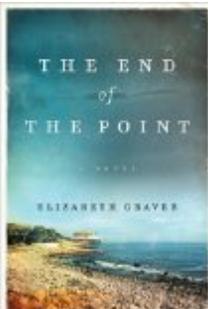


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by Elizabeth Graver

Hardcover Mar 2013, 352 pages.

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BookBrowse Rating:

Critics' Consensus:

**Spanning several decades and several generations, Elizabeth Graver's *The End of the Point* is a novel pulled together by a strong and unifying sense of place.**

Some novels are propelled by a breakneck plot or suspenseful narrative; others are driven by character development. Still others, like Elizabeth Graver's *The End of the Point*, are pulled together by a strong and unifying sense of place. In this case, the place is Ashaunt Point on Massachusetts's Buzzards Bay, where the Porter family has summered for generations. At times, in fact, it seems as if the Porters have little to hold them together beyond this point of land, the place where they can be most at peace, most themselves.

Graver's novel spans several decades of the twentieth century and several generations of the Porter family. It opens (following a brief historical vignette in which the original Native Americans sign their land over to the colonists for a pittance) in 1942, at a time when American troops have (unofficially of course) been stationed on the point, patrolling the coastline for German U-boats and planes and causing a serious uproar in the previously stagnant social scene in Ashaunt Point. Older Porter daughters Helen and Dossy sneak out of the house to attend servicemen's dances. Their long-time nanny, Bea, must also decide where her loyalties and longings reside when she's asked to choose between a burgeoning romance with a dashing soldier and her devotion to, in particular, the Porters' youngest daughter Jane.

Later sections of the book focus on Helen, now a young woman in 1947 trying to decide whether to explore an academic path in Europe or a more family-oriented life back at home in the U.S., and then on Helen's son Charlie, whom we first come to know in 1970 as a struggling college student suffering from LSD flashbacks. Without knowing the precise reason why he's compelled to go there, he winds up at one of the outbuildings at Ashaunt Point where he discovers solace for a time, at least until larger forces start to invade this idyllic territory once again. This time it's the dual pressures of a land developer and the Vietnam War, in the form of a troubled young veteran who draws Charlie in to his compelling circle. The closing section of the novel takes place in 1999, as an oil spill threatens to mar the landscape further and as Helen's life comes to an end and Charlie's is, in many ways, just beginning.

Certainly there are a handful of characters here – namely Bea, Helen, and Charlie – whose stories take much of Graver's attention and the reader's sympathies despite the multi-decade span of the novel. These characters – Bea and Helen in particular – are visited at multiple touchpoints in their lives, from young womanhood through middle-age and even old age. Graver even folds Bea back into the narrative years after she's returned to her native Scotland, an ocean away from Ashaunt Point. That being said, though, the novel lacks an

overarching plot and comprehensive character development, which might frustrate or flummox some readers. Perhaps for those readers it's better to think of *The End of the Point* not as a novel but as a series of linked novellas, each of which focus on a single family but together, ultimately, have the love and power of place as their theme.

Graver's writing about this place and her characters' relationship to it is poetic and profound. Helen's final return to Ashaunt Point – after a life spent in pursuit of excellence and achievement both for herself and others – is particularly poignant. "To be here has brought her the deepest kind of happiness, of the sort she'd not known for... how long? ... How lucky she is. She thinks it all the time now. Lucky to have the sky and sea before her at any time of day or night ... To have hummingbirds visit." Graver illustrates how this place – and everything it's come to mean to Helen and her family – has the power to pull Helen out of her life-long striving and into a place of unexpected acceptance and peace. Again and again, Graver's characters either articulate or exemplify the idea that, whether they understand why or how, it's only at Ashaunt Point that they are truly themselves at their most authentic, largely removed from the dramas that might characterize the rest of their lives. Readers will likely come away from Graver's novel reflecting on the special places in their own lives, longing to reconnect with or revisit them, to introduce their meaning and beauty to new generations.

Reviewed by [Norah Piehl](#)

## The End of the Point: Beyond the Book

### Buzzard's Bay

Elizabeth Graver's novel is set on a (fictional) point jutting out into Buzzards Bay, which borders Massachusetts and is tucked in between the southwest coast of Cape Cod, Plymouth and Bristol Counties on the mainland. New Bedford, which was the world's leading whaling port in the nineteenth century, is the most major city on the bay.

Buzzards Bay was, as Graver suggests in her forward, originally occupied by the Wampanoag tribe and was [sold](#) to a group of thirty-four Colonial shareholders in 1652 for "30 yards of cloth, 87 moose skins, 15 axes, 15 hoes, 15 breeches, 8 blankets, 2 kettles, one cloak, 2 English Pounds in Wampum, 8 pairs of stockings, 8 pairs of shoes, 1 iron pot, and 10 shillings." The bay was given its name by colonists who thought that one of the many ospreys circling the island was actually a buzzard.

Birds and other wildlife do play an important role in the ecosystem of Buzzards Bay. In 1985, the federal government designated it an "estuary of national significance," and the Buzzards Bay Project (now the National Estuary Program) was founded to protect this fragile region from pollution, erosion, and other threats. Late Senator Ted Kennedy was part of the initiative to provide federal funding for this initiative.





Despite these efforts, though, the bay remains at risk from human accidents and natural disasters. In 1991, Hurricane Bob brought much damage to the region, and in 2003, a spill of 98,000 gallons of fuel oil from the barge Bouchard No. 120 caused high bird mortality and affected more than ninety miles of shoreline.

Photograph of Piping Plover by S. Mierzykowski, USFWS

By [\*Norah Piehl\*](#)

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