

Fates and Furies Study Guide

Fates and Furies by Lauren Groff

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Plot Summary

“Fates and Furies” is a literary fiction novel by Lauren Groff which follows the marriage, love, and trials of Lotto and Mathilde Satterwhite. Lotto and Mathilde first meet in college. Following the death of their father, Lotto and his little sister Rachel are raised by their mother, Antoinette, and by their paternal aunt, Sallie. Mathilde is raised by her uncle in America after her parents abandon her following an accident where, at four years old, she opened a door to allow her toddler brother to leave the bedroom he was napping in, only to fall down the stairs, break his neck, and die. Lotto befriends twins Chollie and Gwennie, and a gay Asian boy named Michael, all of whom get Lotto into drugs. Mathilde deals with her issues by shutting others out.

In college, reeling from the overdose death of Gwennie, Lotto decides to commit suicide but stops when he sees Mathilde. Instead, he asks her to marry him, determined to completely change his life for her. Mathilde, who barely knows of Lotto, agrees to marry him. They quickly fall in love and do very well at marriage. This surprises their friends, who believe it will only be a matter of time before they are divorced. They are all proven wrong as the marriage grows stronger over time. Antoinette, however, is furious that her son would marry without her knowledge. She and Mathilde are instantly set against one another. Antoinette believes that Mathilde is only interested in the family fortune, and also knows that Mathilde’s aunt has mafia connections, so she offers Mathilde money to leave Lotto. Mathilde refuses.

Mathilde goes on to inspire Lotto to become a playwright when his acting career never pans out. Lotto composes numerous plays, the first of which are produced with financial backing from Mathilde’s uncle when Mathilde threatens to oust her uncle’s illegal art collection. The plays ultimately speak for themselves, and Lotto thrives. She and Lotto purchase a home in the country beyond New York. Just as things seem perfect, Chollie appears with news that a gallery owner named Ariel had a sexual affair with Mathilde for four years while she was in college, part of the time during which she was dating Lotto. Lotto is stunned by this and the near-simultaneous death of his mother. He dies of a broken heart at 46 years of age not long after.

Mathilde is devastated. Chollie confronts her, explaining that he had sought revenge against her for taking his friendship with Lotto away by marriage, and by not being good enough for Lotto due to her affair, and when she refused to give Lotto children. Mathilde’s relationship with Ariel was one of business. She gave him sex for college tuition money. Mathilde seeks revenge by hiring a private investigator to uncover evidence of Chollie’s own affairs, causing his wife to leave him. She also prepares to expose his investment firm as a Ponzi scheme. However, the discovery that Gwennie did not die of an overdose but rather committed suicide from depression after giving birth to Lotto’s son when she was seventeen, after being paid hush money by Antoinette, causes Mathilde to reverse course. Rather than destroying what remains of Chollie, she puts him in touch with Lotto’s illegitimate son.



Fates: Chapters 1 – 5

Summary

Chapter 1 – 22 year-old Lotto and Mathilde are at the shore in Maine in May after being married that morning. They have sex on the beach. Lotto has dealt with much loss and people abandoning him in his life, so he hopes the marriage to Mathilde will mean they will be together forever. Mathilde tells him no one belongs to anybody, but that they belong together.

Chapter 2 – This chapter occurs in the past. Lotto Satterwhite, short for Lancelot, is originally from Florida, born in the late 1960s to wealthy parents named Gawain and Antoinette. Lotto was so nicknamed by his Aunt Sallie who didn't want Lotto to be beat up at school. Sallie was Gawain's sister, having first introduced him and Antoinette while Antoinette was working as a mermaid and seeking a job as Cinderella at the new Disney theme park in Orlando. Gawain and Antoinette married not long after. Antoinette was deeply religious, and instilled strong faith in Lotto as a child. Gawain was killed when a sinkhole opened up beneath him, leaving Antoinette with Lotto and pregnant with a second child who would be named Rachel. Antoinette soon after sold everything to put the money in a trust for her children, though Lotto felt betrayed at losing his original home.

At their new home, Lotto befriended a gay Asian boy named Michael, an intense girl named Gwennie, and her fat twin brother named Chollie. The three of them got Lotto into drugs, who began to use them to medicate against feelings of loss for his father. Lotto and Gwennie were arrested for having sex in the bushes at a party years later, after which Lotto went on to college in New Hampshire. There, he got into theater, and was unnerved by the hanging suicide of a theater kid nicknamed Jelly Roll and news of the overdose-death of Gwennie. Lotto then descended into drugs and sex with as many girls as he could get his hands on. On the verge of suicide, Mathilde appeared in his life. He vowed to put his past behind him. His first words to her were a marriage proposal, which she accepted.

Chapter 3 – This chapter occurs in the present. Lotto and Mathilde have now been married five weeks and live in New York's West Village. Lotto reflects on how he is still learning things about Mathilde, such as how she is allergic to sushi, has no family, and endured abuse as a child. Chollie, Natalie, and Danica arrive for the housewarming party. Natalie explains to Chollie and Danica that Lotto's family owns Hamlin Springs Bottled Water. Among the guests at the party is college acquaintance Samuel Harris, son of a shady U.S. Senator. Word comes that West and East Germany are on the verge of reuniting. Lotto enjoys the party, and decides they will have one every year in June. Rachel, now 8 years old, suddenly arrives. Lotto and Mathilde are furious with themselves for having forgotten Rachel was due to visit.



The autumn rolls around. Susannah brings rumor to Mathilde that Kristina from the a cappella class has committed suicide. Mathilde is preparing for a role as a teenager in a television show, while Lotto has had a series of small acting jobs here and there. Their marriage grows stronger, which surprises and earns the admiration of their friends. Chollie and Danica don't think it can last, and take bets on when the divorce will occur. At a Halloween party, Lotto sadly overhears Mathilde asking Susannah to do what she can to get Lotto some acting gigs. Chollie, meanwhile, has gone into real estate.

Five years into the marriage, the magic seems to be dying for Lotto. Mathilde does not seem as attractive to him anymore. When Luanne calls Mathilde a fake at a party, Lotto leaps to Mathilde's defense. It reinvigorates the marriage. It is now 1999. Rachel is now in high school. She and Aunt Sallie urge Lotto and Mathilde to make up with Antoinette, who has not seen them in years over the elopement. Danica loses the divorce bet, having bet that Mathilde and Lotto would be divorced by 1998. Mathilde reassures Lotto this will be his year, that he is meant to be a playwright, while Lotto realizes once again how beautiful his wife is. Now 30, Lotto worries he is a failure, but is hopeful he may become a playwright.

Chapter 4 – Beginning with “The Springs” in 1999, Lotto comes into his own as a writer of plays, often inspired by his wife. By the mid-2000s, Rachel has graduated college, broken up with her girlfriend Elizabeth, and has married a man. By 2008, Lotto and Mathilde move to the country with their newly-earned wealth.

Chapter 5 – Pushed over on the street in the city, Lotto must spend the summer recovering. He and Mathilde talk about having children. She finds Lotto to be agreeable while he is recovering, for he is neither depressed nor overly energetic like normal. Lotto finds himself ever more sexually attracted to her. They have a Fourth of July party at which Lotto comes to discover he likes most of his friends less and less as time passes. Chollie and Danica have married, but Danica is having an affair with Arnie. Lotto cannot understand how marriage seems so cheap to some people. To keep Lotto entertained, Mathilde buys him a Shiba Inu puppy that Lotto intends to name “dog” but says “God” instead. The puppy then becomes known as God. Lotto's fortieth birthday rolls around. She takes him to see an opera about Nero, which inspires Lotto to collaborate with Leo Sen, writer of the Nero opera.

