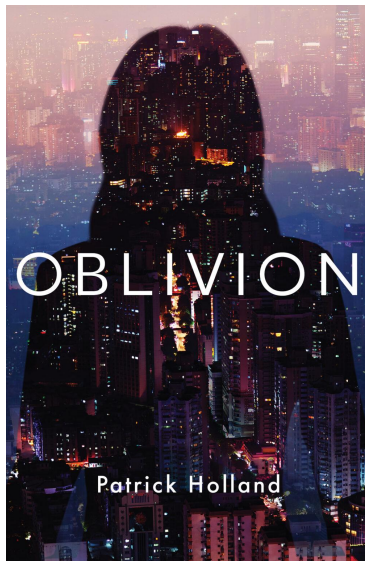


August 2026

***Oblivion* (2024) by Patrick Holland.** Patrick Holland is a novelist and short story writer reared in Roma Queensland. . He is the author of seven books, most notably *The Mary Smokes Boys* (2010), which was longlisted for the Miles Franklin Award and is currently being made into a feature film. His work has been recognised by awards including the Miles Franklin, and the Dublin Literary Award. Patrick divides his time between Hong Kong and Brisbane.



A nameless soul travels through soulless Asian cities. The narrator is adrift in Asia where he officially works in foreign affairs and trade, attending conferences and negotiating deals. His knowledge of Asian economies is extensive, and he speaks the languages he needs with enough fluency to do deals, pick up girls in bars and buy expensive liquor and opium.

Unofficially he does insider trades with super-wealthy Asian investors. When the novel opens, he is negotiating one of these illicit deals to buy up a corridor of Australian land, planning to finance his own purchase of a luxury high rise apartment in Saigon. He aspires to live there in an opium and booze induced oblivion. The glitzy world he traverses seems to offer very little.

And yet, in the desolation of a Japanese airport there is a flicker of hope. He purchases a copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and a bilingual edition of Bashō's haiku. This allusion to Japan's famous haiku poet is an invitation to the readers of *Oblivion* to supply their own images and make leaps and connections, according to the introduction to Basho, the *Complete Haiku* (2008). Ovid (43BC-17/18AD) is remembered for his erotic poetry, which may have caused his exile by Augustus. His epic poem *Metamorphoses* is about the transformation of human beings into other living things such as trees, animals and flowers. The reader is alerted to the possibility of spiritual change for *Oblivion's* world-weary narrator. The literary connections continue when Tien, a 21st-century courtesan makes her appearance in Saigon, and their first conversation references Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Is Tien his Beatrice, the Blessed One who will guide him to redemption? (The meaning of the Vietnamese name Tien is 'Goddess' or 'Celestial Being').

Ominously, when his assignation, promising quick cash, goes astray, Tien also disappears. He searches in vain for her, like a doomed Orpheus in a sky high underworld. Tien, too, has apparently found oblivion.

I would rather search forever — an inverted and abandoned Orpheus, wandering the high halls without a guide, afraid to turn around and see her absence.

The reader is drawn to consider the emptiness; the protagonist is left with nothing. Oblivion indeed.

Dusk became deep night and as the last vapours of the world vanished across the Styx at one bar or another.....

Readers in our group found this a sad and depressing view of life. The descriptive poetry was appreciated, but the emptiness was disturbing.

Ratings: Seven Bookclubbers rated the book – all at 3 out of 5.

Other Books We Read

The things we never say by Elizabeth Strout, 3.5
Whistler by Ann Patchett, 4
A Fraction of the Whole by Steve Tolz, 4.5
Ransom by David Malouf, 4.5
Middlemarch by George Elliot, 5
Odyssey by Stephen Fry, 5
War Poems by Siegfried Sassoon, 5
I Eat the Stars by Sarah Wilson, 4 (must read)
Ecliptic by Benjamin Wood, 4
The Year of Marvellous Ways by Sarah Winman, 4
The Things We Never Say by Elizabeth Strout, 3.5
I Dreamed of Africa by Kuki Gallman, 3.5
The Correspondent by Virginia Evan's, 3.5
The Season by Helen Garner, 3.5
Whistler by Ann Patchet, 3.5