

Glass Ocean Discussion Questions

by Beatriz Williams, Lauren Willig, and Karen White

Author Bios: (from *Fantastic Fiction*)

Beatriz Williams – (aka Juliana Gray) – Author of *A Hundred Summers* and other works of historical fiction. Beatriz worked as a communications and corporate strategy consultant in New York and London before she began writing novels. Born in Seattle, Washington, Beatriz now lives near the Connecticut shore with her husband and four children, where she divides her time between writing and laundry.

Lauren Willig – Author of historical romance novels. Willig briefly worked for Cravath, Swaine & Moore, a law firm in New York, while authoring her "Pink Carnation" series of books, until she gave up law in order to focus full time on the series.

Karen White – Has a degree Management from Tulane University. Ten years later, after leaving the business world, she fulfilled her dream of becoming a writer and wrote her first book.

Characters:

- **Sarah Blake** – (2013) – (27) – Lives in New York City. Author of "Small Potatoes" a nonfiction book about the Irish Potato Famine published 5 years previous. Mother has Early Onset Alzheimer's and lives in a facility. Great granddaughter of Patrick Houlihan.
- **John Langford** – (2013) – Great grandson of Robert Langford. Aristocrat. Ex-wife, Callie (Calliope), is a drug addict and was involved in a scandal with a Russian. Langford resigned his Parliament position due to scandal. Having problems with the paparazzi.
- **The Finches** – (2013) – Mrs. Finch is John's housekeeper. Julie Finch, a barmaid, is John's childhood friend and Mrs. Finch's granddaughter. Davey Finch is the Ship Inn (pub) owner, Mrs. Finches grandson, and John's childhood friend.
- **Jarod Holm** – (2013) – Journalist. Sarah's ex-boyfriend from college/Ireland.
- **Rupert Langford** – (2013) – John's uncle. Former naval officer. His partner is Nigel.

- **Caroline Telfair Hochstetter** – (1915) – (24) – Married for 4 years to Gilbert Hochstetter. Caroline is from an old Southern (Savannah) pedigreed family. Marvelous pianist. No kids. She has a new lady's maid, Martha Jones. In 1st class berthing on the Lusitania. Has an unpublished Johann Strauss waltz being taking to London to get appraised/sold.
- **Tess Schaff** – (1915) – (24) – Painter. Art forger. Comes from a family of con artists. Wants to do one last job, change her name to Tessa Fairweather, and then start a new clean life. Born with the name Tennessee. Has a sister Ginny. In second class berthing on the Lusitania.
- **Robert Langford** – (1915) – British aristocrat. Black sheep of the family. Brother, James, drown when Robert was 9. Journalist in 1915. In 1st class berthing on the Lusitania. Has been in love with Caroline Hochstetter since they were teens. After the Lusitania, he becomes a spy novelist and marries an American. Dies of a heart attack in his 60s.

- **Patrick Houlihan** – (1915) – 1st class steward on the Lusitania. Irish. Died when the ship sank. Had an unopened telegram for Robert Langford in his pocket when he was found. 5 kids. Wife Annie. (Sarah’s great grandfather.)
- **Gilbert Hochstetter** – (1915) – Steel magnate. Self-made money. Wife is Caroline Hochstetter.
- **Martha Jones** – Caroline’s maid.
- **Sir Peregrine Langford** – (1915) – Robert’s father. Director of Room 40, the British code breakers. Shot himself after Lusitania went down in 1915. Never knew Robert survived.
- **Ginny Schaff** – Tess’s con artist sister.
- **Margery Schuyler** – (1915) – Aristocrat on the Lusitania. Wants Caroline to play piano while Margery sings (badly). Has a sore by her mouth. Sister-in-law is Prunella Schuyler.
- **Mary Talmadge** – Concert Pianist. “One of the Greats.” Seen by Robert in 1952 at Carnegie Hall. Only daughter of the Talmadges, who were renown art philanthropists.
- **Lusitania** – British luxury ocean liner owned by Cunard. Often traveled from New York City to Liverpool, England with both American and British citizens. Captain was William Turner. Is torpedoed and sunk by a German U-boat off the coast of Ireland in 1915.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. This book is written from the points of view of 3 characters, in two different time lines, and by 3 authors. Did you like the way it was set up? Was it easy for you or hard for you to read?
3. Do you consider **Glass Ocean** a mystery? Why or why not?
4. At the very beginning of the book, Sarah talks about book piracy and authors only receiving about \$1 per book sale. What did you think of that? Why do you think it was included in this book?
5. History tells us that the Lusitania is sunk in 1915. How did reading about the hopeful passengers make you feel knowing it was going to end in tragedy?
6. Tess tells us her father’s golden rule: “When in doubt, run. It didn’t much matter where you were running to, just so long as you kept going. And going. Because while you were running, you couldn’t think of where you’d come from or where you might land.” Is this good advice? Has this rule served Tess well?
7. When Sarah begins her research into the Langford family history, she assures John Langford that he can trust her. Should he? What are her motives? What are his?
8. Sarah tells John Langford that her mother’s dementia gives her a great sense of urgency: “I need to know the truth, I need to know everything before it’s too late. You’re always better off knowing.” Do you believe that too? What consequences were there to uncovering the truth about the Lusitania and the Langfords?
9. How did you feel about Gilbert (Caroline’s husband)? Did your feelings change as the book progressed?

