

Discussion questions for *Mistress of the Ritz*

SPOILER ALERT: Please read the book before reading these questions.

1. What is your overall opinion of Blanche Auzello? Do you find her a sympathetic character? In what ways does she change during the course of the novel? And how is she affected by her imprisonment, in particular?
2. What is your overall opinion of Claude Auzello? Do you think on balance that he's a good and loving husband to Blanche?
3. Did the Hotel Ritz come alive for you? Did it seem as if the hotel itself was a major character in the book? If so, why? How does reading a book set in one specific location compare to reading a book that uses multiple settings? How does this enhance or distract from the characters and their stories?
4. How do you feel about the way Claude served the German officers at the Ritz during the war, doing his best to please them. Do you think he could or should have treated them differently?
5. What do you think of Blanche's friend Lily? Is she a likeable character? Why or why not? What is it that she has to offer that Blanche is attracted to? Do you think her effect on Blanche is positive or negative?
6. Why do you think the author wrote the novel in alternating chapters, from Claude's and Blanche's perspectives? What did she achieve with this structure that a standard third person narration would have lacked?
7. What did you come away from the novel thinking about Coco Chanel? About Ernest Hemingway? With recent allegations of Chanel's activities during the war (her alleged collaboration with the Nazis, her antisemitism), how does this change your opinion of her? How do we separate the art from the person in light of this and other more recent examples?
8. Why do you think Claude and Blanche keep it a secret from each other that they are involved in the Resistance?
9. Readers learn a great deal about Paris during the German occupation from reading this novel. What are the overall impressions that you came away with after being immersed in that setting? Did the author enable you to feel the threat and fear that Parisians, especially Jews and other vulnerable groups, lived under during that time?

- 10 Why do you think Blanche would routinely get so drunk at the Ritz Bar with Lily, upsetting Claude and making a scene? What is it that makes her do this, and did you sympathize with her at all?

- 11 What do you think of Blanche and Claude's fate, as revealed in the book's Epilogue? Do you find it surprising, given that they both survived and had each other after the war, when so many couples were not so blessed? Or do you think there is a kind of tragic logic to it?