

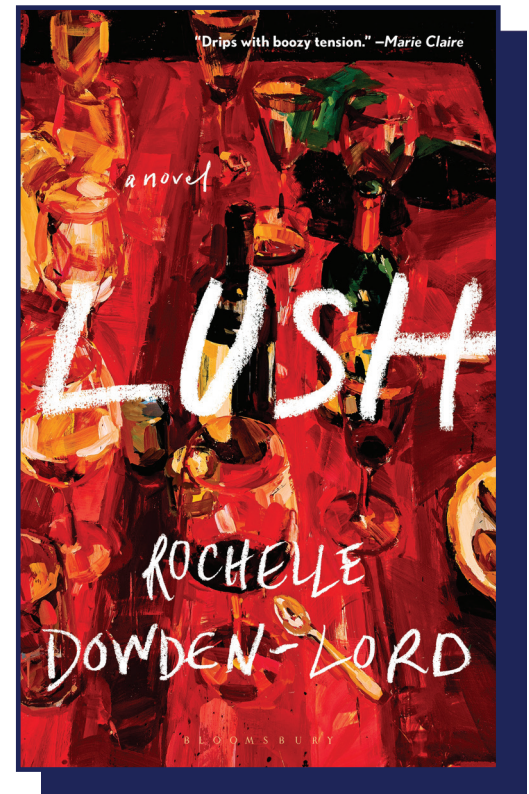


*Lush* by Rochelle Dowden-Lord

## Questions for Discussion

*Please note: Some of these questions might contain spoilers.*

1. Consider the epigraph. How do you feel it relates to the themes of the novel?
2. Why do you think the author chose to open the book with a chapter from Tao's perspective, as opposed to one of the four visitors or the Master himself? Discuss.
3. "Tao's husband thought about giving [the wine] to a museum at one point, but it felt too much like a waste, like turning a painting so it faces the wall (he said this to Tao as part of his pitch; it was a cruel metaphor for the man who saw brushes as extensions of his own hands)" (4). How else are art and wine compared to each other throughout the novel?
4. "Harry, the prematurely bald and so perpetually flat-capped restaurant manager, who calls her sommelière, neither her name nor her title, but a reminder of her tits" (10). How does the novel portray sexism in the wine industry? How are the women in the group, especially Avery, treated as compared to the men?
5. Maëlys says to Avery about her influencer Instagram: "But they cannot taste your wine, so the point is for the pictures to be pretty, no? More than it is for the wine to be good?" (48). How does the novel explore the gaps between social media versus reality—and idealized experience versus actuality?
6. "There's a certain binary in womanhood, where if friendship is not quickly cemented then rivalry and distrust bloom in the space" (50). Discuss the relationship between Maëlys and Avery, as compared to Avery and Sonny. What makes them different? Would you call Maëlys and Avery friends by the end of the book?
7. "Outside, she is comfortable. Inside she feels as though she must network, show her intelligence, secure her future" (84). What does success mean to each character? What are the different ways they work to achieve it?
8. How does the dynamic of the group change with the arrival of Maëlys's daughter, Noa?



9. For Sonny, wine is “about the excavation of the cork more than it is about the terroir . . . If you open a bottle with someone, it means you have, at least, an hour of their time” (97). What does wine mean to the other characters, including the Master and Tao?
10. “I like the word ‘lush,’ she says. It is like luscious, no? Something rich. If you are a lush, it seems it can only be a good thing” says Maëlys (218). How is the word “lush” working as the book’s title—do you think it’s a good fit for the themes of the novel?
11. “If they can find the right words, might the liquid inside the bottle be transfigured into something holier than they could imagine? Are they about to have a religious experience, made possible by their own piety?” (251). How else does wine act like a religion to the characters?
12. “She’s selling nothing . . . This column alone will be without capitalist influence. All she’s doing is telling a story. Once upon a time and never again” (250). Discuss the ways in which the novel explores the relationship between the pure enjoyment of wine and the capitalist industry surrounding it. In this way, do you think Maëlys’ and Avery’s work are similar?
13. In her article, Maëlys speculates on the Master’s selection of the group: “Perhaps the very reason that they were chosen was because they are imperfect” (306). Do you agree? Why do you think the Master selected the group?
14. Discuss the novel’s climax (or anticlimax). What kind of effect do you think it has on the characters, individually and as a group? How are they changed—or not changed—by the novel’s end?