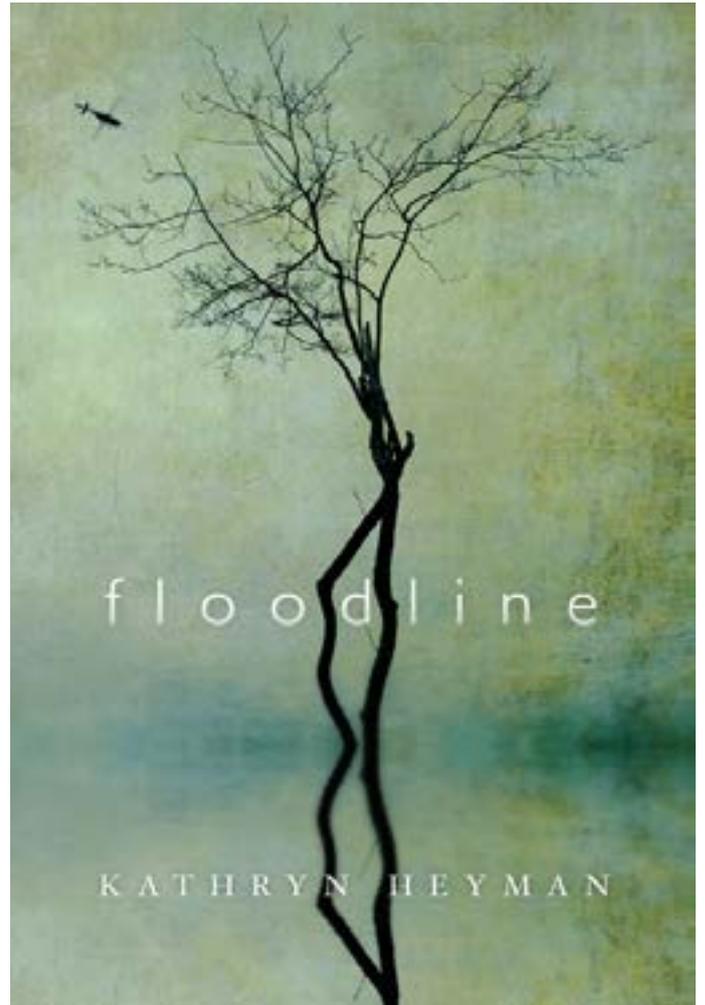


ALLEN & UNWIN



READING GROUP NOTES

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About the book

What remains after everything is washed away? Funny, moving and utterly compelling, *Floodline* tells of the unexpected salvation that can be found on the edge of disaster.

When the city of Horneville is destroyed by a flood on the eve of a huge gay mardis gras, Mikey Brown - the feisty, sexy and dynamic host of a Christian shopping channel - knows exactly what she needs to do. Taking her sons with her, she sets out on a grand mercy mission. The journey is more than a flood clean-up for Mikey - she wants to save the city and teach the godless inhabitants a lesson. Her husband was lost to her, after attempting to 'mission' to this same festival, and this is her chance to lay the past to rest. Mustard - an enthusiastic, ebullient, 8 year old - doesn't believe his father is dead. In fact, he is determined to find him and knows that Horneville is the place to start looking. If anyone can bring him back, Mustard can.

Down in the city, the floodwater surrounding the Horneville City Hospital is steadily rising, turning what has been a place of refuge into a disaster zone. Deep in the hospital chaos, Nurse Gina Donaldson is forced to make a life and death decision with shattering repercussions.

The arrival of Mikey's little troupe helps Gina find hope in the most unlikely places. Both Mikey and Gina must stare down their pasts in order to find salvation, but will they have the courage?

This extraordinary novel is a brilliant feat of imagination and characterisation from an acclaimed writer at the height of her great powers. It is surprising, revelatory and original in every way.

About the author

Kathryn Heyman is the author of four novels, including *The Accomplice* and *Captain Starlight's Apprentice*, published internationally and in translation. She has received an Arts Council of England Writers Award, the Wingate and the Southern Arts Awards, and been nominated for the Orange Prize, the Scottish Writer of the Year Award, the Edinburgh Fringe Critic's Awards, the Kibble Prize, and the West Australian Premier's Book Awards. She has written several radio plays for BBC radio, including adaptations of her own work. *The Floodline* is her fifth novel.

The author, Kathryn Heyman, on writing *Floodline*

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, a group of medical staff in the city's main hospital were forced to make a series of seemingly impossible ethical decisions. I'd read the report on the events, and the court transcripts that resulted, and was completely compelled by the situation, kept returning to it. The idea of the impossible ethical choice is one that contemporary philosophers return to, and it's in my creative DNA. In the midst of thinking about this choice, and a novel which explored it, the Queensland floods started. My sister was a nurse in Brisbane, called in to the hospital over a three day emergency period. So then I knew I had my setting. And I knew that at heart, this was a choice about how we value other people, how we decide who is worthy - so this was to be a novel about faith, and hope.