They meet at an arts residency party. Days pass, but Leo refuses to sit down and talk things over with Lotto because Leo says he is working on an important commission. At last, they get to talk at length and decide to do a retelling of “Antigone.” Lotto focuses on his work, forgetting about Thanksgiving, and making Mathilde unhappy. He learns that Rachel is back together with Elizabeth. He comes to deeply regret missing out on Thanksgiving with family and friends, and becomes depressed over the next several days. Things are made worse when the music Leo has written for the project doesn't match or fit what Lotto has envisioned. Lotto returns home soon after. Leo drowns himself that winter, which shocks Lotto.



Analysis

“Fates and Furies” is a literary fiction novel by Lauren Groff which follows the marriage, love, and trials of Lotto and Mathilde Satterwhite. Lotto and Mathilde first meet in college. From the start of the novel, the theme of marriage becomes central to the plot as Lotto and Mathilde have recently been married. The marriage between Lotto and Mathilde is the central event around which the plot of the novel will revolve. The marriage itself is an elopement and occurs before college has even officially ended.

Marriage means something different to both Lotto and Mathilde, though their views are somewhat similar. Lotto views marriage as a way for him to belong to Mathilde, and for Mathilde to belong to him. Mathilde herself sees marriage as a belonging together. For both of them, however, marriage means not having to be alone anymore. Abandonment and being alone have been critical to each of them, with their pasts fueling how deeply important marriage is in the present to them.

Mathilde’s own past will be reflected upon later in the second half of the novel, while Lotto’s past is explored in the first half of the novel. The structure of the novel should be noted here as being in two major parts. The first half revolves primarily around Lotto, the second around Mathilde. This reflects both the theme of marriage and the theme of theater. A marriage makes a whole of two separate individuals, while the novel makes a whole of two separate stories. In theater, two-act plays are common and popular, so the two halves of the novel reflect two acts that form a complete play.

Likewise, the title of the novel—“Fates and Furies”—draws from two important elements of theater. Fate is often a common theme in plays, and fate is something that simply seems to occur to Lotto without much say from him. Lotto seems consigned to fate, from the death of his father to the death of Gwennie, and later in the novel, to the death of his mother. However, Mathilde refuses to accept fate, becoming a fury—a creature or person bent on vengeance—much later in the novel. Indeed, it is the fates of Lotto’s past that make marriage so important to him in the present.

The marriage between Mathilde and Lotto is seen as only temporary by friends. Chollie and Danica, who later end up married themselves to one another, take bets on how long the marriage between Lotto and Mathilda will last. Both are wrong in their assumptions that it will not last. Lotto comes to sadly reflect on the marriage between Chollie and Danica when he discovers Danica is cheating on Chollie. Lotto is discouraged by the fact that so many people don’t take marriage seriously, and don’t value it for all that it can be.

Lotto’s marriage to Mathilde ends up being tremendously beneficial to him. Unable to secure stable or even good work in theater as an actor, Lotto is encouraged by Mathilde to try his hand at writing plays. Lotto, inspired and encouraged by his wife, commits to writing plays and succeeds wildly in the process. Everything seems to be going well for Lotto, except when it comes to family. He cannot get his mother and Mathilde to see eye-to-eye. He believes it is primarily due to his mother’s concerns about Mathilde wanting only the family fortune, and his mother’s unhappiness at the elopement. He



wishes his family was more complete, that his mother in addition to his sister and his aunt would be a part of his life. The truth behind why his mother refuses, and why Mathilde refuses, will be revealed in later chapters.

Discussion Question 1

How do Lotto and Mathilde each view marriage? Who do you believe is correct? Or do you believe both are correct? Explain.

Discussion Question 2

In what ways does marriage come to benefit Lotto early on, especially with respect to theater? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast the attitude toward marriage that Lotto and Mathilde have with the way that Rachel, Danica, and Chollie view marriage. How do these differing views help or harm those who hold them? What do you believe this says about marriage at large? Explain.

Vocabulary

extravagance, consummation, exigent, gobliness, paradox, undulating, languorously, hallux, unperturbed, audible, mollifying, ostentatious, nonchalance, trite, vapid, planar, omniscient, beatifically, impromptu, lyricism, exuberant, allegorical, druthers, misandry, misanthropy, ignoramus, fraudster, narcissist



Fates: Chapter 6 – 10

Summary

Chapter 6 – Mathilde realizes how great “The Antigonalad” could have been had Leo not drowned himself. She then reads through the opera, which is a modern, modernist retelling of the play.

Chapter 7 – Leo is part of a four-person panel on the future of theater. When domestic life is put down, Leo points out that people who create are so narcissistic that they assume their way of living is the model for all others. He says wives are better human beings than their husband creators. While this earns wild applause, his noting of traditional gender roles and functions, such as women bearing children, does not go over well with the audience. One of the female students calls him a misogynist afterwards. Lotto is devastated to learn his words have hurt Mathilde as well, though he doesn’t regret articulating his beliefs. Mathilde explains his words carry a lot of weight, and that he must choose them more carefully.

Chapter 8 – Lotto writes many more successful plays through 2013 and 2014, including “Telegony,” which melds together all forms of art theater. While Antoinette never sees any of these plays in person, she reads about them and watches them on DVD. In “The Bats,” Lotto bases the character of Livvie, a murderer, on Mathilde. Mathilde is horrified at this. Lotto tells her not to become hysterical, which she points out comes from the word “hystera” for “womb.” She takes it as an insult but later makes up with Lotto. She explains she is also upset that he has based characters on her friends. She decides never to read Lotto’s unfinished play, “The Sirens,” since it is based on all the women that Lotto knows.

Chapter 9 – Lotto’s mother has now been dead for five months. At a gallery one night, a middle-aged man and a younger man talk about how the middle-aged man once had Lotto for an understudy at “Shakespeare in the Park”. Chollie offers the young man two hundred bucks to accidentally dump wine on Mathilde. The young man agrees. This allows Chollie to speak with Lotto and a man named Ariel, which allows Chollie to reveal that Ariel and Mathilde had a four year-long affair. This horrifies Lotto.

Chapter 10 – Lotto goes to Florida to his mother’s house to find the power has been turned off. It breaks Lotto’s heart. Nothing seems the same now that his mother is dead. He has visions of his mother and father. He contemplates an affair to get even with Mathilde, but knows he cannot do this to her. Instead, he contemplates forgiving her.

Analysis

Family continues to be an important theme in this section of the novel. Mathilde and Antoinette still do not come to terms, with the result being that Antoinette goes to her grave refusing to make peace. Lotto is devastated by the death of his mother, and by



knowledge that his family was fractured to the very end. Lotto finds it difficult to accept that his mother and Mathilde could never see eye to eye. Here, the theme of perception becomes important as well, as Mathilde and Antoinette see their dispute from different perspectives, just as Lotto and Mathilde come to marriage with different ideas.

However, marriage itself—the one thing that Lotto has held sacred and inviolable—has now become trampled for Lotto. Lotto is consigned to fate once more. Fate is presented through Chollie's revelation of an important past event. Here, the past becomes crucial as it is discovered that Mathilde had a four year sexual relationship with Ariel. The situation raises many questions, such as why Chollie would decide in such a time and place to make the truth known.

The news compounds the devastation Lotto experiences following his mother's death, and propels him into an existential crisis. Nothing seems right anymore without his mother being alive, or without the sanctity of his marriage upheld. Lotto becomes horribly depressed, and considers everything from suicide to an affair to get back at Mathilde. Instead, he ultimately comes to the conclusion that he will probably simply forgive her.

