

# Beyond Depth and Dementia: A Comprehensive Exploration of We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves

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## We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves: A Novel (Pen/Faulkner Award - Fiction) by Karen Joy Fowler

★★★★☆ 4.1 out of 5

- Language : English
- File size : 2512 KB
- Text-to-Speech : Enabled
- Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
- X-Ray : Enabled
- Word Wise : Enabled
- Print length : 322 pages
- Screen Reader : Supported



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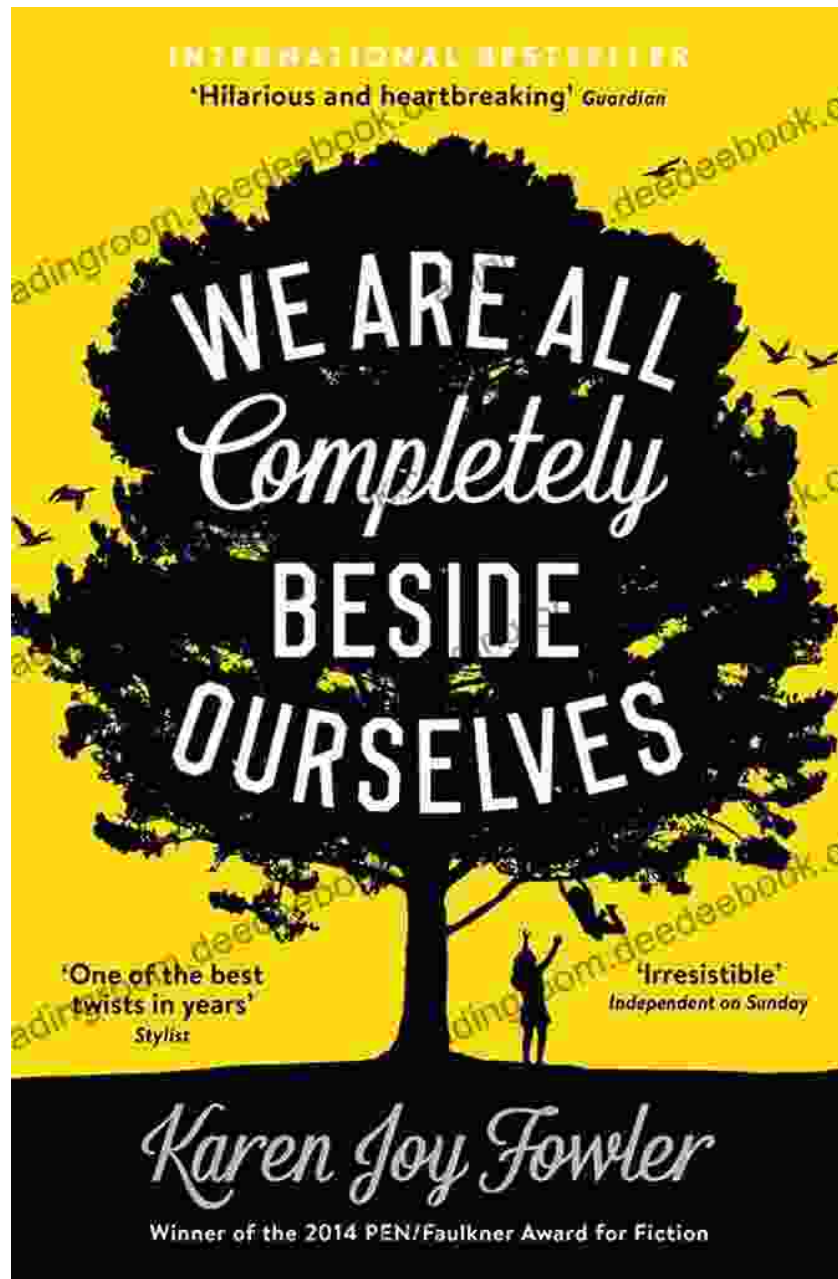
In her 2013 novel, *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*, Karen Joy Fowler delves into the depths of mental illness, family dynamics, and the complexities of morality. Through a unique narrative structure and unreliable narrator, Fowler crafts a poignant and thought-provoking exploration of the human experience.

