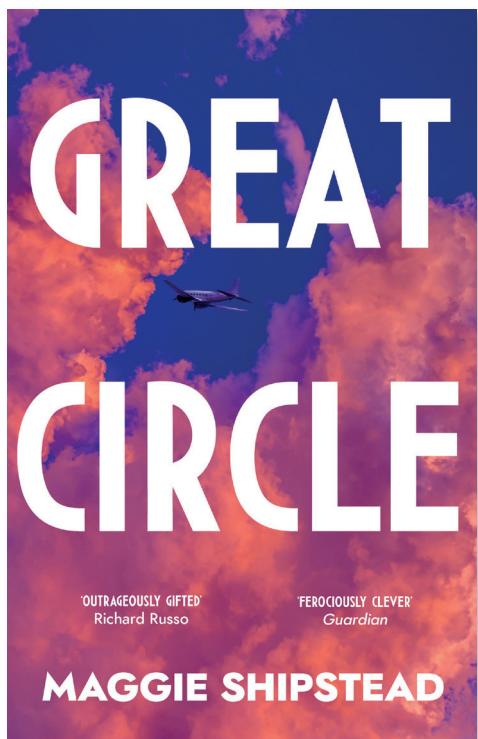


From Judging Room to Living Room A Discussion Guide for Readers

Featuring discussion prompts from this year's judging panel



Great Circle Maggie Shipstead

Transworld

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What the judges decided

'A book of tremendous narrative ambition and scale, *Great Circle* pulled us into its vividly created worlds – from prohibition-era Montana to wartime Britain to present-day Hollywood – and made us want to dwell in them indefinitely. Maggie Shipstead has an extraordinary ability to conjure characters and settings so fully-realised one feels one knows them – and spills her story out in one gorgeously-crafted sentence after another. Absorbing in the manner of the immersive realist novels of the 19th century, the book speaks to ever-present questions about freedom and constraint in women's lives.'

- Maya Jasanoff

What the judges discussed: ideas to explore

- Did the character of Marian Graves speak to you?
- Which of the minor characters are you most fond of or interested in?
- *Great Circle* is so ambitious in scale and scope that it invites the term 'epic'. Yet it's also tightly controlled in many ways. Could you discuss the ways in which Maggie Shipstead prevents this scale from becoming a sprawl?
- Hadley's story and Marian's inform each other – not just because Hadley is playing Marian but because of their respective losses. What does one woman's life show you about the other's?
- There's a strong physicality to the book. Can you point to instances in which you are immersed in what things feel like, smell like, etc?
- How did you feel when the book ended?

About the book

The lives of a fearless female aviator and the actress who portrays her on screen decades later intersect in Maggie Shipstead's vivid, soaring novel, *Great Circle*.

Marian Graves was a daredevil all her life, from her wild childhood in the forests of Montana to her daring wartime Spitfire missions. In 1950, she sets off on her ultimate adventure, the *Great Circle* - a flight around the globe. She is never seen again. Half a century later, Hadley Baxter, a scandal-ridden Hollywood actress, whose own parents perished in a plane crash, is irresistibly drawn to play Marian Graves. This role will lead her to uncover the real mystery behind the vanished pilot.

About the author

Maggie Shipstead is an American novelist who lives in Los Angeles. She is shortlisted for the 2021 Booker Prize with *Great Circle* – her third novel.

Her debut, *Seating Arrangements*, was a New York Times bestseller in 2012 and won the Dylan Thomas Prize and LA Times Book Prize for First Fiction. She is a graduate of the Iowa Writer's Workshop, a former Wallace Stegner Fellow at Stanford and a two-time National Magazine Award finalist for fiction. *Great Circle* was inspired by a statue of New Zealand's Jean Batten at Auckland airport. Shipstead's plan was to write a book about 'scale, travel and what it means to live a life that's truly free'. She has a collection of short stories coming out next summer.

The author says...

'The first seed of *Great Circle* was planted when I saw a statue of the pilot Jean Batten (the first person to fly solo from England to New Zealand in 1936) at the Auckland airport in 2012. I'd been casting about for a book idea, and I felt a strong sense of recognition that this – a female pilot – was what I had to write about. Mostly I researched by reading, but I also traveled to some very remote places, usually on magazine assignments, because I wanted to see what Marian saw. And I went to an archive at Stanford University to read the personal papers of several American women who, like Marian, flew in the Air Transport Auxiliary in the UK during the Second World War.'

Further Reading

- Maggie Shipstead, *Seating Arrangements*
- Maggie Shipstead, *Astonish Me*
- Esi Edugyan, *Washington Black*
- A.S. Byatt, *Possession*
- Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being*
- Eleanor Catton, *The Luminaries*