The structure of the novel here should also be noted. Traditional two-act plays involve a high point as well as the signal for decline in the first act, followed by a climax and outcome in the second. In this case, in the first part of the novel, Lotto's success at work and the closeness in their marriage is seen as the high point of the novel. This is soon after followed by the death of Antoinette and the discovery of Mathilde's unfaithfulness, the mark for decline. Because Lotto is beholden to fate as the title of his part of the novel indicates, nothing will be able to prevent the decline. Fate will take Lotto where it will.

Discussion Question 1

What two tragic events occur which deeply devastate Lotto? Are these events matters of Lotto's own doing, or do they seem to be fate? Explain.

Discussion Question 2

How does Lotto attempt to understand his mother's death based on the antagonism that existed between his mother and his wife? Why?

Discussion Question 3

How does Lotto respond to the death of his mother? How does Lotto respond to news of Mathilde's unfaithfulness? Which seems to hurt him more? Why?

Vocabulary

countertenor, imperceptible, transliterating, asinine, stigmatical, inexplicably, compunction



Furies: Chapters 1 – 9

Summary

Chapter 1 – Mathilde feels very old and lonely since Lotto has died. Chollie reveals to Mathilde that Gwennie's own death years before had not been an overdose, but a suicide.

Chapter 2 – This chapter occurs in the past. Mathilde's early life had always been awash in grief. Her name was originally Aurelie, her father was a stonemason, and her mother was a fishwife. At the age of four, she let her toddler brother out of the bedroom in which he was napping, after which he fell down the stairs, broke his neck, and died. Her parents didn't want anything to do with her after that.

Chapter 3 – This chapter occurs in the present. Thousands of people attend Lotto's funeral. Aunt Sallie cares for Mathilde as she attempts to cope with Lotto's death. She reflects on being faithful to Lotto, and believes Lotto has been faithful to her as well.

Chapter 4 – This chapter occurs in the past. Mathilde had heard of Lotto's sexual exploits in her time at Vassar College for years. It was during a party that she first met Lotto and was attracted to him instantly. She was purely, genuinely happy with Lotto for a time. She originally spoke with Lotto's mother by phone, who did not like Mathilde from the start, from Mathilde's lack of going to church to her uncle's shady history to the elopement. Antoinette believed that Mathilde was merely in it for the money. Antoinette even offered to pay Mathilde to leave Lotto, but Mathilde refused. Mathilde told Antoinette she would do everything she could to keep Lotto away from her until Antoinette apologized.

Chapter 5 – This chapter occurs in the present. Time seems to stand still without Lotto, and nothing seems to matter anymore. She becomes angry, which drives many people away. Enraged one night, she runs her car into a heifer, killing it. She rails about how she is too young to live out her life without loving again, but then knows she can't simply fall back into love with someone else.

Chapter 6 – This chapter occurs in the past. Aurelie was sent to live with her maternal grandmother, the only relative willing to take her in. At eleven, Aurelie returned home from school to discover her grandmother had died. Years later, as Mathilde, her professors marveled at how minimal her French accent was.

Chapter 7 – This chapter occurs in the present. To ease her pain, Mathilde begins sleeping with every man she can. She has also shaved off all her hair. She remembers how she went to Thailand for Thanksgiving without telling Lotto when Lotto refused to come home for Thanksgiving while collaborating with Leo. She also remembers how when Lotto came home, she tied him to the bed to dominate him in sex to have the feeling of power and control.



Chapter 8 – This chapter occurs in the past. At the age of 11, Aurelie when to live with a wealthy uncle in America. Aurelie told her American teachers and friends she went by “Mathilde,” thinking of a strong, cool girl at school in Paris. Being Mathilde allowed Aurelie a new leash on life. Whereas Aurelie had been quiet and timid, Mathilde was tough and capable. After she turned 12, her uncle legally adopted her. At 14, her uncle revealed her parents had new children, and that he would not pay for her to go to college because she would never become something without struggling to earn the things in her life.

Chapter 9 – This chapter occurs in the present. The only person who continues to seek Mathilde out is Rachel. Rachel sees Mathilde as family and will not be driven away. A young man named Land, short for Roland, comes to visit and pay his respects to Mathilde. He says Mathilde is Lotto’s untold story, the mystery. They then have sex.

Analysis

As the second part of the novel begins, Mathilde’s own past is finally revealed in chapters the alternate between the past and the present, with asides to the future. The theme of perception becomes very important as Mathilde’s own past plays heavily into her attitude toward marriage. Mathilde has endured abandonment from an early age, beginning at the age of four with the incident with her brother’s accidental and tragic death. Belonging to someone means the possibility of being abandoned, and Mathilde cannot tolerate this. She would rather belong with someone because that would mean should could not be abandoned in the same way again.

As it is revealed, Lotto’s perception of why his mother and wife refuse to speak to one another is vastly different than Mathilde’s perception. While Lotto can understand his mother’s concern about his life, he has no idea about the truth behind her concern. As it is revealed, the antagonism between Mathilde and Antoinette stems from Antoinette’s offer of payment for Mathilde to leave Lotto. An impasse occurs between wife and mother, and so Mathilde—rightly or wrongly must be determined by the reader—conspires to keep her husband away from his mother. And Mathilde makes this clearly known to Antoinette, fueling the situation even further.

Mathilde, as a child, had such little control over her own life that in her new life in America, she sought all the control she could attain as soon as she could attain it. This includes the changing of her name and changing her personality. Likewise, her uncle’s taking in of Mathilde is seen more of a dutiful obligation rather than an act of familial love. While this teaches Mathilde independence and self-reliance to some degree, it also demonstrates that Mathilde cannot count on family for anything, truly. Family to Mathilde is nonexistent, which explains why it is so easy for her to threaten Antoinette by withholding Lotto from her.

However, Mathilde only belatedly comes to understand that family does exist for her, primarily in the forms of Rachel and Aunt Sallie. Mathilde has been consumed with such thoughts of hatred for Antoinette, and with such thoughts of bitterness about her past,



she fails to see the chance she has with family in front of her before it is almost too late. Indeed, it is ultimately Rachel alone who refuses to be driven away by Mathilde following Lotto's death. Rachel continues to keep Mathilde company, and to care for her, despite Mathilde's lashing out. It is something that Mathilde never had early in her life, but only belatedly comes to recognize and appreciate in the present.

Discussion Question 1

What is the truth behind why Antoinette and Mathilde refuse to speak to one another? Is either woman right or wrong in their actions? Or is either woman fully right or fully wrong? Explain.

Discussion Question 2

Why does Mathilde never tell Lotto the truth about why she will have nothing to do with Antoinette, and why she tries to keep Lotto away from Antoinette? Is Mathilde right in doing so? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

How does Mathilde's past affect her attitude toward marriage and toward family? Does this ultimately help or hinder her in the present? Explain.

Vocabulary

animally, interment, elided, refutation, immediacy, existential, premonition, sanguine, incomprehensible, dissimulate, remonstrate, preternatural, leonine, anneal



Furies: Chapters 10 – 18

Summary

Chapter 10 – This chapter occurs in the past. When she was 16, Mathilde truly came to understand her uncle was part of some kind of criminal syndicate in Philadelphia. On the train to college, she first met Ariel, wealthy and single. In exchange for college tuition, she agreed to have a sexual relationship with him.

Chapter 11 – This chapter occurs in the present and in the past. Mathilde gives away the dog to the neighbors so she can truly be free at home. In the past, Chollie was jealous of what Lotto and Mathilde had because it took away from the friendship he had with Lotto when they dated and then married. He followed her to discover her affair with Ariel. Chollie decided to wait to “explode” Mathilde’s life for her treachery.

