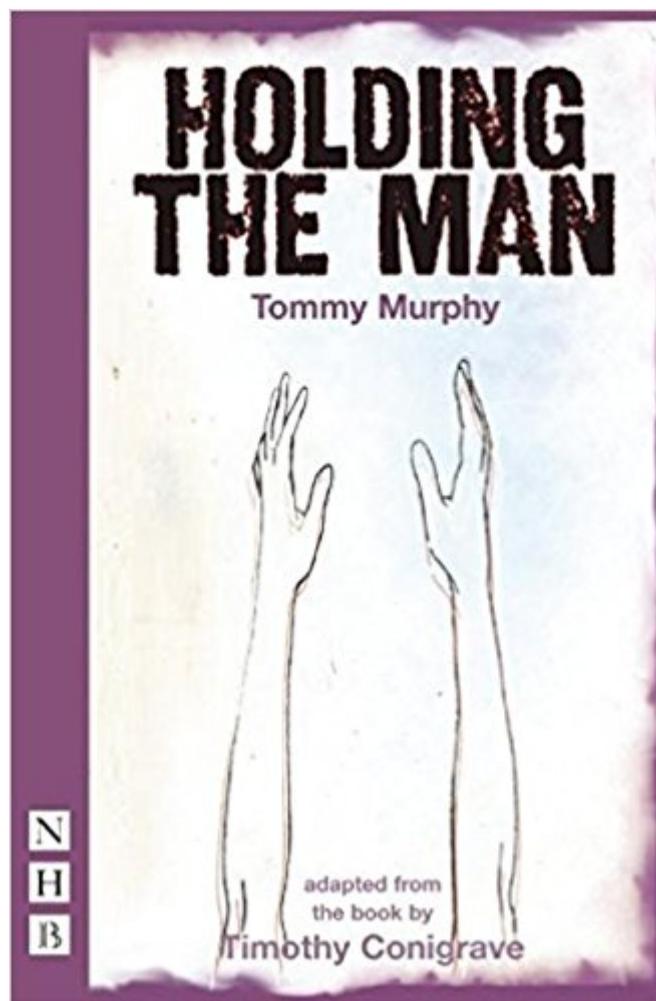


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# Holding The Man



## Synopsis

Based on the much loved book by Timothy Conigrave, adapted for the stage by one of Australia's leading young playwrights.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"fresh, frank and funny... a wrenchingly moving love story I defy anyone with a pulse not to relate to"-London Evening Standard"Compelling, wrenching, unflinching, devastating, moving and funny"-Sydney Morning Herald"Tommy Murphy is a bewitching playwright of startling originality"-Cate Blanchett and Andrew Upton, Artistic Directors of Sydney Theatre Company "fresh, frank and funny... a wrenchingly moving love story I defy anyone with a pulse not to relate to"-London Evening Standard"Compelling, wrenching, unflinching, devastating, moving and funny"-Sydney Morning Herald"Tommy Murphy is a bewitching playwright of startling originality"-Cate Blanchett and Andrew Upton, Artistic Directors of Sydney Theatre Company

TOMMY MURPHY is a graduate of the University of Sydney and the National Institute of Dramatic Art. His most recent play, *Saturn's Return*, was commissioned by Andrew Upton and Cate Blanchett for the Sydney Theatre Company. He lives in Sydney. TIMOTHY CONIGRAVE was born in Melbourne in 1959 and educated at Xavier College and Monash University. He trained as an actor at the National Institute of Dramatic Art, graduating in 1984, and appeared in such plays as *Brighton Beach Memoirs* and *As Is*. He passed away in 1994 shortly after completing *Holding the*

Man.

As a gay man living in North America I have encountered many gay-related stories that are trivial, overly cliched, or just plain boring. *Holding the Man*, by Timothy Conigrave, is definitely not one of them. The book has moved me deeply, and I believe it to be one of the most meaningful I have ever read, of any kind. It stands out as a truly authentic, relevant voice as it describes the lives and circumstances of people with whom we can readily identify, despite what might seem at first to be significant differences. The book tells the story of the author and the love of his life, John Caleo, from the author's early days in school in the very late 1960s through to the time of John's untimely death, nearly three years before the author's own, in the early 1990s. The book can be read on many levels: A gay man's coming out story, a love story, a description of a particular time and place, a story of living through a time of plague, a story of loss, grieving, and death. The book artfully transcends its inherent gravity as the story unfolds, compelling the reader to continue on reading despite the knowledge and fear of what is ultimately coming. One of the reasons for the book's resonance is that the people it describes are all real, vividly described. I have been moved by other works of literature (and I do believe in time this book will be considered literature), but they have typically been works of the author's imagination. As meaningful as *Brokeback Mountain* was, both as short story and film, *Ennis del Mar* and *Jack Twist* didn't actually exist. But Tim and John did live, were surrounded by friends and family, and contended with things that seem all too familiar to so many of us. I didn't know Tim and John, and yet I do know them. They were born only a bit more than half a decade before me, on a different continent on the other side of the world but in a society similar to mine. Tim's descriptions of life growing up gay were riveting reading, being so very different and yet so much the same as my own. Throughout the story the mixture of the seemingly mundane with the far-reaching, such as John's happiness in purchasing a fancy new can opener in the face of grim circumstances, made the people in the book seem very familiar. On other forums some readers have expressed disappointment or frustration with the Australian slang used throughout the book. I think they are missing the point. The book's characters are Australians, living in Australia. I think it's odd for others to expect them to speak in any idiom other than their own, and it's easy enough to search for the meaning of words, even slang words, online when context doesn't supply enough clues for international readers. The language used is one of

