The Weekend

by Bernhard Schlink



About the Book

Old friends and lovers reunite for a weekend in a secluded country home after spending decades apart.

They excavate old memories and pass clandestine judgments on the wildly divergent paths they?ve taken since their youth. But this isn?t just any reunion, and their conversations about the old days aren?t your typical reminiscences: After 24 years, Jörg, a convicted murderer and terrorist, has been released from prison. The announcement of his pardon will send shock waves through the country, but before the announcement, his friends --- some of whom were Baader-Meinhof sympathizers or those who clung to them --- gather for his first weekend of freedom. They have been summoned by Jörg?s devoted sister, Christiane, whose concern for her brother?s safety is matched only by the unrelenting zeal of Marko, a young man intent on having Jörg continue to fight for the cause.

Bernhard Schlink is at his finest as **The Weekend** unfolds. Passions are pitted against pragmatism, ideas against actions, and hopes against heartbreaking realities.

Discussion Guide

1. The book opens with Christiane picking Jörg up from the prison entrance. His sister has visited him every two weeks for the last twenty-four years, yet their first meeting is tense and restrained. Do you think Jörg is concerned about the way people are going to see him, or is it simply dealing with the feeling of freedom?

2. Although there are others present when Henner arrives at the estate, he is the first of Jörg?s friends to be introduced. Do you think Henner?s profession as a journalist makes him more objective when looking at Jörg?s life?

3. During the first meal at which everyone is gathered, Ulrich is particularly harsh toward Jörg. While everyone else making polite conversation, Ulrich wants to know, ?What was the worst thing about jail?? When people object to

Ulrich?s questions, he defends himself by saying, ?Why shouldn?t I ask him about his life? He chose it --- just as you chose yours and I chose mine.? Do you think Ulrich is correct? Do we have so much choice in life?

4. Ilse?s writings about Jan are a parallel plot to the main story. She seems to be trying to grant herself closure by giving Jan?s life meaning. How do you feel about her suggesting Jan had something to do with 9/11, and still giving him an emancipating end?

5. Ulrich?s daughter, Dorle, makes a big scene near the beginning of the book, but she was not one of Jörg?s friends, and seems to completely change after her initial commotion. How does the character of Dorle fit with the rest of the characters, and why do you think the author included her?

6. Jörg?s son, Ferdinand, arrives late to the gathering. He and his father haven?t been in contact, and Christiane says, ?He?s become the person they brought up.? Yet Ferdinand does come for the weekend, despite his feelings about his father?s past. Do you think Jörg and Ferdinand will have a relationship afterwards?

7. Christiane has had a relationship with Henner and Margarete, but her real love is for her brother. Do you think Henner and Margarete are attracted to each other in spite of Christiane, or because of her? Has so much time passed for all of them that the past relationships don?t matter anymore?

8. Marko Hahn believes that Jörg can still live as a symbol to the revolutionary cause. Christiane believes Jörg can change his life and become something separate from his past. Andreas just wants to keep his friend out of public dealings. Do you think any of these things are possible?

9. Karin, as the vicar, tries to keep peace among the parties, but even she is torn by memories of what the friends did in their youth in the name of revolution, of passion and belief in truth. Is it moral responsibility that has changed their beliefs, or, as Marko claims, complacency in life?

10. Jörg claims that he doesn?t remember the murders he committed, and several of the others seem to have forgotten the details of what happened twenty-five years before. Do you think it is possible to thoroughly block out the details of such terrible events? Do you think, from the victim?s standpoint, it is acceptable to let them be forgotten?

11. It is revealed that Christiane was the one who led police to Jörg, because she wanted to protect him. Marko seems more angry about this betrayal than Jörg himself. What do you think about Christiane?s act?

12. Jörg claims he has paid enough for the murders, but his son disagrees. ?You haven?t paid for what you did --- you?ve forgiven yourself for it. Presumably even before you did it. But only the others can forgive you. And they don?t.? Jörg killed in the name of the revolution, but his son sees the individuals that were affected. Is killing in the name of truth ever acceptable?

13. What do you think of Jörg?s revelation at the end? Do you feel sorry for him? Do you think he has paid for what he has done?

14. Looking back at your own life, was there a cause that you felt passionately about that you barely remember now? Why did you let that cause go? How do you feel about it now?

15. How do you think the characters will be changed by the weekend? Who do you think will be most affected?

Author Bio

Bernhard Schlink was born in Germany in 1944. A professor emeritus of law at Humboldt University, Berlin, and Cardozo Law School, New York, he is the author of THE READER, which became a multi-million copy international bestseller and an Oscar-winning film starring Kate Winslet and Ralph Fiennes, and THE WOMAN ON THE STAIRS. He lives in Berlin and New York.

Critical Praise

"Schlink avoids the easy route of condemnation and salvation?The book?s real strength is the finely wrought dynamic among the characters, whose relationships and histories are fraught with a powerful sense of tension and possibly untoward potential."

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