Chapter 12 – This chapter occurs in the past. Mathilde held the body of Lotto until all the warmth had left it.

Chapter 13 – This chapter occurs in the present. Chollie comes to visit Mathilde under the auspice of checking up on her since no one has heard from her in a while. It is then that he reveals he told Lotto about Mathilde’s affair prior to his death, which in turn makes Mathilde understand why Lotto had been so depressed before death. Mathilde asks about Chollie’s timing. Chollie explains that his own family was horrible, and Lotto was the only good thing in his life. He wanted Lotto to have everything, including children, but Mathilde could not have children. Chollie anticipated that Lotto would divorce Mathilde, find a younger, prettier wife, and have children with her. Chollie then leaves. Mathilde is furious and grief-stricken.

Chapter 14 – This chapter begins in the past. Mathilde met Aunt Sallie and Rachel on Graduation Day. She came to like them immediately. She even gave Rachel a \$10,000 emerald necklace, originally given to Mathilde by Ariel. When Mathilde is 60 years old, she learns that Ariel has pancreatic cancer, and goes to visit him in the hospital.

Chapter 15 – This chapter occurs in the present. Mathilde hires a private investigator to look into Charles “Chollie” Watson, and the Charles Watson Fund, an investment brokerage firm. Mathilde explains she thinks the Fund is a Ponzi scheme, and that she wants to destroy Chollie personally and professionally.

Chapter 16 – This chapter occurs in the past. While sleeping with Ariel, Mathilde had also worked for him at his gallery. Only a few years after marrying, and with child, Mathilde scheduled an abortion and sterilization for herself so she could never have children.

Chapter 17 – This chapter occurs in the present. Mathilde continues to meet with her private investigator. Mathilde purchases her old family home in France and has it razed to the ground.



Chapter 18 – This chapter occurs in the past. Mathilde delighted in helping her husband's creative play-writing process. She financed her husband's early plays by blackmailing her uncle for funds over his illegal art collection, and never told Lotto the truth. Over time, this was no longer necessary as Lotto's work took off on its own.

Analysis

The Past becomes a central theme in this section of the novel as it relates to Chollie and Mathilde. Chollie at long last reveals not only his own past (an unhappy childhood) but his role in what led to Lotto's depression before death. Chollie's jealousy and rabid loyalty to Lotto led him to keep the secret of Mathilde's infidelity until everything was perfect for them. Mathilde realizes in this instance that she has become a victim of fate rather than an arbiter of her own destiny. She vows vengeance on Chollie, and so becomes the fury of the second half of the novel.

However, the past continues to haunt Mathilde, and the past is recounted in alternating chapters. Here, the theme of perception becomes critical because Mathilde does not view her sexual arrangement with Ariel as cheating because it was a matter of business rather than an emotional affair. Lotto and Chollie, however, rightfully view the sexual arrangement as infidelity because it violates the sanctity of relationships and marriage. Chollie's loyalty and jealousy, however, increase the despicableness of the crime to him, leading him to wait 20 years to seek revenge on Mathilde for what she did to him and to Lotto. While Chollie's actions may be morally questionable, Mathilde's actions can be considered unquestionably wrong.

Many of Mathilde's actions can also be brought into question by the reader, including Mathilde's assertion that in marriage, people belong together but not to each other. Because marriage is therein a matter of equal partnership, decision-making is important. Both parties must be present in decisions. Her decision to have an abortion and sterilization were done without Lotto's knowledge or input, which confuses Mathilde's conception of marriage as belonging together. Likewise, the reader will question Mathilde's attempts to keep Lotto away from his mother despite seeing his pain and desire to be visit his mother, especially when Mathilde experienced the same kind of heartache as a child.

Discussion Question 1

Is Chollie morally culpable for Lotto's death? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Chollie wait 20 years to tell Lotto about Mathilde's infidelity? Is Chollie morally wrong for having kept the secret so long, or having told the secret at all? Why?



Discussion Question 3

Mathilde does not consider her sexual arrangement with Ariel infidelity. Is she right or wrong? Explain.

Vocabulary

efficacious, academia, dawdled, vividly, emanating, incarnation, exasperation, blaspheme, pathological



Furies: Chapters 19 – 25

Summary

Chapter 19 – This chapter occurs in the present. Mathilde begins going for longer and longer runs. Running helps her cope. She returns home from running one morning to find the private investigator waiting. She has found much information out about Chollie, including numerous affairs.

Chapter 20 – This chapter occurs in the past. Mathilde made good on her promise to keep Lotto away from his mother by suggesting they delay a trip to Florida until he landed his first big role and citing financial difficulties. When Lotto had a job, traveling became impossible; when he didn't have a job he didn't have money to travel. Mathilde vowed never to be controlled again after her sexual arrangement with Ariel. Years later, a day after giving away God to the neighbors, Mathilde took the dog back.

Chapter 21 – This chapter occurs in the present. The private investigator reveals to Mathilde that what she has uncovered for Mathilde will put Chollie in federal prison. Mathilde reveals to the private investigator that in a few days, she will begin using photos against Chollie. Mathilde resumes control of her husband's creative estate from his agent, knowing the only place she can find Lotto is in his work. Meanwhile, Mathilde puts her plan into action by attending a birthday party thrown by Danica and Chollie. She tells Chollie that his plan would never have worked, that Lotto would never have left her, and that Chollie is less than nothing. She leaves photos wrapped for Danica, who then leaves Chollie. Rachel and Sallie visit to catch up with Mathilde. They reveal that Antoinette had Mathilde investigated, and that they stopped her from contacting Lotto about Mathilde's life, abortion, and sterilization. They also reveal that Roland is the son of Lotto and Gwennie.

Chapter 22 – This chapter occurs in the present. Mathilde is both stunned and grateful for what she has learned. She learns it was the Asian boy, Michael, who first introduced drugs to Lotto's group of friends. She also learns that Antoinette gave Gwennie money to remain silent. She learns that after Gwennie gave birth, she gave the baby up and later committed suicide from depression. Mathilde decides not to ruin Chollie's business, but to put him in touch with Roland.

Chapter 23 – Two years after Lotto's death, Mathilde goes to see Land in New Jersey where he plays Caliban in a production of Shakespeare's "The Tempest." She is inspired to write her own play under a pseudonym, but no one comes.

Chapter 24 – Mathilde reflects on a version of her childhood where she was told by a cousin she pushed her baby brother down the stairs. Mathilde doesn't know what the truth is, but feels horribly to this day about it. All she knows is that before the incident, she had been loved, while afterward, love had been taken away.



Chapter 25 – Mathilde remembers her own rushed wedding in Poughkeepsie, with a custodian and a man walking his dog as witnesses. Mathilde’s only regret in life is that she had refused to let so many people in, that she hadn’t been sweeter and kinder like her former self. But even as the good Mathilde rather than as the adventurous Mathilde, she knows she would have said yes to Lotto’s proposal of marriage instantly.

Analysis

In the final section of the novel, Mathilde becomes a full-fledged fury. Having hired a private investigator, Mathilde now has the power in her hands to completely destroy Chollie’s life, both personally and professionally. She finds out that, like Danica, Chollie has not been faithful in marriage. His numerous affairs are demonstrated to Danica through photographs; Danica thereafter (somewhat hypocritically given her own unfaithfulness) leaves Chollie. Chollie is enraged and vows revenge.

