



FLATIRON  
BOOKS  
NEW YORK

# *Dear Reader*

## Reading Group Guide

1. Are you a *Wuthering Heights* fan? How did your feelings about Emily Brontë's novel affect your view of Mary O'Connell's? Did *Dear Reader* make you want to turn to *Wuthering Heights*?
2. Heath believes that there are only five basic plots. Do you think there are any new stories, or is everything a version of something that came before it? How do you feel about modern adaptations of classic works?
3. Flannery reflects that "any old day was pure *Wuthering Heights* for someone." What does she mean by that? Do you agree?
4. Flannery argues: "Heathcliff's disappearance is not some gigantic authorial misstep on the part of Emily Brontë. She's inviting us to use our imagination, to be part of the narrative. She's breaking open the story for us." How do readers participate in the creation of narrative? How does Mary O'Connell break open her story for us?
5. Did you have a beloved high school English teacher, like Miss Sweeney? Discuss his or her importance in your life.
6. Did the portrayal of New York City in *Dear Reader* resonate with you? How do Flannery's and Cait's views of the city differ?
7. Cait asks, exasperatedly, "How can Anne Frank be expected to compete with the Kardashians?" What do you think? How should one balance reading literary classics with pop culture consumption?
8. Heath says: "Old *Wuthering Heights*? It's a bit of a girl's book, really." Flannery objects, but is there any truth to his claim? Do you think some novels inherently appeal more to women than men, or vice versa?
9. Discuss Flannery's assertion that if art "teaches us anything, it is that our hearts were made to be broken. [...] It's everywhere, the ubiquitous quality of heartbreak, the immutable sadness of romance." Do you agree? How does heartbreak shape *Dear Reader*?

10. Would you want to read Flannery's proposed debut novel, about the Blue People of Kentucky? If you were one of the Blue People finally emerging from the forest, do you think you would feel freedom or heartbreak?
11. What did you make of Caitlin's meditation on the boy from the Laundromat in her final section? How does it complicate and inform the resolution of her story?
12. Flannery says to Heath, of *Wuthering Heights*: "I think it's not about mourning the past, but how the finality of the past can drive you *insane*. You know, how wishing someone you love were Christ himself, so that they could rise again." Do her reflections apply to Miss Sweeney, too? How is the literary device of the Christ figure employed in *Dear Reader*?
13. Discuss Flannery's realization that Heath might be Brontë's Heathcliff: "Flannery knew it sounded hardcore crazy, a literary resurrection that perhaps took a greater suspension of disbelief than the heralded religious one, and who would believe it, who would open their mind and heart, and make themselves so vulnerable to the spirit world that lay just beyond the cover?" How does her question relate to all fiction reading? How do fiction and religion relate and diverge in this novel?
14. Cait reflects: "the world could crack open and you could walk into it by yourself, a private kaleidoscope of colorful experience fractured by loneliness, or you could enjoy the cozy contentment of being loved, the security of being in a couple, and yet long for solitude and adventure." Do you agree, or is it possible to have both?
15. Heath cautions Flannery: "This one true soul mate business is total nonsense. It simply doesn't work." What do you think?
16. O'Connell writes: "Because reading next to someone that you loved or might love, depending? Well, it was breathtaking." Discuss the dual nature of reading, that it is a solitary act that can bring people together. How does that duality manifest itself in *Dear Reader* and in your own life?