

The Dinner



Herman Koch

ISBN 9781925498578

RRP AUS \$22.99, NZ \$30.00

Fiction, Trade Paperback



Praise for *The Dinner*

'Funny, provocative and exceedingly dark, this is a brilliantly addictive novel that wraps its hands around your throat on page one and doesn't let go.' S.J. Watson

'What a tremendous book. I loved every single gripping and strange thing about it.' M.J. Hyland

'Herman Koch's *The Dinner* is a riveting, compelling and a deliciously uncomfortable read. Intelligent and complex, this novel is both a punch to the guts and also a tonic. It clears the air. A wonderful book.' Christos Tsiolkas

'In this exploration of how two families deal with an explosive event, *The Dinner* is reminiscent of Christos Tsiolkas's blockbuster *The Slap*.' Stephen Romei

About Herman Koch

Herman Koch was born in 1953. He is a successful actor, screenwriter and columnist in the Netherlands, and has written a number of satirical novels including *The Dinner* and *Summerhouse with Swimming Pool*.

A reader's introduction to *The Dinner*

The Dinner is a chilling contemporary novel set over the course of one sumptuous dinner at a fashionable establishment.

Paul Lohman and his wife Claire meet Paul's brother Serge and his wife Babette for dinner. Paul, a retired history teacher, is full of aggression, both towards the restaurant with its pretentious food and service, and towards his brother, Serge, the popular politician whose ambition is to become Prime Minister of the Netherlands in the forthcoming election.

As the evening progresses, it becomes clear that tonight's dinner will be even more difficult than usual. Hanging over the diners is the shadow of an event that has rocked the city: the cold-blooded killing of a homeless woman by two teenage boys, caught on camera. Boys Paul knows to be his son Michel and his brother's son Rick.

The two couples have met to discuss what their sons have done. They need to decide how far will they go to save their children from the consequences of their actions.

Questions for discussion

1. In the beginning of the novel we meet Paul and his wife Claire as they walk to the restaurant. Paul talks about his idea of happiness and quotes from Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. What do you think he means when he says that 'unhappiness can't stand silence'?
2. We learn that Serge and Babette adopted a child, Beau, from Burkina Faso. What do you think the underlying motivation was?
3. Paul's violent inclinations start to appear when he describes the holiday with his brother in France, where he imagines killing the Dutch people, mentioning violent American films such as *Deliverance* and *Straw Dogs*. Why do you think Paul feels this way?
4. When Paul finds out about what his son has done and confronts him in his bedroom, he remembers a scene when Michel was eight years old. How did this incident influence Paul's reaction now?
5. How and to what extent do you think Michel is influenced by his father's rage?
6. Serge Lohman is willing to sacrifice his entire political career in light of the crime that his son has committed. What do you think his real motive is? Why does his wife so vehemently oppose his decision?
7. The author has set the novel over a meal in a classy restaurant. What do you think he is trying to illustrate by this choice?
8. The novel reveals moral ambiguities regarding the nature of evil, loyalty, love and honesty. What shapes these ambiguities?



9. Do you think people can be born with a propensity for violence and evil, or are they more likely to be shaped by early life, family and circumstances?
10. If you were in Paul and Claire's position, what would you do?