Mathilde also learns that Chollie’s company is nothing more than a Ponzi scheme. Her desire for revenge, and indeed her status as a fury, is only abated by the discovery that Chollie is an uncle—and that Lotto is a father. It is learned that Gwennie became pregnant by Lotto, but was paid hush money to keep the baby quiet. Having learned the truth about Roland, Mathilde finally has a moral awakening of sorts, determined that no one should be without family. Chollie is then put in touch with Roland rather than having his business destroyed.

In order to move on, Mathilde relies heavily on her own past. The past becomes essential to Mathilde’s actions. Knowing the importance of family, Mathilde would rather see Lotto’s son with family than destroying what family remains, even if that family is a shady uncle, much like Mathilde’s own uncle. Mathilde is also able to move beyond Chollie’s endeavors to destroy her marriage by reflecting on who Lotto was. She knows in her heart—as does the reader—that Lotto would have forgiven her for the past. This means that Chollie’s plan would never have worked.

Interestingly enough, the reader should note that Mathilde’s surrendering of her place as a fury is by no means a surrender to fate, but rather is an acknowledgement that she need not be seeking revenge to be in defiance of fate. Her decision to reunite Chollie with Roland is entirely an act of free will. This is in large part attributable to her love of her marriage, and her love of Lotto, as it is to deference to the past.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Mathilde ultimately decide not to destroy Chollie’s life completely? Does Mathilde do this for the right or the wrong reasons? Explain.



Discussion Question 2

Why did Mathilde keep so many things secret from Lotto, including her abortion, sterilization, affair, and the reason for being at odds with Antoinette? Is Mathilde right or wrong in having do so? Explain.

Discussion Question 3

Evaluate Mathilde's understanding of marriage given the revelation of much of her past in the second part of the novel. Is Mathilde's idea of marriage as a belonging together, as a partnership, genuinely held by Mathilde? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

eviscerated, stigmata, defenestrated, abated, ornate, intimated, ostensibly, perfidy, rigidity, nom-de-guerre, exponential, officiant



Characters

Lotto

Lancelot “Lotto” Satterwhite is the wife of Mathilde, the son of Antoinette, the older brother of Rachel, and the nephew of Sallie. Lotto is a native of Florida, heir to a water bottling fortune, and is deeply haunted by the untimely death of his father. As a teenager, he befriends Chollie, Gwennie, and Michael, and gets heavily into drugs, sex, and alcohol through them. He has a son by Gwennie, though he never learns about this because his mother pays to keep Gwennie quiet. In college, Lotto becomes suicidal when he learns of Gwennie’s death, but is brought back when he sees Mathilde. His first words to Mathilde are a proposal of marriage, which she accepts. The two are married by the end of college.

Lotto does away with his reckless past, commits himself wholly to marriage, and comes to believe he will never be alone again with Mathilde by his side. She becomes his inspiration and moral support as he moves into writing plays, becoming wildly successful. Nevertheless, he has long been troubled by the refusal of both his wife and mother to visit one another in person. He is deeply affected when his mother dies. He later learns through Chollie and Ariel that Mathilde had a four year sexual affair with Ariel, leading him to even greater depression and death from a broken heart.

Mathilde

Mathilde, originally named Aurelie, is a native of France. She is the wife of Lotto, the daughter-in-law of Antoinette, the sister-in-law of Rachel, and the niece-in-law of Sallie. At the age of four, Mathilde opened the door to the bedroom where her toddler brother was napping, where soon after, her brother fell down the stairs and died. Her parents refused to have anything further to do with her, so they abandoned her to Mathilde’s maternal grandmother. Following her grandmother’s death, Mathilde moved to America where she began to call herself “Mathilde” after a tough and independent girl she attended school with years before. In America, she lived with an uncle who refused to help her through college. In turn, she began a four-year sexual business arrangement with Ariel, a gallery owner, in exchange for college tuition and other gifts. Upon meeting Lotto, she immediately accepts his proposal of marriage, though her arrangement with Ariel was discovered by Chollie.

Mathilde deeply loves Lotto, and thrives in her marriage. Antoinette despises Mathilde, thinking she is up to no good and seeks only the family fortune. Mathilde refuses to have anything to do with Antoinette as a result, and conspires to keep Lotto away from her. Mathilde becomes Lotto’s source of inspiration and moral support in his work as a playwright. She is later devastated by his sudden death, only later learning his heartache was brought about by Chollie’s revelation regarding her sexual arrangement in college. She vows revenge on Chollie, outing his marital infidelity and ending his



marriage. She stops short of destroying him professionally when she discovers that Lotto had a child covered up by Antoinette. Rather than destroying the rest of Chollie's life, Mathilde arranges a reunion between Lotto's son and Chollie.

Chollie

Charlie "Chollie" Watson is the twin brother of Gwennie, the unfailingly loyal friend of Lotto, and the husband of Danica. Chollie and Gwennie grew up in difficult circumstances with terrible parents. Chollie came to view Lotto as the brother he never had, and the only real family he had after Gwennie committed suicide. Chollie becomes jealous of Mathilde and how she seems to take Lotto away from him, so he follows her one day when she goes into the city. There, he discovers her sexual affair with Ariel, and waits more than two decades to reveal it in revenge. Chollie's own infidelity is outed by Mathilde. Chollie threatens revenge, but calms down when he is reunited with Roland, his long lost nephew.

Danica

Danica is a friend of Lotto and Mathilde's from Vassar College, and later wife of Chollie. Danica and Chollie do not get along well at first, rubbing each other the wrong way. Danica ultimately falls for and marries Chollie, but their marriage is a sham. Both cheat one another throughout the marriage. When Dana learns about the extent of Chollie's cheating, she leaves him.

Antoinette

Antoinette is the mother of Lotto and Rachel, and the sister-in-law of Sallie. Antoinette is a deeply patient, caring, and loving woman who puts her family before all else. She is highly suspicious of the elopement of Lotto and Mathilde, and suspects that Mathilde may only want Lotto for the family fortune. She decides to offer Mathilde money to leave Lotto, but Mathilde refuses and vows to keep Lotto away from Antoinette. For the rest of her life, Antoinette will have nothing to do with Mathilde.

Rachel

Rachel is the daughter of Antoinette, the sister of Lotto, the sister-in-law of Mathilde, and the niece of Aunt Sallie. Rachel admires and even lives with Lotto and Mathilde at various points throughout the novel. She is a loving and loyal sister to Lotto and to Mathilde, doing her best to remain by their side even when things with Antoinette get bad. Rachel falls in love with a girl named Elizabeth, but following their breakup, marries an unnamed man whom she later leaves for Elizabeth once more.



Aunt Sallie

Aunt Sallie is the sister-in-law of Antoinette and the aunt of Lotto and Rachel. Aunt Sallie is a sweet, kind, and patient woman who does her best to keep communication between Lotto and Antoinette open. Sallie later becomes Mathilde's only true caregiver as she deals with Lotto's death.

Gwennie

Gwendolyn "Gwennie" Watson is the mother of Roland, former girlfriend and lover of Lotto, and sister of Chollie. Having grown up in bad circumstances, Gwennie quickly found her way into drugs. Pregnant with Lotto's child, she was paid hush money by Antoinette to give the child up. Riddled with depression and unhappiness, Gwennie committed suicide.

Land

Roland "Land" Watson is the illegitimate son of Gwennie and Lotto. Land comes to visit Mathilde under the premise of paying his respects, but ends up sleeping with Mathilde. Land is later reunited with his uncle, Chollie, and pursues a career in theater.

Michael

Michael is a gay Asian boy who befriends Gwennie and Chollie and gets them into drugs. When the trio befriend Lotto later on, they too get him into drugs. In the drama that goes down surrounding Lotto, Gwennie, Chollie, and their use of drugs, Gwennie Michael makes himself scarce.



