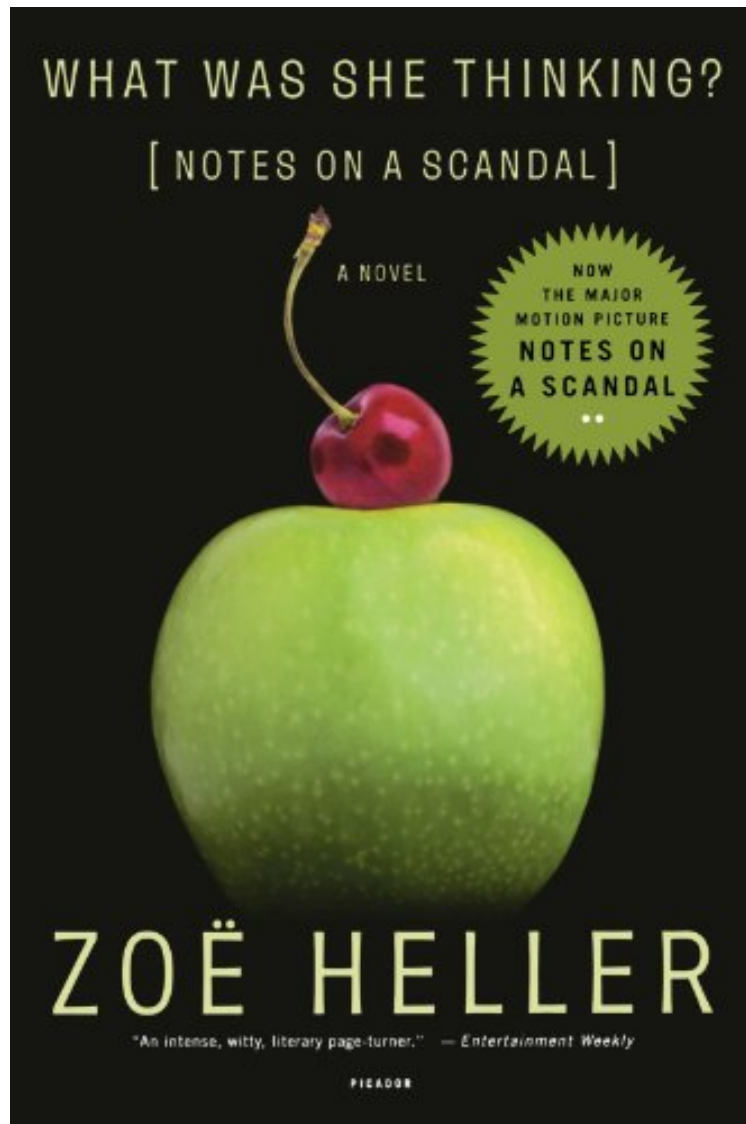


(Library ebook) What Was She Thinking?: Notes on a Scandal: A Novel

## What Was She Thinking?: Notes on a Scandal: A Novel

Zoë Heller

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**Zoë Heller : What Was She Thinking?: Notes on a Scandal: A Novel** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised What Was She Thinking?: Notes on a Scandal: A Novel:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. It Is All About Barbara By Ron KA middle-age female high school teacher has an affair with a student that began when the student was fifteen. The narrator will mention more than once that the uproar among the public, friends of the teacher, friends of the student, and the school staff is different than what it would be if the situation were a male teacher with a female student. The could not be a book like this without making that observation; by doing so we have gotten social politics out of the way. For those looking for salacious

