

## *The Outlander*

### **Synopsis:**

On a moonlit night in 1903, a mysterious young woman flees alone across the Canadian wilderness, one quick step ahead of her pursuers. Mary Boulton is nineteen years old, half mad, and widowed – by her own hand.

Tearing through the forest with dogs howling in the distance, she is desperate, her nerves burning, and she is certain of one thing only – that her every move is being traced. Two red-headed brothers, rifles across their backs, lurch close behind her: monstrous figures, identical in every way, with the predatory look of hyenas. She has murdered their brother, and their cold lust for vengeance is unswerving.

As the widow scrambles to stay ahead of them, the burden of her existence disintegrates into a battle in which the dangers of her own mind become more menacing than the dangers of the night. Along the way, the steely outlaw encounters a changing cast of misfits and eccentrics. Some, like the recluse known as ‘The Ridgerunner’, provide a brief respite from her solitude; others, like the Reverend Bonnycastle, offer support only to reveal that they too have their own demons raging inside. As she is plunged further away from civilisation, her path from retribution to redemption slowly unfurls.

A startling transformation of the classic western narrative, *The Outlander* is the haunting tale of one young woman’s deliberate journey deep into the wild.

### **Questions for discussion:**

- Mary is largely referred to as ‘the widow’ throughout the novel. What is the significance of this? How does this, and her young age, affect the way we perceive her?
- Mary is only one of many characters who are haunted by their pasts. At one point, Mary feels ‘defeated again by an imagined thing’. How does this contrast with the way other characters deal with their demons?
- Mary is repeatedly haunted by nightmares of her past. What role do dreams and memory play in the novel?
- Mary’s surroundings are increasingly dominated by men. How does this affect her behaviour?
- ‘She had often been an insomniac, alone in a house of sleepers’. Mary’s circumstances change dramatically throughout the course of the novel, but how much do her physical surroundings affect her mental state?
- What role does religion play in the book? How does it influence characters’ interactions with one another?

- The *Guardian* said that 'there are echoes of Cormac McCarthy' in this novel. To what extent is this comparison true?

- '*The Outlander* is a transformation of the classic Western narrative'. What genre would you say *The Outlander* fits into, and in what ways, if any, does it push the boundaries of that genre?

- How far do you sympathise with Mary, and to what extent do you think she was justified in killing her husband?