dreams of a wartime

generation, a nostalgic novel that remains relevant today.

PATTY COMEAU (March 6, 2017)

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