10. What do you make of Caroline and Robert's love affair? Should she pick Gilbert or Robert? Right or Wrong?
11. Caroline remembers "what her mother had taught her about being a woman: Appear to be weak and docile when it suites, but never forget that a soft and gentle outer appearance simply masks a spine of steel." Did that make sense for women in 1915? What about today?
12. "There is a serpent in every garden." (p 179). One of the themes of the book is trying to find redemption from the sins of the past and/or past generations. Which characters succeed and which ones fail?
13. A second theme of the book is survivor's guilt – Tess and her mother who caught scarlet fever from Tess and died, Robert and his brother who drowned trying to save him, the people who survived the Lusitania vs those who did not, the Folly being closed after Robert's death, etc. Do you think any of the characters actually deal with their trauma successfully? Why or why not? Why is survivor's guilt so hard to treat/cure?
14. Do you think the British government ever got the coded message? What about the Germans? Why?
15. Did you know who the traitors were before they were revealed?
16. Did you know about Martha Jones or Robert Langford before it was revealed?
17. Did you know who Robert married after the Lusitania before it was revealed?
18. Do you think Patrick Houlihan was just a simple steward or was he something more? Why?
19. Why do you think Robert wrote the spy novel "Night Run to Berlin" thinly disguising his family's story as a work of fiction?
20. Why do you think Sarah decides to focus her new book on who she does?
21. Were you satisfied with how things turned out for each of the heroines? Whose life took the most surprising twist? Would you have rewritten the ending for any of them?
22. In the Epilogue, Sarah says "We're all looking for something, aren't we? Every last one of us looking in vain, looking with futile, unassailable hope for something we've lost." Was this true for the characters in this novel? Which ones find what they're looking for? Which were disappointed?
23. Glass Ocean was Williams, Willig, and White's 2nd book written together. Each of the authors also has a number of books written solely by them. Will you read any of them?

References:

- Book Club Girl – https://www.bookclubgirl.com/book_club_girl/2018/09/how-three-authors-came-together-to-co-author-one-book.html
- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/w/karen-white/>
- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/w/beatriz-williams/>
- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/w/lauren-willig/>
- GoodReads – <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/36099162-the-glass-ocean>
- Novelist – <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.clevnet.org/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=43305113-f482-45c9-8c18-7157d6f1e433%40sdc-v-sessmgr03&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#Uj=10190573&db=neh>
- Reading Group Guides – <https://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/the-glass-ocean/guide>

Williams, Willig, & White Books

- The Forgotten Room (2016)
 - The Glass Ocean (2018)
- All the Ways We Said Goodbye (2020)

Beatriz Williams Books

Schuyler Sister Novels

1. The Secret Life of Violet Grant (2014)
2. Tiny Little Thing (2015)
3. Along the Infinite Sea (2015)

Wicked City

1. The Wicked City (2017)
2. The Wicked Redhead (2019)

Stand Alone Novels:

- Overseas (2012)
- A Hundred Summers (2012)
- A Certain Age (2016)
- Cocoa Beach (2017) (aka The House on Cocoa Beach)
- The Summer Wives (2018)
- The Golden Hour (2019)
- Her Last Flight (2020)

Lauren Willig Books

Pink Carnation

1. The Secret History of the Pink Carnation (2005)
2. The Masque of the Black Tulip (2005)
3. The Deception of the Emerald Ring (2006)
4. The Seduction of the Crimson Rose (2008)
5. The Temptation of the Night Jasmine (2009)
6. The Betrayal of the Blood Lily (2009)
7. The Mischief of the Mistletoe (2010)
8. The Orchid Affair (2011)
9. The Garden Intrigue (2012)

10. The Passion of the Purple Plumeria (2013)
11. The Mark of the Midnight Manzanilla (2014)
12. The Lure of the Moonflower (2015)

Stand Alone Novels:

