



[The Dinner]

By Herman Koch

First published in 2009

Genre and Subject

Families -- Netherlands -- Fiction
Married couples -- Fiction
Teenagers -- Fiction
Dutch fiction -- Translations into English
Amsterdam (Netherlands) -- Fiction
Families -- Fiction
Mystery

Synopsis

An internationally bestselling phenomenon: the darkly suspenseful, highly controversial tale of two families struggling to make the hardest decision of their lives - all over the course of one meal. It's a summer's evening in Amsterdam, and two couples meet at a fashionable restaurant for dinner. Between mouthfuls of food and over the polite scrapings of cutlery, the conversation remains a gentle hum of polite discourse - the banality of work, the triviality of the holidays. But behind the empty words, terrible things need to be said, and with every forced smile and every new course, the knives are being sharpened.

Each couple has a fifteen-year-old son. The two boys are united by their accountability for a single horrific act; an act that has triggered a police investigation and shattered the comfortable, insulated worlds of their families. As the dinner reaches its culinary climax, the conversation finally touches on their children. As civility and friendship disintegrate, each couple show just how far they are prepared to go to protect those they love.

Tautly written, incredibly gripping, and told by an unforgettable narrator, The Dinner promises to be the topic of countless dinner party debates. Skewering everything from parenting values to pretentious menus to political convictions, this novel reveals the dark side of genteel society and asks what each of us would do in the face of unimaginable tragedy.

Author Biography

Herman Koch (born 1953) is an internationally bestselling author. The urgent essay help translation rights of The Dinner (2009) have been sold to over 55 countries, which is unprecedented for a modern Dutch novel. The Dinner has been adapted into several international stage plays and into a Dutch and Italian movie. The US movie adaptation of The Dinner will be screened in 2017, starring Richard Gere and Laura Linney. Summer House with Swimming Pool (2011) and Dear Mr M. (2014) are international bestsellers as well.

Discussion Starters

1. How did your opinion of Paul and Serge shift throughout the novel? How might the story line have unfolded if it had been told from a mother's point of view?
2. In what way do the courses of a meal—from aperitif to digestif—echo the experience of savoring a suspenseful novel? As the waiter described each delicacy in *The Dinner*, did the food appeal to you, or did you share Paul's belief that it was pretentious?
3. What do you think of the sympathy Paul and Claire feel for their son? As a parent, how far would you go to defend your child?
4. Do Michel and Rick represent the indifference of their generation, or are teenagers more socially conscious in the Information Age?
5. How much influence do Claire and Babette have over their husbands? How do they define good mothering?
6. The novel opens with Paul's commentary on how much Serge irritates him. What accounts for their attitude toward each other? Does Paul's animosity run deeper than typical sibling rivalry?
7. Discuss Paul's and Serge's career paths. What does it take to succeed in politics compared with succeeding in the classroom? What skills do the Lohman brothers share?
8. Ultimately, who is to blame for the homeless woman's death? What does the novel indicate about the responsibilities (or irresponsibility) of the upper class? What separates sympathetic souls from heartless ones?
9. Discuss the portrait of a marriage that Paul paints as he recalls Claire's illness and confronts the possibility of losing his family. Why is Claire so protective of Paul? What keeps their relationship going?
10. In chapter 30, we see the details of Paul's approach to history and humanity. As you watched him lose his teaching job, did you perceive him as someone who is ill or simply selfish? Or rational?
11. What does the story of cousins Michel and Rick say about nature versus nurture? How do you think Beau/Faso sees his adoptive family? What have they taught him about getting ahead?
12. How did you react to Claire and Michel's "solution"?
13. What commentary does the novel offer about the author's homeland? What aspects of *The Dinner* would change if it were set in Washington, DC, rather than in the Netherlands?
(Guide written by Amy Clements and issued by the publisher.)

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