the elements of the book that reminds the reader that these are real people, living real lives, in a real time and place. I feel a range of emotions toward Tim, the author. One of them is anger, because Tim's desire for more outside of his relationship with John is implicated in their lives being cut short. I don't mean to judge Tim. His feelings in this regard are hardly unique to him or to gay men, then or now; extra-marital relationships exist throughout society and no doubt will continue. But as I read Tim telling John of his desire to meet people outside their relationship and as I knew what was coming I wanted so badly to somehow leap through the pages and go back in time and urge him to stop and reconsider, to think about the immense value, the rarity and preciousness of what he already had with John. One of the things I find particularly interesting about my reaction is when I consider that the book is written from Tim's point of view, by Tim himself. My feelings are the result of Tim's own telling of the story; there is no access to the story from John's point of view. I feel that Tim himself is eliciting my reaction. Some reviewers in other forums have written that Tim wrote the book as an extended apology to John. Considering what I've written above, I find that a plausible interpretation. If it's true, I can only think of how Tim must have found the weight of his responsibility toward John's demise a truly crushing burden to bear, on top of everything else both of them were going through, and it makes me all the more sad that it had to be endured by these two men. I feel so incredibly bad for these human beings, caught simply unaware as the sea of their lives retreated and then came crashing back, inundating them. Besides the personal loss of them as individuals to their friends and family, the loss of the contributions they, and countless others in similar circumstances, would have made to the world is staggering to comprehend. The last line of the book, after I translated it using a web translation service, caused me to burst into tears. This was embarrassing as I finished the book as I sat on a bus headed home from work. I will not repeat or translate the line here, because I don't want to rob other readers of the impact of discovering its meaning themselves when they come to that point at the end of the story. But I will say it is one of the most moving last sentences of a book I've ever encountered, as it bridges the essence of the story with the author's foreknowledge of his own time to come. I do wish there were an account of Tim's final months or weeks elsewhere. From what I've pieced together from sources on the web it would appear that Tim practically willed himself to live long enough to finish the story, dying the month after completing it and a few months before the book was published. I am hoping that when Tim died he was also surrounded by those who loved him. Although I did not and will not know either

one of them in actual life, thanks to how their story is told I find myself in the odd position of feeling as though I know and love them both.Timothy ConigraveNovember 19, 1959 - October 18, 1994John CaleoMay 30, 1960 - January 26, 1992Although I did not have the privilege of meeting either of you in life, you are two of the people IÃ¢â€žâ¢ve encountered whom I would like to honor by living well and true, and remembering.

Others may pick apart the writing style and the use of italics to indicate flash backs. It should be remembered the author was physically and perhaps psychologically challenged to get the story told so I give him lots of leeway on a style that at times does not appear polished. The work itself is a story worth telling and I enjoyed it, though saddened by the outcome. I viewed the movie, read the book and then viewed the movie again. The movie leaves a lot of detail out so if you have only seen the movie, you must read the book. Overall, these two souls were meant for each other, fitting that they rejoined so quickly.

"Holding the Man" is a great testament to the triumph of love over different kinds of adversity. In spite of familial and social disapproval, the author and his partner manage to pursue a life built together for 15 years. Despite sexual promiscuity on the part of the author, the men remain together even to the end of their lives, which were both cut short due to their deaths from AIDS complications. As a closeted gay man during the same time this story takes place, I was in awe of the courage these 2 men displayed in their honesty about their relationship in spite of tremendous pressure not to do so. I recommend this book to anyone who needs inspiration to live an honest, authentic life.

It is a screen play. It is not the novel and the novel in paperback is hundreds of dollars. This is crazy. Why won't anybody republish this book at a normal cost.

the story of a couple, with their doubts and fear for being gay during the late '70 and '80. It shows the tragedy of AIDS for the gay community. The ending is very sad but at the end It shows us unconditional love. Although the aussie slang was a constant all along the book, It was easy to read (I'm a Spanish speaker). The book is much better than the movie. And we can understand better Tim and he's sexual infatuations. He was a common young man, full of desire and doubts. Everybody must read this book, in particular younger generations to understand AIDS and Its impact in people.

I saw the movie version of Holding the Man before I read the book and enjoyed both. Conigrave's book didn't really pick up for me until he and John were in college. Reading about their relationship as adults and how they dealt with their respective illnesses was both interesting and compelling. Conigrave was very honest in telling this story and that honesty came through in his writing.

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