

Further Reading

Commonwealth
Ann Patchett (2016)
PATCHETT

A five-decade saga tracing the impact of an act of infidelity on the parents and children of two Southern California families, their shared summers in Virginia and the disillusionment that shapes their lasting bond.

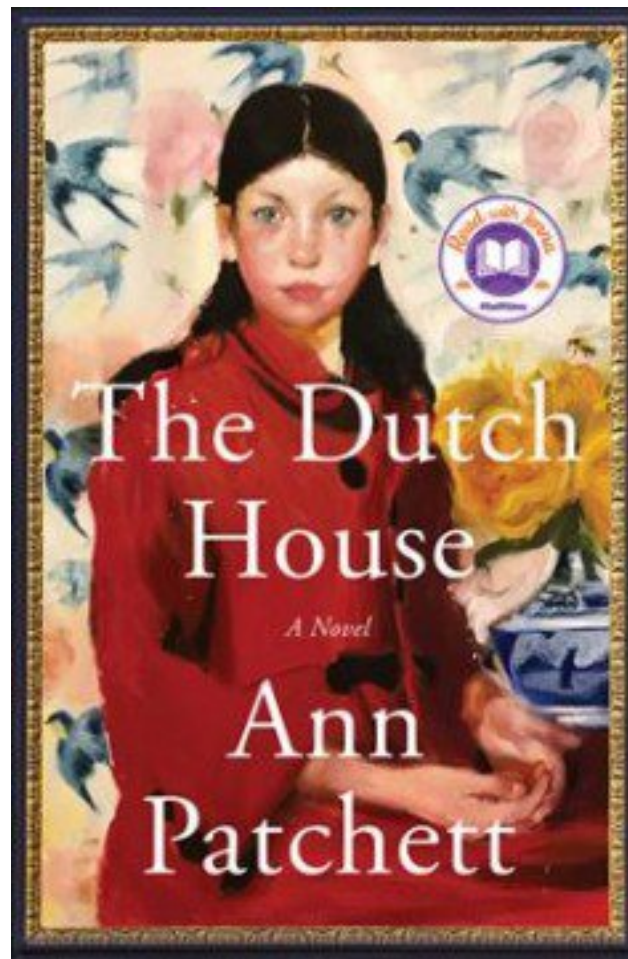
Run
Ann Patchett (2007)
PATCHETT

Bernadette and Bernard Doyle share a great love for family. Already blessed with a son, they adopt two black children, Teddy and Tip. Even after Bernadette dies, she continues to exert a profound influence over the family. And then when Tip is pushed out of a car's path in a sudden act of heroism, their lives are bound by this selfless act.

This Is the Story of a Happy Marriage
Ann Patchett (2013)
BIOGRAPHY PATCHETT

Offering an invitation into her personal life, the noted author shares the stories of the people, places, ideals, and art to which she has remained indelibly committed.

Book Discussion Guide



About the Book

At the end of the Second World War, Cyril Conroy combines luck and a single canny investment to begin an enormous real estate empire, propelling his family from poverty to enormous wealth. His first order of business is to buy the Dutch House, a lavish estate in the suburbs outside of Philadelphia. Meant as a surprise for his wife, the house sets in motion the undoing of everyone he loves. The story is told by Cyril's son Danny, as he and his older sister, Maeve, are exiled from the house where they grew up by their stepmother. The two wealthy siblings are thrown back into the poverty their parents had escaped from and find that all they have to count on is one another.

Discussion Questions

1. Recall specific details of the Dutch House—rooms, stairways, architectural specifics, furniture, windows and doors, etc. What is the mood of the space?
2. Describe the relationship between Maeve and Danny. What explains the longevity and power of their support and love for one another?
3. Describe Cyril Conroy. Why was he "always more comfortable with his tenants than he was with the people in his office or...in his house"?
4. What are Fluffy's various, evolving roles in the Dutch House? What is her overall influence on Maeve and Danny?
5. What explains why Elna Conroy abandoned her children? Why, as Maeve argues, are men who leave their families often judged less harshly?
6. What is the significance of Maeve receiving a box of matches and instruction for how to light a fire from her mother on her eighth birthday?
7. When discussing Maeve's diabetes, Danny says, "the body had all sorts of means to deal with what it couldn't understand." What does this mean? What is the relationship between physical health and emotional stress or trauma?

What forces—familial, social, cultural—might explain why the two males, Cyril and Danny, are in various ways "excused...from all responsibility" concerning the lives and struggles of females in the house?
8. What is the source of Andrea's power? Why is she so bent on using it against the others—especially the women—in the house? What does she covet and care about?
9. What is significant about each of the portraits in the Dutch House?
10. What were the "original disappointments" that Celeste felt about Danny? Why did her relationship with Maeve begin so well and become so acrimonious?
11. Do you agree that Maeve and Danny "had made a fetish out of [their] misfortune, fallen in love with it"? Why might Danny not want "to be dislodged from [his] suffering"?
12. Danny eventually realizes that "after years of living in response to the past, [he and Maeve] had somehow become miraculously unstuck." What does this mean? How did it happen?
13. In the end, Danny realizes that "the rage [he] carried for [his] mother exhaled and died. There was no place for it anymore." What does this mean?
14. What changes and transformations are suggested by May's buying of the Dutch House? What might it imply that Danny walks with her through the darkness to enter it?

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