- Two L (2011)
- The Ashford Affair (2013)
- That Summer (2014)
- The Other Daughter (2015)
- The English Wife (2018)
- The Summer Country (2019)

Karen White Books

Tradd Street

1. The House on Tradd Street (2008)
2. The Girl On Legare Street (2009)
3. The Strangers on Montagu Street (2011)
4. Return to Tradd Street (2014)
5. The Guests on South Battery (2017)
6. The Christmas Spirits on Tradd Street (2019)

Stand Alone Novels:

- In the Shadow of the Moon (2000)
- Whispers of Goodbye (2001)
- Falling Home (2002)
- After the Rain (2003)

- Tender Moments (2004)
- The Color of Light (2005)
- Pieces of the Heart (2006)
- Learning to Breathe (2007)
- The Memory of Water (2008)
- The Lost Hours (2009)
- On Folly Beach (2010)
- The Beach Trees (2011)
- Sea Change (2012)
- The Time Between (2013)
- A Long Time Gone (2014)
- The Sound of Glass (2015)
- Flight Patterns (2016)
- The Night the Lights Went Out (2017)
- Dreams of Falling (2018)

If you liked The Glass Ocean, try...

- Dead Wake: The Last Crossing of the Lusitania – Erik Larson – (Nonfiction)
- Doll Factory – Elizabeth Macneal
- Signature of All Things – Elizabeth Gilbert
- Longbourn – Jo Baker
- The Essex Serpent – Sarah Perry

Other Stuff

Article on how the 3 authors (Williams, Willig, and White) came together to write 1 book”:

https://www.bookclubgirl.com/book_club_girl/2018/09/how-three-authors-came-together-to-co-author-one-book.html

Question: Which author wrote which character's story? Have any of the authors revealed this information??

Answer from Goodreads: The authors have said that they will never reveal who wrote which sections. Their editor didn't even correctly guess who wrote each section. They like that no one can figure it out.

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/36099162-the-glass-ocean/questions>

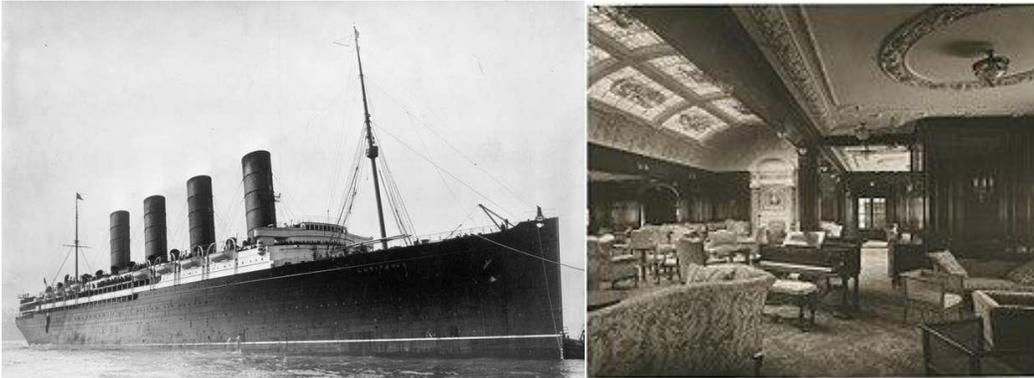
Lusitania Facts:

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lusitania-British-ship>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RMS_Lusitania

The Lusitania, British ocean liner, was sunk by the German U-boat, SM U-20, on May 7, 1915. The death of so many American passengers contributed indirectly to the United States entering into World War I.

- Lusitania was captained by William Turner.
- U-20 was captained by Walther Schwieger.
- Lusitania was torpedoed 11 miles off the southern coast of Ireland inside the declared war zone.
- Lusitania sank in 18 minutes.
- Only six out of 48 lifeboats were launched successfully, with several more overturning and breaking apart.
- Lusitania had 1,266 passengers and a crew of 696 = 1,962 total people.
 - 761 people survived the boat sinking.
 - 1,201 people died
 - 128 Americans died - including writer Elbert Hubbard, theater producer Charles Frohman, and multi-millionaire businessman Alfred Vanderbilt.
 - Only 11 US citizens on the boat survived.
- The Germans justified treating Lusitania as a naval vessel (and sinking her) because she was carrying hundreds of tons of war munitions and ammunition, making her a legitimate military target.
 - Lusitania was officially carrying among her cargo 750 tons of rifle/machine-gun ammunition, 1250 cases of shrapnel artillery shells with the explosive burster charges.



The coffins of victims of the Lusitania disaster outside the offices of the Cunard Company