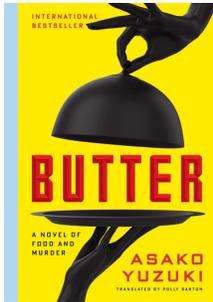


# Discussion Guide



*Butter: A Novel of Food and Murder*  
Asako Yuzuki

Ecco  
2024  
464 pages  
ISBN: 978-0063236417

Food and Nutrition

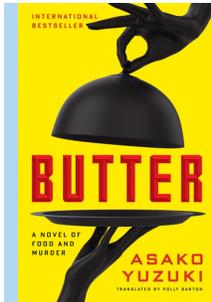
## Summary

Inspired by the real case of a convicted con woman and serial killer—the “Konkatsu Killer”—Asako Yuzuki’s *Butter* is a vivid, unsettling exploration of misogyny, obsession, romance, and the transgressive pleasures of food in Japan. Gourmet cook Manako Kajii sits in the Tokyo Detention House convicted of the serial murders of lonely businessmen, whom she is said to have seduced with her delicious home cooking. The case has captured the nation’s imagination, but Kajii refuses to speak with the press, entertaining no visitors. That is until journalist Rika Machida writes a letter asking for her recipe for beef stew, and Kajii can’t resist writing back.

## Questions

1. How does *Butter* explore the tension between traditional gender roles and contemporary female independence in Japan? How are these expectations manifested in the lives of both Rika and Kajii?
2. How does the novel portray the media’s fixation on Kajii’s body and her supposed “femme fatale” persona? What does this reveal about societal views on women’s appearance and behavior?
3. In what ways does food function as a symbol of power, identity, and transgression in the novel? How do Kajii’s culinary skills influence her relationships with the men she is accused of killing?
4. What draws Rika to Kajii, and how does her relationship with Kajii evolve throughout the novel? Do you believe Rika is objective in her investigation, or does she become too personally involved?
5. How are issues of body image and fatphobia presented in the novel? What impact do these societal pressures have on Rika and Kajii’s identities, and how do these pressures differ between Japan and other cultures?
6. Why does Kajii declare she cannot tolerate feminists or margarine? How does this statement reflect her complex relationship with gender politics and food culture?
7. How does Rika’s relationship with food change over the course of the novel? In what ways do cooking and eating offer her comfort, and how does it also become a form of control?

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8. Why do you think butter becomes a central symbol in the novel? What does it represent in terms of luxury, indulgence, and rebellion against societal norms?
9. How does Rika's relationship with her friends, such as Reiko, evolve alongside her meetings with Kajii? What role does loneliness play in the lives of the characters, and how do they cope with it?
10. How does food in *Butter* serve as a link to memory, identity, and personal history? How do Rika and Kajii's pasts influence their present-day attitudes toward food and relationships?
11. The novel revolves around the idea of Kajii seducing men through her cooking. Do you think Kajii's culinary prowess is inherently tied to her alleged crimes, or is it a convenient narrative created by the media and society?