

Discussion Questions for *Beyond That, The Sea*

by *Laura Spence-Ash*

We had numerous questions, so this list reflects those asked most often as well as those that were especially focused on the writing. Thank you all!

1. Many of us (all of us maybe?) questioned the multiple (eight) points of view. Were there too many? What benefits—or drawbacks do you see in having so many? According to one mostly positive review (**Judy Catterton tells us**)...There was a “hollowness of the narrative” and a “sketchiness of characters.” Is this inevitable with so many characters? Is it possible to adequately develop so many?
2. The author uses italics for dialogue in Part One, changes to quotation marks for Part Two, and then uses italics again for Part Three. Part Two is also the only section told in past tense. Why did the author make these choices? Do they benefit the story in any way? (**Gail Comorat**). Perhaps shedding light on at least part of this, **Kim Burnett** tells us that one reviewer wrote this about the dialogue:

Another design oddity that I quickly stopped thinking about was that all dialogue is in italics—and often, two separate speakers are included in the same paragraph. Somehow it keeps the dialogue soft, as if everyone is whispering to each other, which made me feel closer to the characters. And only once or twice did I have to reread a section to figure out who was speaking.

Does the above quote work as an explanation for you?

3. Speaking of dialogue, **Kathleen Martens** noticed that the author repeats the verb (dialogue tag) “says.” A lot! Check out page 101 where it is used 10 times or the short chapter 95-97 where it is used 17 times. Clearly this was a craft and editing choice. Is it effective?
4. In addition to jumping in POV, the story jumps in time from the 1940s to the 1960s to the 1970s, necessitating the introduction of new characters late in the novel. Is this a good idea? Why or why not? (**Sarah Barnett**)

5. In Part Two, the chapters are alternating scenes of Bea and William's 1951 meeting. Since it's at the center of the book, this seems important that she chose to do this. Does it work to put those two characters in the spotlight at that point in the story? (**Gail Comorat**)

6. Why are three major male characters dispatched quickly? (Both fathers are killed off with heart attacks at a young age). How do these lives and deaths affect the plot and the other characters? (**Kim Burnett, Sharon Hoover**)

7. **Judy Catterton** tells us, the author said that one of her themes was the search for identity and how that changes over time. Does that come through? Does she adequately develop that theme? Might that be what the following question is about?

8. Bea, Beatrix, Trixie. Discuss the craft choice of having your main character with three names (**Kim Burnett**).

9. WWII is an instigating factor in the novel yet it appears to play almost no role in the lives of the characters, except for Gerald's help with trash drives. Is its presence on the East Coast real? The characters might have missed the Korean War but what about the Vietnam War? It would have affected the coast and the male characters at least. What role does War play in the novel? (**Sharon Hoover**)

10. Related to Sharon's question above, the author says she's less interested in writing about major events and more interested in writing about emotions felt before and after them (like a wedding). Therapists call this "process over content." Does this approach provide more insight into the personality of her characters than showing them in the midst of major events would? (**Judy Catterton**)

11. What role does the sea play, especially as it is part of the title of the novel? (**Sharon Hoover**)