

Book Club Discussion Prep: *The Dinner* by Herman Koch, Domestic Suspense

Book Club members: Jackie, Liz, Sarah, Bella

Bella's Notes:

- A brief overview of the book
  - Paul Lohman and his wife Claire join Paul's brother and sister-in-law for dinner at a high-end restaurant. The four have come together to discuss how to handle a messy situation created by their sons, though none are exactly thrilled to be forced to discuss the situation. As courses are served, familial tensions simmer, revealing prejudices and long-held issues that boil into just how far each is willing to go to keep their perfect, happy family together. Paul serves as our narrator.
- Brief author/illustrator background
  - Born in 1953, Dutch author Herman Koch has become an internationally known best-selling author. *The Dinner* has been sold in over 55 countries and has been adapted into stage plays and several different films. Koch's inspiration for *The Dinner* came to him at a dinner party in 2005. While a wide variety of topics surrounded him, he found himself inspired as the first two sentences of the novel popped in his head. He is of the opinion that the very DNA of a book can be found in the first two sentences. He currently lives in the Netherlands with his wife and son.
- Open-ended discussion questions (5-7)
  - What did you think about the implication of hereditary violence in regards to Paul and Michel's actions?

- Is it actually hereditary, or is violence something mimicked from a role model?
  - In this case, Paul's behavior in front of Michel throughout his life.
  - Yes, this is a nature vs. nurture question.
- Did the flashbacks to Paul's violent streak change your opinion of his character and his narration? Why or why not?
- What do you make of Claire's decision to not immediately tell Paul about Michel and Rick's involvement in the killing? Was she right in keeping the truth about that night hidden from him?
- Would bowing out of the election like Serge planned to do actually help Rick and Michel's situation? Serge seemed focused on Rick and his own distress with the murder. Do you think he cared about what would happen to Michel if he dropped out of the election?
- Why do you think Claire switched from "my son" to "our son" later on? (around page 237 and on).
  - As a note, she switches to "our son" after Paul chastises Serge for using "their" cafe for his press conference. Do you think this was a deliberate attempt to help get him on her side to attack Serge later?
- Paul reveals himself as unreliable throughout the book, especially when the time jumps begin more frequently. Were there any times when you weren't sure if what he thought was happening was accurate to reality?
- Brief descriptions of read-alikes (3)
  - *The Party* by Robyn Harding (Jun 2017)

- The sweet sixteen birthday party for Hannah Sanders goes horribly awry when one of her guests is seriously injured. As Hannah scrambles to face the consequences of that night amongst her peers, her parents find their own skeletons coming out of the closet as they attempt to deal with the ramifications of their daughter's actions in this domestic thriller.
- *Defending Jacob* by William Landay (Jan 2012)
  - Following the brutal murder of his son's classmate, Andy Barber finds himself switching from prosecution to defense when his son, Jacob, is charged for the crime. As the case unfolds, shocking revelations come out around the Barber family, who struggle to keep their crumbling world from falling apart. A courtroom thriller with domestic tension thrown in.
- *My Sister, The Serial Killer* by Oyinkan Braithwaite (Nov 2018)
  - Korede has grown used to cleaning up her sister's messes - messes being the boyfriends she keeps murdering. But when her sister sets her sights on the man Korede is infatuated with, she begins questioning the morality of what she has been doing. Torn between preventing his murder and remaining passive, Korede finds herself asking just how far she will go to protect her sister and just how much of the spilled blood rests on her own hands.
- BONUS (1 pt)-Prepare something interesting or unusual that you found out about the book/author/publication/setting/topic/history, et

- When Herman Koch hands over a new book to his publisher, he often [comments](#), "This is the book that will make readers stop talking about '*The Dinner*.'" This has yet to be true.