

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Gail Honeyman is a graduate of the universities of Glasgow and Oxford. *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* won the Costa First Novel Award and the British Book Awards Book of the Year, was short-listed for the Lucy Cavendish College Fiction Prize, the Desmond Elliot Award, and the Author's Club Best First Novel, and was long-listed for the Women's Prize for Fiction. This is Honeyman's debut novel and she lives in Glasgow, Scotland.

- Penguin Random House

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe Eleanor. Book reviewers have called her "quirky." How has she earned that description?
2. Early in the novel, Eleanor says, "It often feels like I'm not here, like I'm a figment of my own imagination. There are days when I feel so lightly connected to the earth that the threads that tether me to the earth are gossamer thin, spun sugar." Why do you think Eleanor feels so disconnected? At this point in human history we are more connected than ever to world events, people and even places, and yet people still feel lonely. Do you think Eleanor's assessment of her own disconnectedness is a common feeling? At one point, Eleanor says, "Loneliness is the new cancer." In the way people used to fear saying the word "cancer," loneliness is often considered embarrassing, even shameful. Why did you decide to write about it?
3. What is comfortable about Eleanor's self-imposed isolation? Why does she choose to live this way? What about her character makes her unrelatable to others? At the beginning of the novel, did you empathize with her, or did you find yourself reading her critically?

4. Eleanor is closed off to affection, having not been the recipient of it. She seemingly has no craving for emotional connection. What has that done to her psyche? Is her numbness obvious in her interactions with people? In her professional life?
5. In what ways is Raymond like Eleanor? In what ways is he different? How do you feel about him as a character?
6. How does Raymond help Eleanor overcome her social anxiety and emotional deficiencies? Why is he effective in doing so?
7. Late in the novel, Eleanor describes how she's feeling, which is a complete departure from her previously unfeeling ways. "I felt like a newly laid egg, all swishy and gloopy inside, and so fragile that the slightest pressure could break me." There are obvious reasons why she may have feared the fragility of emotion. When she starts feeling again, what does that do to her as a character?
8. Discuss Eleanor's metamorphosis. Do you think the author is making a comment on people's propensity for change?
9. There appears to be an emerging fiction genre featuring characters with serious social ineptitude. Why do you think this is such a popular concept right now? Why is Eleanor's fear of vulnerability one that seems to appeal to too many?
10. Compare this book to others your group has read. Is it similar to any of them? Did you like it more or less than other books you've read? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book? What will be your most vivid memories of it a year from now? Or will it just leave a vague impression, and what will that be? Or will you not think of it at all in a year's time?
11. Finally, what else struck you about the book as good or bad? What did you like or dislike about it that we haven't discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Did this book make you want to read more work by this author?

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/540586/eleanor-oliphant-is-completely-fine-by-gail-honeyman/9780735220690/readers-guide/>

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

Move over, Ove (in Fredrik Backman's *A Man Called Ove*, 2014)--there's a new curmudgeon to love. Thirty-year-old Eleanor Oliphant leads a highly predictable life, working at an office, eating the same meals alone in her apartment, and spending her weekends regularly administering vodka (she usually goes without speaking to another human from the time she bids farewell to the bus driver on Friday until she greets another one on Monday). She is, as she regularly tells herself, fine. But when a chance encounter with a local musician sends her reeling into the throes of a full-fledged crush, her carefully constructed world breaks open. Soon she is embarking

on a self-improvement program from the outside in, complete with shopping trips, manicure, makeup, and attempts at hairstyling. The real changes, however, are slowly taking place within, as she develops a friendship with a man from work and eventually learns the wonderful rewards that come to those who open their hearts. Walking in Eleanor's practical black Velero shoes is delightfully amusing, her prudish observations leavened with a privately puckish humor. But readers will also be drawn in by her tragic backstory, which slowly reveals how she came to be so entirely Eleanor. Witty, charming, and heartwarming, *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* is a remarkable debut about a singular woman. Readers will cheer Eleanor as she confronts her dark past and turns to a brighter future. Feel good without feeling smarmy.--Bridget Thoreson