sexual content; this is NOT the book for you. In the first few pages the reader is almost promised all the lurid details of an eight-month affair, but you will have to look very hard to find any "good stuff." What the reader will find is some excellent writing in the way of character development. Barbara, the narrator, is a fascinating character. More and more of her character is revealed as the book moves on. The novel is in the form of Barbara's notes on the scandal once Sheba has been caught. Barbara wants to make notes on her relationship with Sheba from the time she first met the new teacher until the "present" time, when she is still taking care of Sheba in the house of Sheba's mom. While Barbara's focus is on Sheba and student lover Connolly; Barbara also writes of her own relationship with headmaster Pabblem, former best friend Jennifer, and Sue Hodge. It seems Barbara is quite jealous of Sue because Sheba's first close friend was Sue, not Barbara. Barbara also is involved with Sheba's family, husband Richard, daughter Polly, and son Ben. Barbara does not have a high opinion of many. She thinks Richard is pretentious and does not deserve Sheba. She thinks Polly is disrespectful and disdainful of Sheba (a correct viewpoint). She does not have bad things to say about Ben, but Ben has Down's syndrome. Sheba is an upper class lady trying to make a difference in sharing enlightenment with the lower class rough crowd of students at her school. Connolly is a student who sees an opportunity for sex. Sheba does not start out with the idea of sex with a student. She looks at Connolly's early attempts at starting a relationship as cute. She rationalizes her responses as polite; she does not want to stunt his social growth by an outright rebuff. Then she becomes intrigued. Then she responds with more enthusiasm, then she gets caught. After she gets caught, daughter Polly will not talk to her, husband Richard throws her out of the house and allows only limited visitation with Ben. Sheba loses her job. Barbara loses her job, ousted by the headmaster she never liked, but she was ready to retire anyway. Sheba moves into a house owned by her brother Eddie, who is away in another country for an extended period of time. Barbara moves in with her for emotional support; she also begins making notes (this novel). There is a surprise, not to be revealed here. How did she get caught? Did someone see Sheba and Connolly together? Who informed? But the surprise takes backstage to the examination of Barbara's life (as explained by Barbara). And the answer to the unasked question of why Barbara, really quite a snob, is taking care of Sheba, remains unanswered.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Read the book....then see the movie

By Rhonda Filipan I saw the movie (twice) before buying the book but wish I had done it the other way around. The story is narrated by Barbara Covett, a cynical, 60-something teacher who is very lonely---and very obsessed with Sheba, the pretty, 40-something art teacher at her school who had an affair with a high school student. Although the book (and the wonderfully-adapted movie) seek to question Sheba's actions, it's actually Barbara who is the real villain. The book is so well written that readers actually believe Barbara early on. She is simply writing "notes" on "a scandal" that occurred at her school, right? And she wants to protect her best friend and fellow teacher, Sheba, by documenting how Sheba got involved with a teenage student, right? False and more false! It's not until later in the book, though, that we realize that Barbara is an unreliable narrator---that's why I wish I had read the book before I had watched the movie. All these "notes" are actually Barbara's way of documenting her so-called relationship / obsession with Sheba. I think Barbara actually feels betrayed that Sheba chose a young man over her. Barbara's fixation on Sheba is so over the top, but she justifies it in the book and in the movie because she's "lonely." Please. Get another cat, crazy lady! Volunteer somewhere! Just. Get. Away. If you've ever known someone with an unhealthy fixation on YOU, you will find Barbara Covett as creepy as I did. That being said, the novel (and in turn my review) do nothing at all to refute the unflattering societal stereotype of the old / educated / lonely / spinster-teacher with cats. Other reviewers sympathize with Barbara and found passages about her solitary life touching. Not me. Her desire to attach herself to Sheba seems so obsessive that I think it makes Sheba's equally obsessive affair with the underage Steven who-smells-like-fresh-laundry Connelly seem almost acceptable. Both are May-December romances. And both relationships would be great to discuss in a readers' group, I think. Judi Dench plays Barbara Covett (to the hilt) in the film; Kate Blanchett plays the posh pottery teacher, Sheba. And now I want to read MORE books by Zoe Heller. --Rhonda Filipan

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Thought-provoking disclosure of all parties involved in elicit acts

By Carolyn Dargevics I don't usually buy British novels because I simply can't get past the differences in our languages. However, due to a trusted review, I thought I'd give it a try. In general, this was an OK novel but I enjoyed more how it was written, as the first-person's memoir or journal. The author was very perceptive on many issues and brought to light many concepts that run through my mind: the media's pouncing on a story -- any story, an exaggeration in so many ignorant minds, lack of empathy and/or sympathy within us all, egocentrism of all, the hormonal stupidity of both genders of all ages and stages. The story kept moving; in other words, I didn't have to scan anything to get at the meat. The characters were well defined; I could envision all of them. This was a different take on what some people would have expected and I like that. For me, it defined that sex between an adult male teacher and a teenage girl is very different from sex between an adult female teacher and a teenage boy. Very different! I won't go into the details, but those differences -- intentions of all parties -- should definitely be considered in any court of law.

