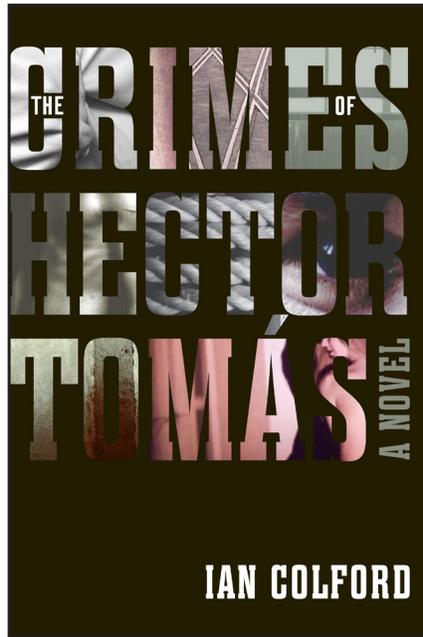




DISCUSSION GUIDE



The Crimes of Hector Tomás

Ian Colford

About the book:

Enrique Tomás lives a quiet life with a large, loving family in an unnamed South American country. But Enrique has secrets. When his second eldest son, Hector, and Hector's beloved friend Nadia uncover one of Enrique's secrets, the course of Hector's life is irrevocably altered. Exiled by his parents to the isolated countryside, Hector is accused of terrorism—a crime for which he is innocent, yet ruthlessly punished. As he tries desperately to extricate himself from the violence perpetrated by a brutal political regime, he realizes that freedom can only come at a terrible price.

The Crimes of Hector Tomás is an epic novel about disappearance and deception, family and nation. Enrique, Hector, and Nadia become victims of their own choices as they helplessly make confessions, concessions, and commitments in pursuit of resolution—and, failing that, retaliation.

“Reading this remarkable novel is an act of witnessing. Colford has accomplished the seemingly impossible.”

— The Chronicle Herald

About the author:

IAN COLFORD is a fiction writer living in Halifax, Nova Scotia. His stories, reviews, and commentary have appeared in Canadian literary publications from coast to coast and in journals published online. From 1995 to 1998 he was editor of the literary journal *Pottersfield Portfolio*, and from 1994 to 2000 served on the executive board of the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia. He has completed residencies at the Hawthornden Castle International Retreat for Writers and Yaddo, the artists' colony in Saratoga Springs, New York. *Evidence*, his first collection of short fiction, was published in 2008 by Porcupine's Quill, and won the Margaret and John Savage First Book Award; *Evidence* was also shortlisted for the Danuta Gleed Literary Award, The Thomas Head Raddall Atlantic Fiction Prize, and the ReLit Award.

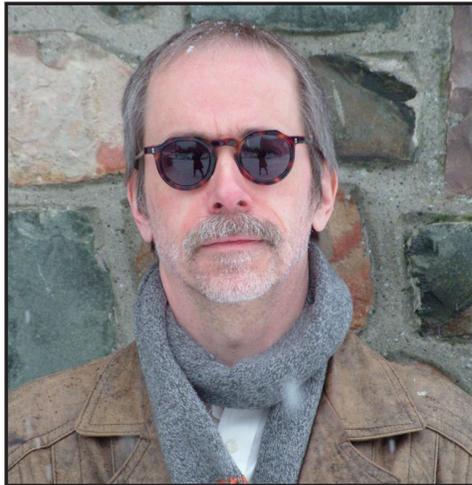


Photo: Tina Usmiani

1. What “crimes” has Hector committed? What is the author saying about his main character with this title? Is the title misleading or is it asking something of the reader?
2. Much of the action takes place in the city where Hector’s family lives. How does the author’s decision not to name this city and instead refer to it as B_____ influence the reader’s experience?
3. The novel depicts many characters acting according to a personal or hidden agenda, expressing one thing in public while privately working toward another goal altogether. Give an example of how a character’s unstated intentions influence the direction the story takes.
4. Violence plays an important role in this novel. Discuss instances where the author uses a graphic act of violence to illustrate a character’s moral outlook or to reveal someone’s state of mind.
5. The novel is narrated in a cool, emotionally detached voice that seems at odds with the tense situations in which many of the characters find themselves and the horrors they are forced to undergo. Why do you think the author chose to tell Hector’s story in this way?
6. Enrique is perhaps the most puzzling character in the book, a man who loves and provides for his family but who also behaves selfishly and recklessly. Is he admirable or sympathetic on any level? Do we despise him or pity him? Is it possible to reconcile Enrique’s desire to protect those he loves with his insatiable and depraved craving for sexual gratification?
7. Many of the characters in this novel seem like cogs in a wheel, driven to behave as they do by forces that are beyond their control and comprehension. Do any of the military characters deserve the reader’s sympathy? What does it mean that Hector himself is recruited by the military and subsequently commits murder?
8. More than one reviewer has observed that *The Crimes of Hector Tomás* dwells primarily on the dark side of human nature and for this reason is unfulfilling. Is this a fair assessment? Should the novelist always strive to balance the light with the dark or is it possible the author has a valid reason for showing us people behaving at their very worst?
