**Lay Brothers**

**Book Club Discussion Questions**

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1. Luca has been described as an “alpha male.” If you see him as such, in what ways does that make him more or less attractive? In what ways might he be seen as a parody of the typical alpha male? Given your opinions of him, what is his role in the book?
2. Although Sophie falls for Luca, she’s less than blind to the manipulative side of his character. Why does she cling to the notion that she has a future with him, given everything she knows or suspects about him?
3. Luca’s betrayal of Sophie affects her severely. Does this compromise her strength as a female lead character?
4. The Jesuit Order is presented in a negative light in this novel, and, in fact, its efforts to achieve power were seen as a threat by Europe’s rulers who one by one expelled them from their jurisdictions. However, because of the Jesuits’ active defence of native labourers in Europe’s overseas colonies, much of their mission might be described as heroic. Discuss the author’s portrayal of the Order. To what degree is his portrayal fair or unfair
5. In Chapter 11, Father Adam says, “In my own mind, I haven’t left the Order. I’m the only one who hasn’t. You’re speaking to the last Jesuit.” What does he mean
6. Are you convinced by Adam Eckhardt’s struggle with his religious convictions? He claims to be committed to the Jesuit principles even to the extent of refusing, at first, to bargain with Mirko, even “…if Leni’s life depends on it?” His answer to Sophie’s question is, “Then she’ll lose it, God help me.” What is it that finally persuades him to abandon his priestly vows and to save the woman he loves
7. In what way(s) did her relationship with the Rathenau family influence her?
8. In what ways do you see Sophie as a spiritual person? She has scant patience with religious practices designed to serve an elite few, and she fails to embrace Johann Weishaupt’s Enlightenment thinking, but she frequently expresses a personal devotion to the Virgin Mary, to Marie, as she calls her. This implies some degree of religious feeling and belief. Where do you think she stands on spiritual questions
9. Leni is a woman so bent on finding a little love in life that she takes out an intolerable bad temper on Sophie. Given Sophie’s nature as a fighter who stands up to people like Detlef, Mirko, and Loretto, why does she put up with Leni’s nastiness?
10. Though Sophie was born too early to be a conscious political feminist, she has a healthy capacity to be riled by male arrogance. At the same time, though capable of warm friendships with other women, she displays no automatic feelings of sisterhood. How do you read Sophie’s stance in the so-called gender war?
11. The Munich suburb of Haydthausen is presented as a threatening neighbourhood due to the presence of a large number of migrants—particularly Mirko’s people who have alarming connections. In what way might there be parallels to today’s concerns about the influx of refugees and migrants into areas that have not had a previously established community of migrants?
12. To the degree you understand eighteenth century history, how does the author’s approach provide a sense of that time period in that particular place? Is the Munich of Sophie’s time and its history believable?
13. Given that the author intentionally uses an occasional anachronistic tone, can you identify specific anachronisms that arise throughout the story? In what ways does the use of such techniques enhance or detract from the story?
14. In Chapter 28, Sophie reflects on leaving her pistol on Loretto’s desk: *I couldn’t help but be sad. The pistol was one of my last ties to Gustl. Yet maybe I wouldn’t be needing it anymore.* Moments later, a September wind gusted past her and Luca, but it fails to trigger the unhappy memories she normally associates with September. What do you make of these events? What does it say about her frame of mind and her expectations for the future?
15. Discuss Sophie’s meeting with Granitz in the final chapter. Why does he allow her to go free instead of imprisoning her in the Spielberg?
16. If you read *The Prussian Dispatch*, in what ways has the character of Sophie changed or developed since the events of that first book? What do you foresee happening with her return to Vienna?

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*If you would like the author to join your reading group for a conversation via Skype or Google Hangouts, contact him at* *neilsondavid3@gmail.com**.*