

THE WATERMARK

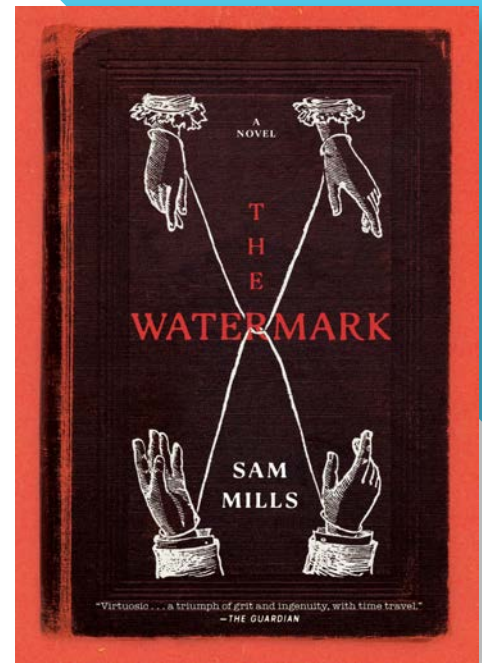
Sam Mills

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“ This time-hopping meta-fiction has the madcap energy of a Philip K. Dick story ... Mills’s protagonists treat their absurd bind with absolute seriousness. Farce on the outside, tragedy within.” —*The Times (London)*

“ If you are a fan of geeky, metafictional gameplay — and really, why wouldn’t you be — then Mills’s dazzlingly inventive genre-hopping caper will keep you pleurably on your toes ... a reckless disquisition on the reality-distorting consolations of fiction and story-telling ... Mills’s vaulting ambition delivers huge brain-addling rewards.” —*Daily Mail*



INTRODUCTION

A quirky, literary love story like no other, one that veers wildly from contemporary Britain to Soviet Russia to a bizarre but recognizable future, from one of the UK’s hottest young novelists...

Rachel and Jaime: their story isn’t simple. It might not even be their story.

Augustus Fate, a once-lauded novelist and now renowned recluse, is struggling with his latest creation. But when Jaime and Rachel stumble into his remote cottage, he spies opportunity, imprisoning them inside his novel-in-progress. Now, the fledgling couple must try to find their way back home through a labyrinthine network of novels.

And as they move from Victorian Oxford to a utopian Manchester, a harsh Russian winter to an AI-dominated near-future, so too does the narrative of their relationship change time and again.

Together, they must figure out if this relationship of so many presents can have any future at all.

The Watermark is a heart-stopping exploration of the narratives we cling to in the course of a life, and the tendency of the world to unravel them. Kaleidoscopic and wildly imaginative, it asks: how can we truly be ourselves, when Fate is pulling the strings?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you make of the section of the book set in the future? Does it seem plausible to you? What elements of it seem likely, or unlikely, and why? Is it a dystopia? A utopia? What do you think Mills is trying to say about our future?
2. In one section of the novel, Mills writes, “Closing my eyes, I listen, for Fate’s narration has always been loudest in church...God sleeps” (pg. 143). What is Mills trying to communicate about the connection between fate and religion?

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3. In one section, Jaime reflects, "Fate's book gave me the chance to know what it's like to have a good dad - one who loves you. Of course, I swear that bastard only did it so that he could destroy me by killing him off . . ." (pg. 187). What does this sentiment show? In what ways do the themes of imprisonment and identity intertwine in the narrative, and how do the distinct settings reflect the characters' inner conflicts or growth?
4. What is the significance of the text in each story having a different typeface? The graphic elements between chapters? What effect do these have on the reader?
5. How do the main characters' relationships with their mothers play into the novel? What does this communicate about mothers in general?
6. Feminism is a source of discussion between the two main characters throughout the novel. How does this discussion play into the story?
7. The POV is switched throughout the novel between the two main characters. How does this contribute in representing their relationship?
8. How does the theme of juxtaposing death and rebirth manifest throughout the novel, and what significance does it hold for the overall narrative?
9. How is consciousness portrayed in the novel? Why is it so important?
10. What is the role of art in the novel? How does this contribute to representing the main characters? Their relationships with one another?
11. How does the novel explore the tension between fate and free will? Are Rachel and Jaime's actions truly their own? Or are they completely manipulated by Augustus?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sam Mills is the author of *The Quiddity of Will Self*, along with three young adult novels, including the award-winning *Blackout*. Her memoir about being a carer, *The Fragments of My Father*, was published in 2020. Mills has written for a number of publications, including the *Guardian*, *Independent*, *3 AM* and *London Magazine*. She is the co-founder of the independent press Dodo Ink and lives in London looking after her father and cat.

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