

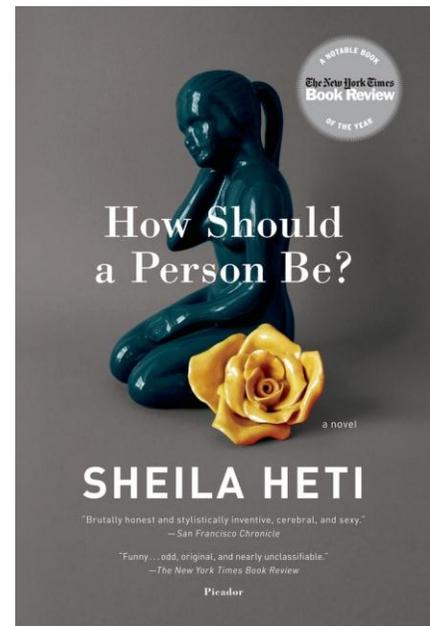
PICADOR

Reading Group Gold

How Should a Person Be?

by Sheila Heti

1. *How Should a Person Be?* is constructed as part fiction; part play; part confession. How has this mixture of genres shaped your understanding of the novel and how do the different elements converge to create the story?
2. Describe Sheila. What kind of person is she at the beginning of the novel, and what kind of person does she set out to be? What are some things that she does in order to become a “complete person?” Do you think she succeeds? Why or why not?
3. Why is Sheila so drawn to Margaux when they first meet? How would you describe their relationship and what makes them such a dynamic pair?
4. The concept of beauty is highly subjective, especially in the context of this book. Margaux says that there are things that are “not ugly for the world,” but “looks like death” to her. What is your definition of ‘ugly?’ What is the significance of the ugly painting contest?
5. Israel seems to possess an intoxicating power over Sheila. Why is she so consumed by him? How is she finally able to free herself? Why do you think it was important to Sheila to cut ties with Israel?
6. How are the ideas of fate and freedom manifested in the novel? Are our lives dictated by fate or is fate a self-fulfilling prophecy? How does Sheila reconcile her fear of her fate and her desire to live a meaningful life?
7. Religion is a major conceit throughout the novel. Sheila often finds solace in religious references and comparisons. What significance does Sheila find in these references to Moses and the Israelites? Are religion and fate bound together?
8. Margaux claims that boundaries allow you to love someone. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
9. When are human beings cheaters, and how did Sheila’s cheating affect Margaux? How do you distinguish between truly being and merely appearing to be?
10. Towards the end of the book, the author includes one chapter that is isolated from the rest of the narrative titled “The Gravedigger.” What is the significance of this story and how does it relate to the rest of the book?



11. In this novel, art takes on various forms—the conversations Sheila records with Margaux; the work done at the salon; even the actual book is a form of art. For Heti, artistry and life seem intertwined. Is art a depiction of life, or is it the other way around?

12. Does the book answer the question of how a person should be? Do you think there is an answer? How do you want to be?

About the Author

Sheila Heti is the author of several books of fiction, including *The Middle Stories* and *Ticknor*; and an essay collection written with Misha Glouberman, *The Chairs Are Where the People Go*. Her writing has been translated into ten languages and her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Bookforum*, *McSweeney's*, *n+1*, *The Guardian*, and other places. She works as interviews editor at *The Believer* magazine and lives in Toronto.



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