

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

WOLF AT THE TABLE

BY ADAM RAPP

1. Although the novel spans sixty years, each of the chapters covers just a single day. Why do you think the author chose to tell the story in this way?
2. During the first half of the novel, Fiona, Lexy, and Myra each try to carve out a life of their own (running away from home, quietly settling down, and living alone in a big city, respectively). How might the Catholic values that Ava tried to instill in them have shaped their identities as grown women? What are some of the social factors that hindered their agency?
3. As a young man, Alec has several violent encounters with men, and later we learn that he was abused as a boy. As he ages, he perpetrates violent acts of his own. Was he always going to turn out the way he did? If not, what do you think was the tipping point that made him change from victim to victimizer?
4. When Ava learns the dark truth of Alec's behavior and the trauma he's carried with him throughout his life, she still doesn't take action. Why does she respond that way? Is she partly to blame for Alec's vile deeds?
5. Although the Larkin siblings grow up in the same household with the same family dynamics, their lives play out in dramatically different ways. Why might that be? Is there something inherent in their personalities that lead them to make particular choices, or are there external forces powerful enough to dictate the choices they make?
6. Donald, Denny, and Ronan all suffer from mental illnesses that impair their abilities to be husbands and fathers. What effect do these illnesses have on their family members? What is the impact of the stigma around mental illness and its treatment?
7. Throughout the novel, the characters brush against or directly engage in violence, yet they're all perceived as "normal" people. Meanwhile, larger instances of violence play out in the background (the Oklahoma City bombing, the assassination attempt on President Reagan, serial killers, etc.). Do you think Americans have an unusual proximity or attraction to violence? If so, why?
8. Despite all the darkness it contains, a remarkable achievement of the novel is transmitting light, hope, and redemption by the end. What are some final takeaways from the story?