Symbols and Symbolism

Bottled water

Bottled water is the source of wealth for the Satterwhite family, who own the company Hamlin Springs Bottled Water in Florida. The bottled water industry is huge, making the Satterwhites billionaires and being heavily influential in Florida. Throughout the novel, various characters guess at the Satterwhite family fortune, but only a few such as Chollie know that it can be traced to bottled water.

Illegal drugs

Illegal drugs are taken by Lotto, Chollie, Gwennie, and Michael early on in the novel. The illegal drugs are first introduced to the group by Michael. Lotto, Chollie, Gwennie, and Michael get heavily into drugs to such an extent that it becomes scary to Lotto. Lotto cleaves to marriage as a way to cut off his past, including drugs.

Plays

Play scripts are written by Lotto from his early thirties through the rest of his life. The scripts are inspired and encouraged by Mathilde after Lotto comes to believe that theater is not his direction in life. Mathilde explains that although acting may not be Lotto's forte, writing just might be. She turns out to be correct. Lotto's scripts ultimately earn a handsome income for himself and Mathilde, leading to the purchase of a house in the country.

Volumina

"Volumnia" is the only play written by Mathilde. It is written after Lotto's death, and is an attempt by Mathilde to move her life in a new direction. However, whereas Lotto could write but not act, Mathilde can act but not write. The play is a critical and commercial failure, its subject matter never mentioned in the novel.

Wine

Wine is consumed at gallery openings and dinner parties in the novel. While at an opening at Ariel's gallery, Chollie pays a young man to accidentally spill wine on Mathilde's dress. This gives Chollie the opportunity to speak with Ariel and Lotto, leading to the revelation of Mathilde's college sexual arrangement with Ariel.



Paintings

Paintings are illegally collected by Mathilde's uncle in Pennsylvania. She discovers the secret trove of paintings while she is a teenager, and later uses the knowledge to her benefit. She blackmails her uncle into funding Lotto's early plays, until Lotto's success truly becomes his own.

Photographs

Photographs of Chollie in bed with various women are taken by the private investigator that Mathilde hires to seek vengeance on Chollie. Mathilde leaves the photographs at Chollie's house for his wife, Danica, to find following a birthday party. Danica discovers the photographs, causing her to leave Chollie the following day.

Research

Research is conducted by Mathilde's private investigator and Antoinette's private investigator. Mathilde's private investigator turns up research that Chollie is having numerous extramarital affairs, and that his investment firm is actually a massive Ponzi scheme. Mathilde acts on the affairs, but ultimately refuses to act on the Ponzi scheme in order to reunite Chollie with his nephew. Antoinette's research demonstrates Mathilde's uncle's mafia connections, which in turn concerns Antoinette tremendously. She doesn't believe Mathilde is right for her son, and worries that Mathilde may only be interested in the family's wealth. This leads to Antoinette's offer of a million dollars to leave her son, which Mathilde refuses.

Tuition

Mathilde is in desperate need of tuition money as she begins Vassar College. Her uncle has refused to finance her, saying his familial obligations have been completed now that she is 18 and out of a desire to teach her independence. Mathilde then enters a sexual arrangement with Ariel wherein she will give Ariel sex in exchange for his financial support and tuition money in college. It is an arrangement that comes back to haunt Mathilde two decades later.

Birth certificate

A birth certificate is uncovered by Mathilde's private investigator through her researching Chollie. The birth certificate is for Roland Satterwhite. It demonstrates that Roland is the illegitimate son of Lotto and Gwennie. The birth certificate convinces Mathilde not to seek revenge against Chollie's business, but to reunite Chollie and Roland instead.



Settings

Vassar College

Vassar College is a liberal arts college located in Poughkeepsie, New York, with a very strong arts program. It is the school attended by Lotto and Mathilde, where both study theater. It is at Vassar that Mathilde begins a sexual business arrangement with Ariel, trading sex for tuition. It is also at Vassar that Mathilde and Lotto first meet the night Lotto contemplates suicide. There Lotto proposes marriage Mathilde, and Mathilde accepts. It is early during their relationship and marriage that Mathilde continues her sexual arrangement with Ariel, which Lotto learns about years later.

New York City

New York City is the largest city in the United States, and is located in the State of New York. It is known for its commercial and cultural nature. Lotto and Mathilde move to New York after marrying and graduating from college. They spend much of the next two decades there, as Lotto fails at a career in acting but succeeds at a career in writing plays. Mathilde also slowly lets her aspirations to act slide away as she comes to relish helping her husband to be successful. When Lotto does become very successful, Lotto and Mathilde leave New York for the country.

Hudson Valley countryside

The country of the Hudson Valley becomes the new home of Lotto and Mathilde following their departure from New York after Lotto has achieved sustained success in play writing. Here Lotto continues to work. From the country, Lotto and Mathilde visit the city on occasion. Lotto looks forward to a quiet life in the country, but is devastated when he learns not only of his mother's death, but Mathilde's infidelity years before. Lotto becomes depressed and dies of a broken heart in the country. Mathilde continues to live in the country long after Lotto's death, because it keeps her isolated.

France

France is the home country of Mathilde. Following the accident in which her brother is accidentally killed falling down some stairs, Mathilde's parents abandon her to an aunt in Paris. Mathilde is ultimately sent to live in the United States with her uncle following the death of her grandmother. Because Mathilde is only a child when she immigrates to the United States, her accent does not carry over across the Atlantic.

Florida

Florida is a state located in the southeastern corner of the United States of America. Florida is noted for its warm climate and beautiful shorelines. It is at the shore that Lotto and his family live early in the novel. Florida is also home to Hamlin Springs Bottled Water, the company owned and operated by the Satterwhite family, making them billionaires. Antoinette continues to live in Florida long after the rest of her family members have left, and ultimately dies in Florida. Lotto visits Florida following his mother's death, only to become even more depressed by the time he returns to New York.



Themes and Motifs

Marriage

Marriage is an important theme in the novel “Fates and Furies” by Lauren Groff. In the novel, it is primarily the marriage of Lotto and Mathilde which garners attention, but it is also the idea of marriage in general, and the marriage between Danica and Chollie which merit consideration as well. Marriage is central not only thematically, but to the plot of the novel itself.

The marriage between Lotto and Mathilde is nearly instantaneous, and makes up the plot of the novel as the novel revolves around their marriage. Lotto’s first words to Mathilde are a proposal of marriage, which she accepts. They date for two weeks before deciding to elope. The marriage, by any standards, is quick. Antoinette believes Mathilde has designs on the family fortune, and so offers to pay Mathilde to leave Lotto. Mathilde refuses, because she truly does love Lotto. Their friends believe the marriage will not last more than a few years. They are all proved wrong as the marriage lasts until Lotto dies.

The marriage itself grows stronger all the time. Marriage, as the narrator explains Mathilde’s position, isn’t a question of adding one and one together, but of exponential growth. Marriage helps people to grow as individuals, and in love with one another. The love between Mathilde and Lotto grows so much over time that they can barely stand to be apart from one another for Thanksgiving. Mathilde encourages Lotto to try his hand at play writing when his career as an actor does not pan out. Mathilde herself becomes a source of inspiration to Lotto as he writes his plays. Marriage for Mathilde means that she will finally have someone who cannot abandon her the way her parents did. Marriage is also a reason to be better as a person for Lotto, for it gets him away from promiscuity, drugs, and reckless use of alcohol.

