



# Fall Reading with Fifteen Friends

BY: SHANNON LINDEN

With golden sunlight dancing across the changing landscape and a little nip in the Autumn air, I love to dive down under a duvet, out on my deck, a fat glass of red wine or creamy cup of coffee in one hand; a good book in the other.

What really enriches my reading is when the LOL get together to discuss our current novel. Now into our third season as a book club, we continue to relish one another's company (and happily devour the delectable spread of fine food and sumptuous sips) every monthly meeting brings.

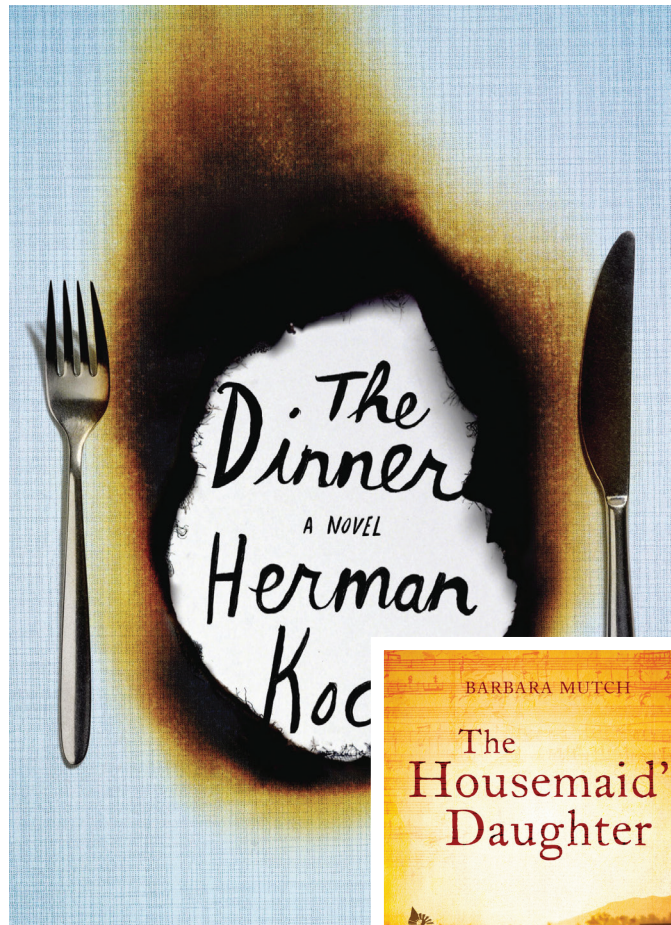
Take a look at what we've read this fall. Join us online ([shannonlinden.ca](http://shannonlinden.ca)) or follow us on Twitter (@LadiesOnLit). We'd love to hear

what you think of our books—and what you're reading. Pass along your passions for literature—and food and wine, too!

## THE DINNER By Herman Koch

LOL member, Laura Gosset, is more than an avid reader; she's an awesome writer. With a mystery novel in the works, she takes time to really weigh in on our reads—and write into my blog. She (and all of the LOL) had a lot to say about this controversial, international best seller by Dutch author, Herman Koch.

A superb pick for a book club, the story is set when two families meet under the pretense of dinner,

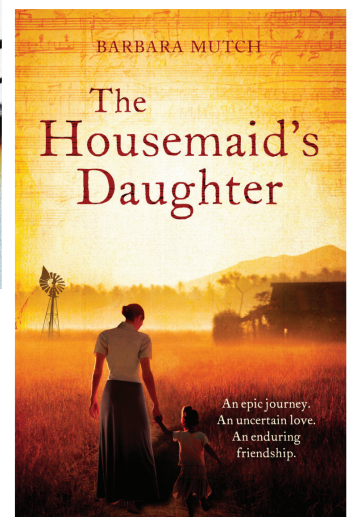


but are really there to discuss their sons' heinous crimes—video taped recordings of them brutally beating homeless people. Here's what Laura had to say:

This dark and disturbing read, with a cast of increasingly nasty fictional characters, brings a whole new meaning to, "Guess whose coming to dinner?"

During the aperitif, I admit I was on the side of the protagonist, Paul. I could identify with him as he

ruthlessly skewered the pretension of the swank, trendy restaurant and his seemingly shallow, insincere brother. His mocking and meandering musings were almost comical, although some of the other gals found them to be more tiresome than



funny, particularly that ominously hovering pinkie finger of the Maitre'D.

Other LOLers also claimed to have seen the real, loathsome Paul from the very first bite. But I did not. I naively believed him to be the persona he initially presented – a devoted husband and father and a rational, moderate individual. But even before the "main course" was served, I was beginning to doubt my preliminary judgment. And that is how it went through the entire book. Continually, I was forced to re-evaluate my conclusions in light of further evidence, masterfully revealed, layer-by-layer, by Herman Koch.

By the time the dame blanche had melted into the fancy linen tablecloth, and the ending had unfolded, there were still many questions left unanswered. And I think perhaps that is exactly what Koch intended – food for thought!

Personally, I think this book was about the measures a person is

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prepared to take to protect his or her family. You love your kids. You want to instill in them a strong set of values. But what happens when things go awry? How far are you willing to go to sweep things under the mat? To keep secrets? To protect them from appropriate consequences for their actions, particularly if those consequence will devastate them the rest of their lives?

I can't say that I enjoyed the book. But I can't say I wish I hadn't read it either.

**4.5/5 Cheers!**

## THE HOUSEMAID'S DAUGHTER

By Barbara Mutch

This book is an epic journey of friendship between two unlikely women: Cathleen Harrington, an Irish immigrant settled in South Africa in 1919, and her housemaid's daughter, Ada.

Bright, inquisitive, and eager to learn, Ada is a charming child and Cathleen takes to her, teaching her to read and write, and indulging



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Ada's immense talent for music with piano lessons. Before long Madam feels more connected to Ada than she does her own children.

When Ada grows into a young woman, becoming pregnant with a mixed race child, she fears she has betrayed her beloved Cathleen. Desperate to spare her Madam the disgrace that would descend upon her family if the truth were known, Ada flees the only home she's ever known, moving to the poor, black township.

The rising tides of apartheid conspire to keep Ada captive in poverty while ostracizing her daughter. Rampant racism gives way to escalating violence, yet Madam Cathleen never gives up looking for Ada.

Mutch's writing is lovely and lyrical, particularly descriptions of Ada's piano playing, and the way the music selections throughout the

book seem to echo the sentiments of the characters. I enjoyed this author's style and appreciated the immensity of the story, but I found her work too constant.

All of the LOL liked this novel, admired the writer's skill, and were moved by the women's friendship, but while the book is never boring, it's never exciting either. Given the drama of the day, I yearned for more spark in the story.

The characters are well developed and the division of blacks and whites is well described in Mutch's book. She masterfully weaves an intriguing plot, but for me, the passion of the place—and the people—was missing.

As the reader is taken through events like war and suicide, the shanty shacks of black townships versus the estate homes of the whites, the fierce fighting that erupted during apartheid, the

undercurrent that keeps it all together, is the story of Ada and Cathleen. Constant. Predictable. Despite the deep sadness and unending loss these women endure, their friendship lives on, surviving the most unforgivable odds.

It's quite beautiful. It's certainly thought provoking. It just isn't a page turner. But then again...good literature doesn't have to be.

**3.5/5 Cheers!**

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