

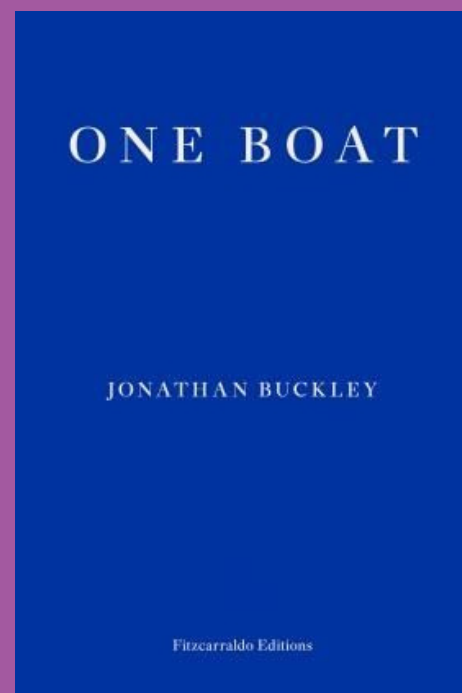


THE SCHOOLS' LAUREATE 2026 BOOK GUIDE

ONE BOAT

By Jonathan Buckley

In a small seaside town in Greece, the weather is radiant and the views of the sea and the mountains are breathtaking. Teresa is here on holiday to gather her thoughts following the recent death of her father. She has been here once before, nine years ago: the impetus for the earlier visit was the death of her mother. Memories of the earlier visit interweave with her account of this present visit. Her thoughts and reflections are in turn intersected with extracts from the diary that she is writing and from the notes that she made of her previous visit. Everywhere, including in herself, she finds change and continuity. Occasionally there are demands from the outside world, received in the form of messages sent to her phone. Mostly she bats these away. She is trying to find answers to the big questions: what is life and what is death, why does anything exist, what control do we have over our lives. In the meantime, as a lawyer, she can't resist involving herself in a (possible) murder mystery which spans her two visits. This novel contains many stories for the reader to find.



Fitzcarraldo, 2025

Longlisted, The Booker
Prize 2025

**With thanks to the
Hawthornden
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jonathan Buckley studied English Literature at university. He went on to research the work of the Scottish poet and artist, Ian Hamilton Finlay. He has written books about Italy, classical music and opera for Rough Guides. His first novel was published in 1997. *One Boat* is his eleventh novel. He has said, 'at no point did I ever envisage becoming a novelist. It was rather that I found that writing was something I had to do – at first, the writing was sporadic; it soon became a daily necessity.'

RESOURCES

[The Booker Library](#)

[The Arts Desk review](#)

[Bookbag review](#)

[Times Literary Supplement review](#)

[Kirkus Reviews](#)

“Jonathan Buckley’s strange, sly and self-assured novel, in which both nothing and everything happens, is about thinking and overthinking.”

Frances Wilson,
*Times Literary
Supplement*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

The World of the Book

- What does this novel say about the reliability of appearances?
 - Are they a question of perspective?
 - Is the narrator incapable of lying, as her mother believed?
 - Is the sea peaceful, as it appears?
 - Is Teresa's mother indifferent to her divorce from Teresa's father, as she is assumed to be?
 - What might the act of diving or swimming underwater signify in this novel?
- Petros says we need solid ground, or the feeling of solid ground, in order to live meaningfully (page 149). Is there solid ground in this novel?
- Teresa does not speak Greek. She understands Petros' poems with the help of a dictionary.
 - What other languages of communication do you see in this novel?
 - How many references can you find to possible ways of making sense of the world?
- What do you make of Petros' poetry?
 - You might want to look up examples of Ian Hamilton Finlay's work.

Style – or, How is this book written?

- The passive voice is used a lot in this novel.
 - What effect does this create?
 - Does the narrator observe herself on the page?
 - Does she have a stable sense of self?
- Can you spot the shifts that take us from one time period to another?
- Look up the meaning of the names of the characters. What do the names tell you about the role of the characters in the novel?

FURTHER READING:

Outline by Rachel Cusk

Briar Road by Jonathan Buckley

The Odyssey, translated from Homer's Greek by Emily Wilson

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How does the identity of the narrator emerge?
 - What does she write in her notebook?
 - What have other people, such as her parents, told her they think about her?
 - What do we learn about her from the way other people interact with her?
 - What do we learn about her from what she notices, or only half allows herself to notice, in other people?
 - When you first started reading this book, what gender did you think the narrator was? Why?
 - How long do we have to wait before we find out the name of the narrator?
 - Is identity context-dependent?
- Teresa's ex-husband, Tom, told her that she had a mania for symmetry. Can you find examples of symmetry in this novel? For example:
 - What colour begins and ends the novel? What are its associations?
 - What does Teresa do in an attempt to get a truth out of Petros? (Look at pages 127 to 129.) How does he respond? (Look at pages 140 to 144.)
 - Are there parallels in the epiphanies that Teresa experiences on page 125 (first visit) and page 157 (second visit)?

Wider Themes

- What does this novel say about narrative?
 - Do we construct stories as we live them or in retrospect?
 - What use do we make of stories?
 - What happens to the parts of our lives that are not captured in narrative?

'Explorations of connection and presence drive this enigmatic, precise little web of a book.'

Kirkus Reviews

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Patrick tells Teresa to throw away the rubbish in her story (page 166).
 - Is what is rubbish a question of perspective?
 - Are you glad that Teresa does not appear to have followed Patrick's advice, even though she said he was right?
 - Or would you have preferred to read a story along the lines that Patrick proposes?
- Why is Teresa so interested in the patterns of condensation on page 15?
 - Does the pattern remind you of a family tree?
 - Does it have any relevance to the theme of narrative?
 - Does it point to the theme of responsibility for actions?

Reading the world

- Would you like to spend a holiday in this seaside town?
 - What does and does not appeal to you about this place?
 - Does the final paragraph on page 158 change your perspective?

One more thing

- Teresa is always practising her writing. Sitting in Xanthe's café, she has the idea of writing a catalogue of a day from this one perspective, one episode per hour (page 157).
 - Would you like to choose a place to try a similar exercise?

"This novella offers an unforgettable journey into the intricacies of memory, identity, and human connection"

The Bookbag