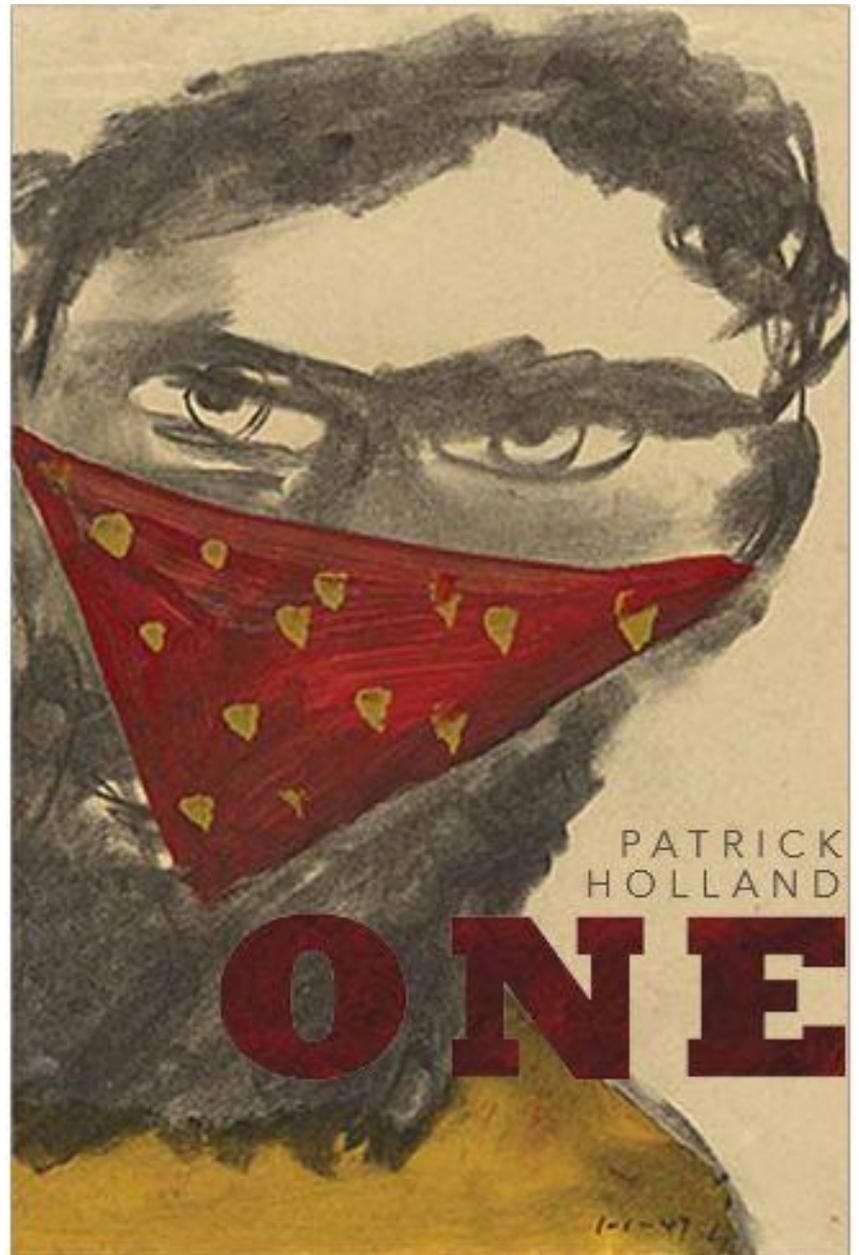


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READING GROUP NOTES

Contents: About the book [1] About the author [1] Reviews of previous works [2]
Points for discussion [3] Suggested reading [5] Suggested viewing [5]
Suggested listening [6]

About the book

The last bushrangers in Australian history, James and Patrick Kenniff, were at the height at their horse thieving operation at turn of the 20th century. In *One*, troops cannot pull the Kenniff Gang out of the ranges and plains of Western Queensland – the brothers know the terrain too well, and the locals are sympathetic to their escapades. When a policeman and a station manager go out on patrol from tiny Upper Warrego Station and disappear, Sergeant Nixon makes it his mission to pursue the gang, especially Jim Kenniff, who becomes for him an emblem of the violence that resides in the heart of the country.