Marriage is a sacred thing to Lotto. This is in large part due to his faith as a Christian, but also in large part due to the model marriage his parents had. When Lotto is married, he cuts his past, consciously reminding himself he is a new person at several points. When he discovers Danica cheating on Chollie, Lotto contemplates sadly how many people don’t take marriage seriously. When Chollie reveals that he arranged for Lotto to learn about Mathilde’s infidelity back in college, Mathilde hires a private investigator to destroy Chollie’s marriage.

Family

Family is an important theme in the novel “Fates and Furies” by Lauren Groff. Family involves mutual love, compassion, loyalty towards, and emotional, spiritual, and physical support of individuals who may or may not be blood-related, but who still behave in the fashion of the traditional family unit. Family can be found consistently



throughout the novel, and family affects the plot of the novel in various ways. Family may be a very positive thing, or family may be a very negative thing.

For Lotto, family is initially a very positive thing. Lotto experiences firsthand how a marriage should be, not only from his mother's religious faith but from the marriage that his mother and his father have. Both parents are dedicated toward their children at the expense of all else. When his father dies, even though she doesn't have to, Lotto's mother sells everything but the family company off in order to ensure that her children will have even greater financial security down the road. Antoinette will do anything for Lotto and for Rachel. Rachel, in turn, looks up to and deeply admires her brother. Their Aunt Sallie becomes something of a surrogate mother to them later on when Antoinette is at odds with Mathilde.

Antoinette believes she is protecting Lotto when she offers Mathilde money to leave her son. She believes Mathilde is only interested in the family fortune, and worries about Mathilde's uncle's mafia connections. Likewise, it was Antoinette who paid Gwennie hush money about the baby she had by Lotto as a matter of protecting Lotto. However, Antoinette's unwillingness to come around after two decades—indeed through death—means that Lotto's love of family is ruptured because the two most important women in his life cannot come to terms.

For Mathilde, is a largely negative thing. As a 4 year old, Mathilde let her toddler brother out of the room in which he had been napping, after which he fell down a flight of steps and died of a broken neck. As a result, Mathilde's parents wanted nothing more to do with her, and so abandoned her. Only one relative was willing to take in Mathilde after that, her grandmother in Paris. Following the death of her grandmother, only her uncle in America was willing to take her, and he was involved in the mafia. Although he taught her to be independent, his utter lack of real compassion toward her, and his unwillingness to help her with school, hurt her deeply.

Theater

Theater is an important theme in the novel "Fates and Furies" by Lauren Groff. Theater—the art of dramatic action on a stage—not only heavily informs the plot of the novel, but also lends itself to the novel's title as well. In theater, fate in human life is often explored, while furies are traditionally mythological creatures or people seeking vengeance. When it comes to Lotto and Mathilde, Lotto is predisposed to fate while Mathilde becomes a fury.

Lotto and Mathilde both aspire to be actors in college. Life after college proves to be difficult, more so for Lotto than for Mathilde. While Lotto is able to find only periodic small jobs, Mathilde has better and better successes, though no real breakthrough roles. Eventually, she decides to encourage Lotto to write plays rather than star in them. She becomes his greatest supporter, influence, and inspiration, even blackmailing her mafia uncle for funds to produce Lotto's early plays. Whereas Lotto is consigned to his fate as a non-actor, Mathilde is the fury who drives him on to a new area of theater.



Lotto ultimately becomes successful based on the merits of his work, and he is able to give Mathilde a beautiful house in the country. However well things seem to be going in his life, he cannot get over the fact this mother and his wife will not see one another. He is soon thereafter devastated by his mother's death, and by news of Mathilde's infidelity with Ariel while in college. These are things which he can do nothing about, and so is consigned to them as fate. Lotto himself succumbs in heartache to these things, and soon after dies.

Mathilde learns that Chollie had set off the final straw that led to her husband's depression and subsequent death. Mathilde herein emerges principally as a fury, actually vowing vengeance against Chollie by destroying his marriage and his business. To this end, she hires a private investigator who reveals Chollie is having numerous affairs. Mathilde exposes the affair, wrecking Chollie's marriage. However, Mathilde decides not to destroy Chollie's business when it is discovered that Lotto had a son named Roland by Gwennie, with Roland being Chollie's nephew. Here, she would rather help fate take its course than rail against it.

The Past

The Past is an important theme in the novel "Fates and Furies" by Lauren Groff. Thematically, the past—incidents, events, situations, and circumstances in a person's history—can largely affect the present. The past has tremendous bearing on the novel in various ways, especially when it comes to Lotto and Mathilde as both are haunted by the past.

Tragedy begins at an early age for Lotto when his father is killed in a sinkhole, and the family home is sold. Lost and reeling, Lotto falls into the wrong lifestyle, using drugs, sex, and alcohol to medicate his pain. Lotto begins a relationship with Gwennie, but this does not last. Gwennie bears Lotto a son, but this son is never known about until decades later (this will affect Mathilde rather than Lotto) because Antoinette pays Gwennie hush money. Gwennie's subsequent death also traumatizes Lotto to the point of near-suicide, stopped only by Mathilde. Mathilde's presence in Lotto's life means marriage, and means having someone who will never leave him.

Tragedy for Mathilde also begins at an early age. When she is four, Mathilde lets her toddler brother out of the room in which he is napping, only for him to fall down the stairs, break his neck, and die. Horrified, Mathilde's parents abandon her, wanting nothing more to do with her despite her age. She is abandoned to a grandmother in Paris who dies thereafter. Mathilde is then sent to live with her uncle in America. Her uncle has mafia connections and has no real sense of family beyond mere obligation. He refuses to help her with college. Mathilde feels unloved and alone, and seeking a way to pay for college, begins the four year sexual exchange with Ariel that will ultimately be used by Chollie against Mathilde.

Both feeling abandoned in many respects, Mathilde and Lotto cleave to one another so that their lives will be complete, and so that they will never have to be alone again. Their



reliance on one another, and their love for one another, strengthens their marriage and helps them to grow as people. The past drives them to make a better present, to prepare the way for a better future. Mathilde's past sexual arrangement comes back to haunt her as Chollie makes possible its revelation, leading Lotto to severe depression and death from a broken heart. Mathilde, upon discovering that Lotto had a son, decides not to expose and destroy Chollie's business, but to put Chollie in touch with the son, bringing the past into focus by way of the present.

Perception

Perception is an important theme in the novel "Fates and Furies" by Lauren Groff. Perception here is essentially what is believed to be true or what is understood based on information available to someone. Perception matters greatly in the novel, especially when it comes to Mathilde and Lotto. Just as marriage forms two halves in a whole, so too do two halves of an experience form a whole story.

The novel itself is divided into two halves. The first half deals primarily with Lotto's perception of events, while the second half deals primarily with Mathilde's perception of events. The first half of the novel not only deals with Lotto's understanding of things, but his history and his life as well, from childhood through death. Mathilde's section of the novel deals with events and experiences from her childhood through her old age in the future.

For Lotto, marriage is a way to avoid being abandoned, a way to find love, and a way to be completed. Mathilde shares these sentiments. However, while Lotto sees marriage as a means of belonging to one another, Mathilde sees marriage as a belonging together. Whereas Antoinette feels shut out of the marriage process by the elopement, and whereas Antoinette worries that Mathilde is only after the family money based on her uncle's involvement with the mafia, and based on the fact that Mathilde is without much money, Mathilde perceives Antoinette to be a horrible and unkind person. Neither can understand the perception of the other. This leads to Antoinette going to her grave without ever seeing Mathilde in person.