Reviews & Quotes

'Kathryn Heyman's extraordinary fifth novel is a daring look at the nuances of belief ... *Floodline* is quite brilliant in its observation of human behaviour and the way tragedy brings out the best and worst in different people. Heyman balances a book that is preoccupied with tragedy with moments of great humour.' – *Culture Street*

'*Floodline* is full of dark humour ... [it] is a more poignant exploration of human behaviour in crisis, of how well we behave in chaos, and the small decisions we make along the way to allow us to live with ourselves.' – *Sydney Morning Herald*

For discussion

- ☞ *'I knew that at heart, this was a choice about how we value other people, how we decide who is worthy – so I knew I that this was to be a novel about faith, and hope'* - Kathryn Heyman on writing *Floodline*
How is the idea of faith explored through the two female characters, Mikey and Gina? How do their ideas of faith differ and how do they evolve throughout the course of the book?
- ☞ *'Roselands was as close to home as anything Gina had.'* (p.114)
In what ways does Gina's turbulent family history continue to shape her life working in the hospital?
- ☞ How are the values of NuDay altered by its growth from a 'small house church' to a multi-million dollar organisation? Consider the emphasis placed on the material objects produced by NuDay and endorsed by Mikey. What comments do you think are being made about the relationship between religion and the modern world?
- ☞ How is the idea of compassion explored through the range of characters at the hospital? Consider the ways in which Gina is depicted in comparison to the other nurses, Carla and Donna. How is our perception of Gina's compassion altered in the final hospital scene with Doctor Jim Baker and her patient Ned Hall?
- ☞ Throughout the book, many of the characters battle with feelings of 'shame'. In particular, consider the characters Talent and Mikey. How are their feelings towards religion complicated by shame once they enter the flood zone? How does shame impact their feelings towards Scott Brown? And consider the role of shame in internal struggles of Scott and Talent regarding sexuality.
- ☞ How do Mustard's religious views differ from his families? Consider how age, experience and memory have shaped the religious views of each of the family members.
- ☞ *'But it wasn't God she'd heard, rattling around in her brain. It never was. Even now, eight years later, it was him she heard when she was frightened, or lonely or sad. Scott.'* (p. 103)
In what ways are Mikey's relationships with God and with Scott Brown inextricably linked? How does this complicate her feelings towards both her religion and her husband?

- ☞ In what ways do our character judgments of Donkey evolve throughout the book? Consider the role of Donkey as a father figure and the implications it has for all the characters in the book. How is the relationship between Gina and Donkey developed through the split narrative device, and what kind of possibilities for reunion do you imagine beyond the resolution of the book?
- ☞ 'What is she could have saved him? If all he'd needed, to be saved, was this: I forgive you' (p.208)
Discuss the role of forgiveness and acceptance in the final revelations of the book. Consider the relationships between Mikey and Scott and between Gina and Donkey.
- ☞ Discuss the ways in which *Floodline* may have impacted your own experiences or understandings of real-life disaster zones. Has it altered your perception of human responses to natural disasters in any way?

Suggested further reading

Fiction:

The Road – Cormac McCarthy
Tsunami and the Single Girl – Krissy Nicholson
Lord of the Flies – William Golding
Jasper Jones – Craig Silvey

Non-Fiction:

On 'The Trolley Problem', the thought experiment developed by philosopher Phillipa Foot, exploring human value and ethics:

Phillipa Foot - *Moral Dilemmas: And Other Topics in Moral Philosophy*
 Judith Thompson - *Killing, Letting Die and the Trolley Problem in Rights, Restitution, and Risk: Essays in Moral Theory*
<http://www.philosophyexperiments.com/fatman/>
http://people.brandeis.edu/~teuber/Trolley_Problem-PHIL_1A.pdf

Sheri Fink's original report on the circumstances in Memorial Hospital in the New York Times:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/30/magazine/30doctors.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>

A collection of articles on the controversial 'ex gay' movement:

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/june-web-only/exodus-international-alan-chambers-apologize-for-exgay-past.html>
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/04/alan-chambers-exodus-international-_n_3696750.html

Suggested further listening

A BBC Radio broadcast on the 'Prosperity Gospel' movement:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01sm2fy>

Suggested further viewing

Leigh Sales on the impact of 'ex-gay therapy':
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-08-19/the-impact-of-ex-gay-therapy/4898032>