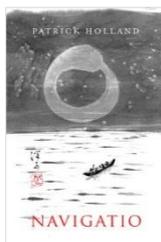
From the award-winning author of *The Mary Smokes Boys*, *One* is a novel of minimalist lyrical beauty that traverses the intersections between violence and love. It asks what right one man has to impose his will on another, and whether the written law can ever answer the law of the heart.

About the author

Patrick Holland is an Australian novelist and short story writer who grew up in outback Australia, later working as a horseman in the Maranoa district and as a ringer in the Top End. He has travelled widely throughout Asia, studying language and literature at Qingdao University and Beijing Foreign Studies University, and at the Ho Chi Minh Social Sciences University in Vietnam.

His works include *Navigatio* [Transit Lounge 2014], shortlisted for Queensland Literary Awards - People's Choice Book of the Year 2015; *The Darkest Little Room* [Transit Lounge 2012], Pulp Curry Top 5 Crime Books of 2012, and film optioned to Scott Street Films; *Riding the Trains in Japan: Travels in the Sacred and Supermodern East* [Transit Lounge 2011], shortlisted for the 2012 Queensland Literary awards - Best Non-fiction, shortlisted for the 2012 *Courier Mail* People's Choice Award; *The Mary Smokes Boys* [Transit Lounge 2011], longlisted for the 2011 Miles Franklin Award, shortlisted for the 2011 *The Age* Book of the Year, the *Australian Book Review* Book of the Year 2011, the *Adelaide Advertiser* Book of the Year 2011, *Readings* Book of the Year 2011; *The Source of the Sound* [ANZ Hunter Publishers/Salt Publishing 2010], winner of the Walter Scott Prize 2010, shortlisted for the Steele Rudd Prize 2011 and *The Long Road of the Junkmailer* [UQP 2006], shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize Best First Book 2006, winner of the Queensland Premier's Award - Best Emerging Author 2005.

Reviews of previous works



'...A beautiful mediation on losing one way and finding another. It is sensual and soulful. A rich and mellow book, one to take time over and savour in its many moods.' Michael McGirr, author of *Things You Get For Free* and *Bypass*



'The dialogue is tough and curt, the descriptions often achingly beautiful...the perfect 21st-century Australian novel, exposing the cruel underbelly of life in the Asia-Pacific region while also managing to be a cracking read.' Chris Flynn, *The Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald*

'...this is both a stunning page-turner and an investigation into the dim caverns of the human heart and soul that bears comparison to Graham Greene and Joseph Conrad.' Matthew Condon, author of *The Toe Tag Quintet*, *Three Crooked Kings* and *Jacks and Jokers*.



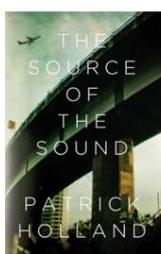
'... a patient, observant book, and also a joyful, knowledgeable one.' William Heyward, *Australian Book Review*

'... Reading *Riding the Trains* in Japan is a meditative experience, and I found much more to contemplate once I put the book down.' Ingrid Josephine, *Readings Monthly*

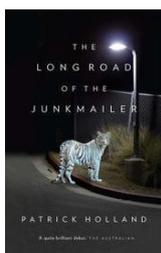


'Barely a scene or image is wasted ... He weaves Hemingway's blunt sentences and carved dialogue with the old fashioned storytelling of a folk tale imbued with the dark romance of a Nick Cave ballad.' Jo Case, *The Age*

'This book is poetic, moving and will haunt the reader long after the story is over.' Krissy Kneen, author of *Affection* and *Triptych*



'Beautiful and bittersweet ... written in tough lean prose, its denouement leaves a lingering impression.' *Sydney Morning Herald*