Perhaps the greatest errors of perception occur as a result of Mathilde's sexual arrangement with Ariel. Though this occurred while in college, and while Mathilde was dating Lotto, she believes she was never unfaithful to him despite the fact she was having sex with someone else. Chollie perceives this to be cheating, though his revelation to Lotto is more retribution against Mathilde for monopolizing Lotto's time than anything else. Lotto himself considers Mathilde's actions to be cheating, and this in turn leads him to depression and death.

Styles

Point of View

Lauren Groff writes her novel “Fates and Furies” from the third-person limited omniscient perspective, focusing primarily around the characters of Lotto and Mathilde in their respective sections of the novel. The third-person narrator acts as a unifying voice between two different sides to the same story, but also allows the author to explore and create greater depth for other characters, such as Antoinette and Chollie. This is also in keeping with the theme of perception in the novel, where different people may take away different ideas from the same situation or event, such as Mathilde’s sexual arrangement with Ariel. The limited-omniscient aspect of the narration further provides for greater emphasis on perception and perspective, as the reader is given different sides to the same story, and must make up his or her own mind in the end.

Language and Meaning

Lauren Groff writes her novel “Fates and Furies” in language that is simple and straightforward. This is done for at least two reasons. First, the vast majority of the novel takes place in the after the year 2000. The language of contemporary America is quick, casual, and to-the-point. Because the characters in the novel exist in a post-2000 America, the language they use is reflective of the time in which they live, and adds a sense of realism, believability, and authenticity to the story. Secondly, because the novel was published in 2015, it is only natural the language used to write the novel be reflective of the day and age in which it was written.

Structure

Lauren Groff divides her novel “Fates and Furies” into two major parts, or halves, with each part being subdivided into chapters. Part I of the novel is entitled “Fates” while Part II is entitled “Furies”. The structuring of the novel is reflective of both the theme of marriage and the theme of theater. Just as marriage creates a whole of two halves, so too does the novel create a story based on two sets of experiences, those of Lotto and Mathilde. In the world of theater, two-act plays involve a high point and usually the signal for decline (in this case, Lotto’s success at work and the closeness in their marriage followed by the death of Antoinette and the discovery of Mathilde’s unfaithfulness) in the first act, followed by a climax and outcome in the second (Mathilde’s plotting of revenge against Chollie). Likewise, whereas Lotto seems consigned to fate in the first section of the novel (the death of his mother and father, Mathilde’s unfaithfulness, etc.), Mathilde herself becomes a fury bent on revenge in the second half of the novel, where she endeavors to destroy Chollie.



Quotes

Marriage meant forever.

-- Narrator (Fates, Chapter 1 paragraph 6)

Importance: Having been married in secret, Lotto and Mathilde are at the shore in Maine. Lotto, who has dealt with loss and people falling away from him in his life, hopes that his marriage to Mathilde will be different. He cannot imagine ever losing her or being without her, which is why marriage has been so important to him. Marriage means she is his forever.

Lotto felt sick that matrimony could seem so cheap to some people.

-- Narrator (Fates, Chapter 5 paragraph 74)

Importance: Chollie and Danica surprisingly end up married. Danica, however, goes on to cheat on Chollie which makes Lotto reflect sadly on how some people can take marriage for granted. Lotto's own marriage to Mathilde is a strong and good marriage, and it is something to which Lotto is wholly committed.

It could have been so great.

-- Mathilde (Fates, Chapter 6 paragraph 9)

Importance: Mathilde here comments on the opera that Lotto and Leo had been writing over the fall and early winter. The project is cut short when Leo drowns. Mathilde remarks sadly that the opera could have been so amazing, but there is a potential here never realized. The statement is ironic when considered with Lotto, for Mathilde herself has given Lotto the inspiration to be great. Without her, his work is not fully realized; only through her is his work truly masterful. This demonstrates just how much Mathilde means to Lotto.

Sometimes people who create are so narcissistic we assume that our way of living is the jewel in the crown of humanity... and wives are far better human beings.

-- Lotto (Fates, Chapter 7 paragraph 6)

Importance: Here, Lotto is part of a four-person panel on the future of theater and argues that being a housewife is not necessarily a bad thing. He points out that creative people become so self-absorbed they look down on anyone who isn't like them or who doesn't live the way that they do. He goes on to say that wives are far better people when it comes to them and their husbands.

The lights were dead as, well. As dead as his mother.

-- Lotto (Fates, Chapter 10 paragraph 12)

Importance: Visiting home after the death of his mother and after learning of his wife's four year-affair, Lotto is devastated. He discovers that the power to his mother's house has been shut off, which becomes a physical manifestation of how the lights in Lotto's



own life have left him. He no longer feels he has his wife with him, and he knows he no longer has his mother with him, either. It is one of Lotto's lowest points in his 40-some years on earth so far.

I've looked so old ever since my husband-
-- Furies, Chapter 1 (Mathilde paragraph 6)

Importance: While out walking around, Mathilde receives cat calls from a group of young men in a car. The young men stop and speed away when they see Mathilde's face and realize how old she is. Mathilde feels horrible about this, knowing she looks a wreck since her husband has died.

Mathilde was not unfamiliar with grief. That old wolf had come sniffing around her house before.

-- Mathilde (Furies, Chapter 2 paragraph 2)

Importance: Here, the narrator explains that Mathilde's life tragedies did not begin with the death of Lotto. Tragedy began many years earlier. At the age of 4, Mathilde had let her toddler brother out of the bedroom at his grandmother's house in which he had been sleeping, only for him to fall down the stairs, break his neck, and die. This is merely the first of many tragedies that will befall Mathilde over the course of her life.

Time, after Lotto died, swallowed itself.

-- Narrator (Furies, Chapter 5 paragraph 1)

Importance: After Lotto dies, Mathilde is devastated and heartbroken. The past and present bear heavily on her all at once. She feels lifeless and lost, and cannot imagine how she will carry on. Days blur into weeks, and nothing feels right without Lotto. This demonstrates just how much Mathilde truly loved Lotto.

The only one who returned and returned and returned was Rachel.

-- Narrator (Fates, Chapter 9 paragraph 1)

Importance: After the death of Lotto, Mathilde becomes despondent and angry. She drives away her friends and loved ones, all except for Rachel. Rachel returns time and time again to visit with Mathilde, to bring her food, and to care for her. Rachel does this out of family love and loyalty, and provides a genuine compassion that Mathilde is otherwise lacking.

Fine, Chollie thought. You'll see how well I can wait. When you're least expecting it, I will explode your life.

-- Narrator/Chollie (Fates, Chapter 12 paragraph 31)

Importance: Chollie, Lotto's oldest friend, discovers Mathilde is having an affair very early on in her relationship with Lotto. It is a sexually-based business arrangement, where Mathilde trades sex for tuition with Ariel. Chollie, angered at having his friendship



with Lotto impinged on by someone who is dishonest, plots revenge and waits more than two decades to deliver it.

The only place that Lotto could be seen anymore was in his work.
-- Narrator (Furies, Chapter 21 paragraph 15)

Importance: As Mathilde puts her plan for revenge against Chollie into action, she also takes over the business end of her husband's writing estate once more. She misses Lotto terribly, and takes over the business side of his legacy in writing because she knows she will find him in the things he has written and has left behind. Taken altogether, these form who Lotto was.

It was mathematical, marriage. Not, as one might expect, additional. It was exponential.
-- Narrator (Furies, Chapter 25 paragraph 1)

Importance: Here, the narrator speaks to the consequences of marriage. Marriage isn't merely about adding one person and another together, but is about the love, growth, and new horizons that come with marriage. Marriage makes people better than who they were, and allows them to grow and reach new heights.