A lonely schoolteacher reveals more than she intends when she records the story of her best friend's affair with a pupil in this sly, insightful novel. Schoolteacher Barbara Covett has led a solitary existence; aside from her cat, Portia, she has few friends and no intimates. When Sheba Hart joins St. George's as the new art teacher, Barbara senses the

possibility of a new friendship. It begins with lunches and continues with regular invitations to meals with Sheba's seemingly close-knit family. But as Barbara and Sheba's relationship develops, another does as well: Sheba has begun a passionate affair with an underage male student. When it comes to light and Sheba falls prey to the inevitable media circus, Barbara decides to write an account in her friend's defense—an account that reveals not only Sheba's secrets but her own. *What Was She Thinking?* is a story of repression and passion, envy and complacency, friendship and loneliness. A complex psychological portrait framed as a wicked satire, it is by turns funny, poignant, and sinister. With it, Zoë Heller surpasses the promise of her critically acclaimed first novel, *Everything You Know*. Shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize *What Was She Thinking?* is the basis of the 2006 film, *Notes on a Scandal*, starring Judi Dench and Kate Blanchett.

From Publishers Weekly Subtitled *Notes on a Scandal*, Heller's engrossing second novel (after *Everything You Know*) is actually the story of two inappropriate obsessions—one a consummated affair between a high school teacher and her student, the other a secret passion harbored by a dowdy spinster. Sheba Hart, a new 40ish art teacher at a London school for working-class kids, has been arrested for having a sexual relationship with a 15-year-old student, Steven Connolly. The papers are having a blast. Sheba is herself the object of fascination for her older colleague and defender, Barbara Covett, whose interest in Sheba is not overtly romantic but has an erotic—and at times malevolent—intensity. Barbara narrates the story of Sheba's affair while inadvertently revealing her own obsession and her pivotal role in the scandal. The novel is gripping from start to finish; Heller brings vivid, nuanced characterizations to the racy story. Sheba is upper-class, arty, carelessly beautiful in floaty layers of clothing, with a full life of her own: doting older husband, impossible adolescent daughter, a son with Down's Syndrome, real if underdeveloped talent as a potter. She never got a driver's license, she tells Barbara, because she is always given rides; people want to do things for her. Barbara's respectable maiden-lady exterior hides a bitter soul that feasts on others' real and imagined shortcomings: one colleague's carelessly shaved armpits, another's risible baseball jacket. Even characters on stage for a minute (a Camden barman who hams it up for Barbara) live and breathe. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *The New Yorker* Barbara Covett, a sixtyish history teacher, is the kind of unmarried-woman-with-cat whose female friends sooner or later decide she is "too intense." Thus when a beautiful new pottery teacher, Sheba Hart—a "wispily novice with a tinkly accent and see-through skirts"—chooses Barbara as a confidante, she is deeply, even rather sinisterly, gratified. Sheba's secret is explosive: married with two kids, she is having an affair with a fifteen-year-old student. The novel, Heller's second, is Barbara's supposedly objective "history" of the affair and its eventual discovery, written furtively while she and her friend are holed up in a borrowed house, waiting for Sheba's court date. Barbara has appointed herself Sheba's "unofficial guardian," protecting her from the salivating tabloids. Equally adroit at satire and at psychological suspense, Heller charts the course of a predatory friendship and demonstrates the lengths to which some people go for human company. Copyright © 2005 The New Yorker From Booklist Heller's insightful, piercing second novel (her first was *Everything You Know* [2000]) is narrated by Barbara Covett, a lonely older woman who purports to tell the story of her friend's downfall. When Sheba Hart arrives to be the new art teacher at the school where Barbara teaches history, solitary Barbara is immediately taken with her. Though her initial attempt to befriend Sheba is thwarted when Sheba becomes friends with another teacher, eventually Sheba begins to converse with Barbara. Soon, she invites Barbara over to her house to have meals with her family. Barbara is shocked to learn that Sheba is being pursued by a 15-year-old student and scandalized to find that Sheba has given in to his romantic overtures. But for solitary Barbara, her friend's scandalous life is a window to a more exciting one, and vicariously she laps up the bits and pieces Sheba shares, imagining or surmising the rest. The novel builds to a stunning ending that ultimately reveals Barbara's true character as much as it shows the depths to which Sheba has fallen. Both a penetrating character study and a sharp examination of voyeurism, Heller's novel is utterly brilliant. Kristine Huntley Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved