



Indiscretion

By Charles Dubow
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Questions for Discussion

1. What were your first impressions of Claire? Did they change over the course of the novel?
2. Describe each of the protagonists: Maddy, Harry, Claire, Walter. What drives each of them? What attracts them to the other? Is their outcome inevitable? How much are each responsible for the events that unfold?
3. Walter described the couple as being unselfish about their love. "They share it with so many people. It is what draws the rest of us to them." Talk about his comment. What is it about the Winslows' love that is so appealing? Would they have been better off being more selfish about their feelings?
4. What is Claire's relationship to the Winslows? Why are they so willing to adopt her into their circle? Were there any signs that Maddy should have seen?
5. Harry made up bedtime stories for his son, Johnny. One of Walter's favorites was about the Penguin King. Think about that bedtime story. How does it relate to the wider story told in *Indiscretion*?
6. In describing the indiscretion at the heart of the story, Walter refuses to cast blame. "Who can blame them? There are few things more powerful, more intoxicating than knowing there is someone who desires you utterly. And if it is illicit, secret, forbidden, that makes it all the more exciting. Who cares at that point about other people? Others don't matter when it is just the two of you in your own little lifeboat. Desire is all. Shame does not figure into it." Are you sympathetic to Walter's point of view? Do you share his understanding?
7. Madeleine is a wise and worldly woman. Why is she taken by surprise by Harry's actions? Should she/could she have handled her reaction differently?
8. Were you surprised by the novel's twist? Why does Charles Dubow turn the story as he does?
9. Harry's father, an English teacher, believes that Harry suffered from hamartia/the fatal flaw. "When the hero does something stupid or wrong, the fates won't let him forget it." Is he right? Was Harry a heroic character? Or is Harry's father trying to make rational sense of the irrational as Walter thinks?
10. Why doesn't Walter have Harry's second book published? Was the decision truly his to make? At the novel's end, Walter meets Claire again and she tells him that the naiveté of youth shields her from blame. Do you agree with her? She also tells him, "The irony is that I won in the end. At least in a way I did." What does she think she won?
11. *Indiscretion* is narrated by Maddy and Harry's friend, Walter. How does this affect how the story is told? How would the story change if it were narrated by multiple voices or from another character's viewpoint? Choose a character, and retell a few scenes from his or her perspective. How does this affect how you read the novel and your impressions of the characters and their motives?
12. Is Walter a reliable narrator? Is he believable? How does he attempt to earn the reader's trust? He explains that he is the narrator, "because it is the story of my life and of the people I love most." Is he right? Was his loyalty to Maddy actually a flaw that complicated or exacerbated matters?