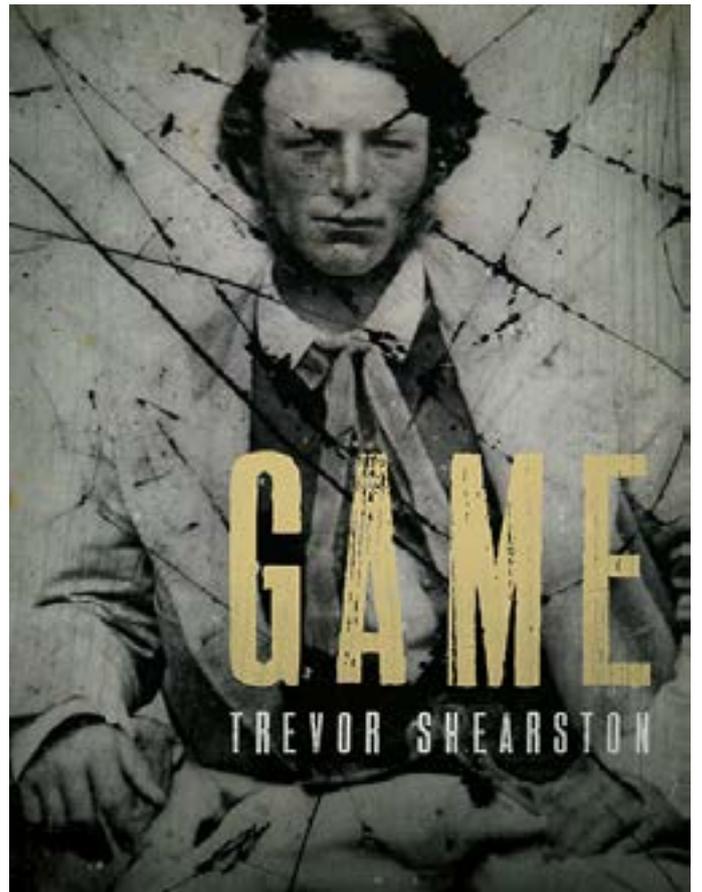


ALLEN & UNWIN



READING GROUP NOTES

Contents: About the book (2) About the author (2)
Suggested points for discussion (2) Further reading (3)

About the book

The thought was coming more often. That wherever he was, he was at the centre of a cage. He couldn't have said when the notion first entered his head. Some time in the last months. It was more now than a notion, he could see the damn bars. They were grey steel, the height of a man on horseback. In a dream he'd ridden out of a clump of boulders and caught them just before they retreated, how he knew what they looked like.

It is 1865. For three years, Ben Hall and the men riding with him have been lords of every road in mid-western New South Wales from Bathurst to Goulburn, Lambing Flat to Forbes. But with the Harbourers' Act made law, coach escorts armed now with the new Colt revolving rifle, and mailbags more often containing cheques than banknotes, being game is no longer enough.

The road of negotiated surrender is closed. Jack Gilbert has shot dead a police sergeant at Jugiong. Constable Nelson, father of eight, lies buried at Collector, killed by John Dunn. Neither time did Ben pull the fatal trigger, but he too will hang if ever the three are taken.

Harry Hall is seven. Ben has not seen the boy since his wife Biddy left to live with another man, taking Harry with her. The need to see his son, to be in some way a father again, has grown urgent. But how much time is left before the need to give the game away and disappear becomes the greater urgency?

A spare, epic work of haunting beauty that breathes life back into legend and confirms Shearston as one of Australia's finest writers.

About the author

Trevor Shearston is the author of *Something in the Blood* (1979); *Sticks That Kill* (1983); *White Lies* (1986); *Concertinas* (1988); *A Straight Young Back* (2000), *Tinder* (2002) and *Dead Birds* (2007). He lives in Katoomba, NSW with his family.

For discussion

- 📖 'The ring was my father's.' 'Give your word and you keep it.' *Game* pp. 17.
Discuss Ben's moral code, and how he implements it throughout *Game*.
- 📖 Consider Ben and Harry Hall's relationship in *Game*. What is Ben's motivation to know his son better? How do you feel about Harry's actions towards Ben?
- 📖 If you were in Jos Strickland's position, what would your actions have been?
- 📖 Discuss the figure of Ben Hall as a bushranger – does he match your preconceived notions of bushrangers?
- 📖 Think about the relationship between Ben, Jack Gilbert and John Dunn. Would you call them friends, allies, a gang or something else?

📖 Consider the influence of the Harbourers' Act in *Game*.

📖 Discuss the weaponry in *Game*.

📖 'Well, Mr Stead, you can see how it is with us today. But I'll answer you. Time was there weren't eight traps with every coach. Time was buggers like him –' he lifted his chin towards the driver of the sulky – 'were game to take us on, not have the uniforms camped permanent on their verandahs. Now it's needs must. Right now the need's boots. That's all we'll trouble you for.' *Game* pp. 198.

What is the range of public reaction in *Game* to bushrangers and to the actions of Ben?

📖 Discuss the women in *Game* and their depiction. How does each manage the balancing of loyalty against risk?

Suggested Reading

True History of the Kelly Gang – Peter Carey

Our Sunshine – Robert Drewe

The Burial – Courtney Collins

Blood Meridian – Cormac McCarthy

Sister Kate – Jean Bedford

Suggested Listening

'The Streets of Forbes'

'The Death of Ben Hall'