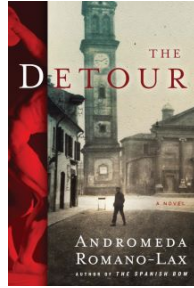


# *The Detour* by Andromeda Romano-Lax

## A Reader's and Book Club Guide



*Art, beauty, travel, duty, propaganda, the “perfect” body, and love....*

1. Ernst Vogler takes solace in the image of the *Discus Thrower*. Is there an object or image in which you've taken solace? Are there times when reverence for an object or image has misled a person or people?
2. “For beauty, you cannot prepare,” claims Enzo. Ernst Vogler, by contrast, thinks that beauty (and specifically, art) requires intellectual preparation. Who is right, or are they each right in different situations?
3. Is there a particular work of art in any form (including music, architecture, or film) that has captivated you, and why? What does it say about you personally that this particular work so entralls you?
4. What makes Vogler a poor candidate for this mission, and what, in his mind or objectively, makes him an ideal candidate?
5. Vogler's mentor, Gerhard, feels that his young protégée needs a trip to Italy. Why is this so? Do you agree? What are your thoughts on the power—or limitations—of a short-term experience to change us? Have you ever taken a trip that radically changed your outlook on life?
6. Is Vogler overreacting when he is anxious about his own personal mark of “difference”? Why or why not?
7. Various German artists—including a preeminent conductor and a world-famous filmmaker—were essentially forgiven for working in high positions or in close collaboration with the Third Reich. What is your opinion on the choices they made and the post-war attitudes toward artists like them?

8. To what extent do we hold people accountable today for working in or for unethical companies, organizations, or governments? To what extent are they innocent? To what extent are they culpable?
9. Various governments have tried to gain or keep control of artistic and archaeological objects and artifacts over the centuries, and have used these symbols in propaganda efforts. Can you think of examples, and why do these objects matter so much?
10. Hitler was a failed artist. Churchill was a successful one. Mussolini played violin every day. Is art as important in the lives of today's leaders or opinion-makers? If not, has something else taken its place?
11. There are multiple father figures in the novel. Discuss their relevance and their positive or negative impacts on Vogler. Do you think this has particular relevance to Germany at this time in history?
12. If Vogler's trip to Italy is meant to shake him from his blinkered approach to life, or his ethical paralysis, does it? What people or events are most significant in changing his attitudes or behaviors?
13. Both the ancient Greeks and the Third Reich held the "perfect" body in great esteem. What are your thoughts on this?
14. How are Ernst and Rosina similar, and how are they different? What are their chances for happiness, and do they—does anyone—"deserve" it? What life do you envision for them, beyond the final chapters of this book?

Author Biography: Born in Chicago, Andromeda Romano-Lax worked as a freelance journalist and travel writer before turning to fiction. Her first novel, *The Spanish Bow*, was translated into eleven languages and was chosen as a *New York Times* Editors' Choice, BookSense pick, and one of *Library Journal's* Best Books of the Year. Among her nonfiction works are a dozen travel and natural history guidebooks to the public lands of Alaska, as well as a travel narrative, *Searching for Steinbeck's Sea of Cortez: A Makeshift Expedition Along Baja's Desert Coast*, which was an *Aububon* Editor's Choice. As a freelance writer, she has been published in a wide range of magazines and newspapers, from *Seventeen* to *Steinbeck Studies*. Andromeda lives with her husband and children in Anchorage, Alaska, where she co-founded and now teaches for a nonprofit organization, the 49 Alaska Writing Center.

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