

Discussion Questions for *Bel Canto*

1. Why did Patchett decide to telegraph the outcome very early on, foregoing any suspense related to whether or not the hostages would be killed? On **pg.13**, she writes: “*It was the unspoken belief of everyone familiar with this organization and with the host country that they were all as good as dead, when in fact it was the terrorists who would not survive the ordeal.*” While the book is not first and foremost a thriller, I still wonder about this decision. Why not keep us in suspense? (Judy Catterton). Judy Wood asked something related: How does the plot function in this book (in light of the fact that Patchett herself seems to dismiss it)?
2. Reviewers of this book praised the use of omniscient narration. How does this point of view choice impact the novelist’s telling of this story? (**Sarah Barnett**) And how does this POV work exactly, the seamless movement from one character’s thoughts to another? Are there any especially good examples that you noted of such movement? (**Maribeth Fischer**) On the flip side, at what point are there too many characters? “I hit my limit with Fyodorov in **Chapter 6**. I want to hang with Gen, Hosokawa, Carmen, Ruben, maybe a couple others,” says **Paul Dyer**.
3. In this multi-character story, what techniques does the author use to show us each character’s individuality? (**Sarah Barnett**)
4. And along those lines, Patchett commented in an interview that she would never have been allowed to write *Bel Canto* today—a white woman writing from the POV of Japanese men? Getting into the minds of terrorists from an impoverished South American country? Do you feel she successfully writes from an “other” POV, or does she fall into stereotyping? If she doesn’t, what makes her character’s feel unique (back to Sarah’s question above) (**Maribeth Fischer**).
5. One more character question (sort of): Why do you think Patchett chose to include so many different languages: Czech (did anyone understand the words of the ad Paria from Rusalka?); many characters don’t understand Spanish; and there are all the other languages: Japanese, French, English, Italian, Russian, German: What is Patchett doing with all this? (**Katherine Gekker**)
6. The ending (epilogue) felt surprising. How did Patchett choose which characters to kill and which not to kill? Even after the resolution of the hostage situation, why did Patchett add the scene in Italy? Do we need this epilogue? (**Mariah Nelson**)
7. What is the function of the long scene with Fyodorov and the “story within a story” he relates to Roxanne and Gen? The whole scene with Fyodorov begins around **pg. 210**, but the story within the story starts on **pg. 214** and runs through **pg. 222**. (**Sarah Barnett**)