### **Delving into the Darkness of Mental Illness**

At the heart of the novel lies the character of Rosemary Cooke, a woman struggling with schizophrenia. Fowler portrays Rosemary's descent into madness with raw honesty and empathy, offering a nuanced portrayal of a condition often misunderstood.

Through Rosemary's fragmented thoughts and delusions, readers are drawn into the labyrinth of her mind. Her hallucinations, paranoia, and inability to distinguish reality from fantasy paint a vivid picture of the torments of mental illness.

Fowler also explores the impact of Rosemary's condition on her family, particularly her younger brother Lowell. Witnessing his sister's decline from a bright and curious girl to a shell of her former self, Lowell grapples with feelings of guilt, anger, and helplessness.



## Broken Lives and Fragile Bonds

We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves is not only a story about mental illness but also an exploration of family dynamics. Rosemary's diagnosis exposes the fragility of the Cooke family, chipping away at the bonds that once held them together.

The parents, Marian and Ethan, are torn between their love for Rosemary and their own need for stability. Lowell is torn between his desire to protect his sister and his resentment towards her for disrupting their lives.

Fowler deftly weaves together the perspectives of these characters, creating a tapestry of emotions and conflicting desires. Each member of the Cooke family struggles to find their place in the face of Rosemary's illness, and the novel raises profound questions about love, loyalty, and the nature of family.

Character	Perspective	Conflicts
Rosemary Cooke	Fragmented and unreliable	Mental illness, hallucinations, paranoia
Lowell Cooke	Guilt-ridden and resentful	Responsibility for Rosemary, family dynamics
Marian Cooke	Loving but overwhelmed	Balancing love for Rosemary with family stability
Ethan Cooke	Supportive but distant	Dealing with Rosemary's illness while maintaining normalcy

### **Morality, Animal Rights, and the Boundaries of Humanity**

Beyond its psychological and familial aspects, *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* raises complex ethical questions about animal rights and the boundaries of humanity.

The novel follows the family's involvement with Fern, a chimpanzee raised as a human child. Fern's presence in the Cooke household challenges traditional notions of species and intelligence, prompting readers to question the ethical implications of treating animals as humans.

Fowler does not provide easy answers, but rather forces readers to wrestle with the moral dilemmas surrounding animal rights. The novel explores the complexities of empathy, communication, and the capacity for suffering across species.

### **Narrative Complexity and Unreliable Perspectives**

Fowler employs a unique narrative structure and unreliable narrator to further enhance the novel's themes of mental illness and fractured reality.

The novel is narrated by Lowell, who struggles with his own biases and faulty memories. His unreliable narration adds an element of doubt and uncertainty, challenging readers to question the accuracy of the events depicted.

Fowler also incorporates journal entries and medical records into the narrative, providing glimpses into Rosemary's own perspective and the difficulties of diagnosing and treating mental illness. These fragmented voices and perspectives add depth and complexity to the story, reflecting the elusive and multifaceted nature of truth and experience.

### **Critical Reception and Legacy**

*We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* received widespread critical acclaim upon its release. It was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction

and the National Book Award for Fiction, and won the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction.

The novel has been praised for its compassionate and unflinching portrayal of mental illness, its nuanced exploration of family dynamics, and its thought-provoking examination of ethical questions. Fowler's ability to blend emotional depth with philosophical inquiry has made *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* a modern classic.

### About the Author: Karen Joy Fowler

Karen Joy Fowler

Karen Joy Fowler is an American author best known for her novels *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (2013) and *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2004). Her work often explores themes of family, loss, and the complexities

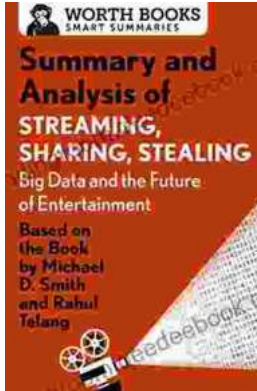


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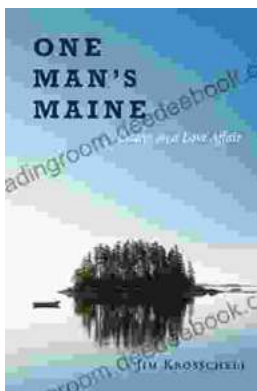
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