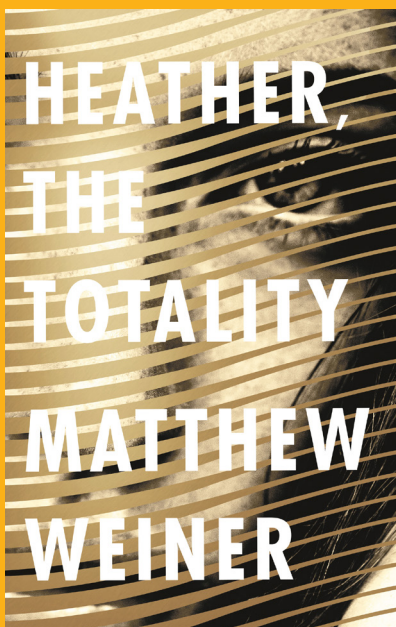




ALLEN & UNWIN'S
Book Group Guide
Conversation Starters



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Welcome to

Allen & Unwin's Book Group Guide

for *Heather, The Totality* by Matthew Weiner

Book, food & drink pairings

Books should never be read on an empty stomach! And if book groups, drinks and nibbles are a perfect match then we think that the classic cocktail, the Manhattan was made for this book. It's a bold, boozy drink and is well-paired with rich cured meats. So how about a charcuterie plate piled high with prosciutto, salami and an extra-sharp aged cheddar to bring the flavour of both the cocktail and food to the foreground?

About the book

The Breakstone family arrange themselves around their daughter Heather, and the world seems to follow: beautiful, compassionate, entrancing, she is the greatest blessing in their lives of Manhattan luxury. But as Heather grows – and her empathy sharpens to a point, and her radiance attracts more and more dark interest – their perfect existence starts to fracture. Meanwhile a very different life, one raised in poverty and in violence, is beginning its own malign orbit around Heather.

Matthew Weiner – the creator of *Mad Men* – has crafted an extraordinary first novel of incredible pull and menace. *Heather, The Totality* demonstrates perfectly his forensic eye for the human qualities that hold modern society together, and pull it apart.



About the author

Matthew Weiner is the creator of *Mad Men*, and worked as executive producer, writer and director on the show, which is widely considered one of the greatest television series of all time. He has received nine Emmys for his work on *Mad Men* and *The Sopranos*.

He lives in Los Angeles with his wife, architect Linda Brettler, and their four sons.

Watch the book trailer

Philip Pullman, Maggie O'Farrell, James Ellroy and Michael Chabon on *Heather, the Totality*.



Praise for *Heather, The Totality*

'*Heather, The Totality* is superb. It gripped me at once. There was no question of turning away at any point. Weiner conveys the sense that beyond the brilliantly chosen details there was a wealth of similarly truthful social and psychological perception unstated. Then there was the ice-cold mercilessness, of a kind that reminded me (oddly, I suppose, but there it was) of Evelyn Waugh. This novel is something special.'

PHILIP PULLMAN

'A miraculous and fearless novel, *Heather* is unprecedented. As well as being smart, sharp and readable, it proves there are still fresh and exciting ways to write fiction.'

M.J. HYLAND

'This short novel of upper-crust anomie and class-divide obsession is a scorcher! It's the classic noir construction: the short walk off the long ledge and the plummet to an indifferent Hell. Matthew Weiner demonically delivers the goods! Read this book in one gasping breath.'

JAMES ELLROY

'*Heather, The Totality* is a tour de force of control, tone and razor-slash insight. In its clear-eyed anatomist's gaze and its remarkable combination of empathy and pitilessness I hear echoes of Flaubert and Richard Yates, with a deeply twisted twist of Muriel Spark at her darkest. I could not put it down.'

MICHAEL CHABON



'I cringed and shuddered my way through this short, daring novel to its terrible inevitable end. Each neat, measured paragraph carpaccioes its characters to get to the book's heart - one of Boschian self-cannibalising isolation. A stunning novel. *Heather, The Totality* blew me away.'

NICK CAVE

Conversation starters ...

- ☞ Do you think it's interesting that a screenplay writer like Matthew Weiner hasn't used any dialogue in *Heather, The Totality* except in reported form? Pages 104 and 124 could be argued as exceptions to this but in essence there is no exchange of words between characters throughout the book.
- ☞ What would the effect on characterisation be if there was dialogue?
- ☞ Now consider the book as a screenplay. There are no CAPS for setting nor italics for directions and film techniques but there is a definite omnipresent narrator. The book is the script for the narrator of the film and the visual action follows her/his narration (with the occasional line as reported). Who would you cast as the narrator?
- ☞ Who would you cast as Mark/Karen/Heather/Bobby?
- ☞ Now move the setting from New York to Sydney (or your favourite Australian city). Where in Sydney? Which Australian actors would you cast in the roles above?
- ☞ How much of Karen and Mark's upbringing do you think informs the way they interacted with and raised their own child?
- ☞ What are your feelings towards Bobby? Do you feel empathy for him? Do you think the intervention of a positive figure in his life could have changed the path he ended up on?
- ☞ Do you think the juxtaposition of luxury and poverty used throughout is a clever device?
- ☞ Pick out a passage that strikes you as particularly moving or interesting and read it to the group.
- ☞ If you could speak with any character from the novel, who would it be and why?
- ☞ What three questions would you ask them?
- ☞ When you were reading *Heather, The Totality* how did you think the novel would end? How did the actual ending compare to your prediction? What alternate endings would you consider as plausible given the build-up of tension?