'A quite brilliant debut' *The Australian*

'His imagination is unrivalled' *Good Reading Magazine*

'Quirky, magical, melancholic and utterly readable' *Bookseller + Publisher*

For discussion

- Explain the significance of the title of the book. Did your interpretation of the title change as you read? In what ways and why?
- *One* is Holland's fictionalised account of the last police hunt for Australian bushrangers James and Patrick Kenniff in 1902. What do you think of this technique of fictionalising actual events? How did it affect your enjoyment of, and interest in, the narrative?
- Holland uses repetition, both at sentence level and at chapter level. What effect does this have on the narrative?
- Landscape in *One* can be seen as a character in its own right. What is its actual and metaphorical role in the unfolding of this story? What effect does the emptiness of this silent landscape have on the characters?
- What does this novel tell us about power relationships between cultures in the late 1800s/early 1900s in Australia? Think of the way the landowners, the Irish, the Aborigines and Chinese are portrayed. How does this relate to the way we see different cultures nowadays?
- The law is extremely important to Sergeant Nixon. Is it because he believes in justice, or is it a crutch? Does his attitude towards it change throughout the novel? Discuss.
- Whilst Sergeant Nixon and Jim Kenniff seem to have opposing personalities, there are, in fact, many similarities to their characters. Discuss.
- Secondary characters are said to support the Kenniff brothers, and the Skillington boy believes 'every man, woman and child loves [Jim]' [p343] – is this a survival tactic on their part, or genuine liking for the brothers? Discuss.
- What part do women play in the core emotional relationships of the main characters? Discuss.
- When Nixon tells Jim 'It was the Crown that gave you that land you're fighting for', Jim answers that he isn't fighting for land [p199]. What is Jim fighting for? Discuss.
- Both Jim and Nixon live in a world punctuated by violence – as Jim says, 'Violence is power.' [p197]. Yet both men allow themselves to be vulnerable to women. Discuss this duality.
- Tom Lawton tells Nixon that he still loves Jim, and that 'if I have to choose ... when I have to choose ... I will choose him' [p333]. Yet he still betrays Jim. Discuss the motivation behind this betrayal.

- What do you make of King Edward? Discuss his character in terms of his behaviour, motivation, intelligence, language use, and his relationship with other characters.
- In the end, Nixon says he should have killed the Kenniff brothers or let them run. [p363]. Why? Discuss.
- Is 'justice' realised in this novel? Discuss.
- What are the religious references in this novel, and how do they affect the narrative?
- How do the relationships between the characters shift and realign as the novel progresses? Does it change anything fundamental in the characters? In the narrative? Discuss.
- Australian bushranger/settlement stories have their counterparts in the gaucho literature of Argentina, American Westerns, and more recently, in post-apocalyptic stories [where, after a major catastrophe, a society struggles to rebuild a civilisation, and is depicted in a manner similar to the settlement/frontier/gaucho stories]. Does *One* reinforce or resist this genre? Discuss, using other novels or films to support your argument.

Suggested reading

For Whom the Bell Tolls – Ernest Hemingway [Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940]

Wuthering Heights – Emily Brontë [Thomas Cautley Newby, 1847]

Snow Country – Yasunari Kawabata [Penguin Books Ltd, 2011 (1956)]

Haiku – Matsuo Bashō [State University of NY Press, 2004]

Game – Trevor Shearston [Allen & Unwin, 2013]

Our Sunshine – Robert Drewe [Pan MacMillan, 1991]

The Border Trilogy: All the Pretty Horses (1992), *The Crossing* (1994), *Cities of the Plain* [1998] – Cormac McCarthy (Vintage Books).

Blood Meridian – Cormac McCarthy [Random House, 1985]

The Burial – Courtney Collins [Allen & Unwin, 2012]

Gould's Book of Fish – Richard Flanagan [Picador, 2002]

True History of the Kelly Gang – Peter Carey [UQP, 2000]

The Ox-Bow Incident – Walter Van Tilburg Clark [Random House, 1940]

Suggested viewing

The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford – [Director: Andrew Dominik, 2007]

The Proposition – [Director: John Hillcoat, 2005]

Tony Takitani – [Director: Jun Ichikawa, 2005]

Suggested listening

Lamentate – Arvo Pärt

Cantus – Arvo Pärt

Für Alina – Arvo Pärt

Horses – The Dirty Three

White Lunar – Warren Ellis & Nick Cave

4@18 – John Broaddus

Cascade – William Basinski

Cello Suites – Bach

Xerxes – Handel [especially *Largo*]

One

Patrick Holland

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