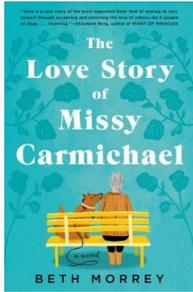
Library Journal

Eleanor Oliphant, the friendless 29-year-old finance clerk in a small Scottish graphics design firm, feels safest in the cocoon of strict routines both at work and at home. Unfazed by office gossip about her peculiarities (she acknowledges that her coworkers have a point), Eleanor's careful firewalls start to crack. She simultaneously develops a crush on a bar musician and is reluctantly drawn into a tentative friendship with Raymond, the new IT guy, and with Sammy, an older man whose life she and Raymond save. Without a shred of self-pity and lacking nearly all social skills (but willing to learn them) owing to her shocking, savage past, Eleanor is unaware of her ability to charm and inspire those who want to help her and those who grow to care for her. VERDICT Honeyman's exquisite, heartbreaking, funny, and irresistible novel brings to life a character so original and pitch-perfect that it is nearly impossible to believe this is a debut. Surprises abound as the author boldly turns literary expectations upside down and gives to her readers Eleanor Oliphant, who, yes, is completely, beautifully fine. [See Prepub Alert, 11/14/16.]—Beth Andersen, formerly with Ann Arbor Dist. Lib., MI --Beth Andersen (Reviewed 02/15/2017) (Library Journal, vol 142, issue 3, p78)

Kirkus Reviews

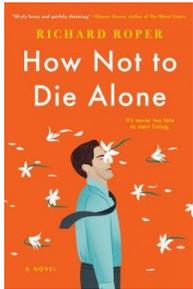
A very funny novel about the survivor of a childhood trauma. At 29, Eleanor Oliphant has built an utterly solitary life that almost works. During the week, she toils in an office—don't inquire further; in almost eight years no one has—and from Friday to Monday she makes the time go by with pizza and booze. Enlivening this spare existence is a constant inner monologue that is cranky, hilarious, deadpan, and irresistible. Eleanor Oliphant has something to say about everything. Riding the train, she comments on the automated announcements: "I wondered at whom these pearls of wisdom were aimed; some passing extraterrestrial, perhaps, or a yak herder from Ulan Bator who had trekked across the steppes, sailed the North Sea, and found himself on the Glasgow-Edinburgh service with literally no prior experience of mechanized transport to call upon." Eleanor herself might as well be from Ulan Bator—she's never had a manicure or a haircut, worn high heels, had anyone visit her apartment, or even had a friend. After a mysterious event in her childhood that left half her face badly scarred, she was raised in foster care, spent her college years in an abusive relationship, and is now, as the title states, perfectly fine. Her extreme social awkwardness has made her the butt of nasty jokes among her colleagues, which don't seem to bother her much, though one notices she is stockpiling painkillers and becoming increasingly obsessed with an unrealistic crush on a local musician. Eleanor's life begins to change when Raymond, a goofy guy from the IT department, takes her for a potential friend, not a freak of nature. As if he were luring a feral animal from its hiding place with a bit of cheese, he gradually brings Eleanor out of her shell. Then it turns out that shell was serving a purpose. Honeyman's endearing debut is part comic novel, part emotional thriller, and part love story. (Kirkus Reviews, February 1, 2017)

READALIKES



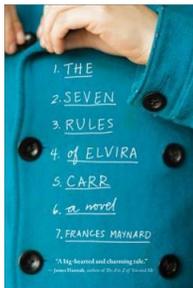
***The Love Story of Missy Carmichael* by Beth Morrey**

Reevaluating her past upon finding herself alone at age 79, Missy forges unexpected ties with two strangers and their spirited dog, discovering the power of friendship, family and self-forgiveness along the way.



***How Not to Die Alone* by Richard Roper**

Telling a white lie that makes his coworkers believe he has a loving family at home, a lonely man stuck in a thankless public-health job falls in love with a new coworker who challenges his secrets.



***The Seven Rules of Elvira Carr* by Frances Maynard**

Forced to confront her social anxiety in the wake of her mother's stroke, a young woman who lives by strict if unreliable codes of conduct devises a seven-step approach to coping with the outside world, before a series of awkward encounters reveals how most people do not live according to rules.