



The narrow road to the deep North

By Richard Flanagan

First published in 2013

Genre & subject

Australian fiction

World War, 1939-1945 - Fiction

Synopsis

August, 1943. In the despair of a Japanese POW camp on the Thai-Burma death railway, Australian surgeon Dorrigo Evans is haunted by his love affair with his uncle's young wife two years earlier. Struggling to save the men under his command from starvation, from cholera, from beatings, he receives a letter that will change his life forever. A story about the many forms of love and death, of war and truth, as one man comes of age, prospers, only to discover all that he has lost.

Author biography

Flanagan was born in Longford, Tasmania, in 1961, the fifth of six children. He is descended from Irish convicts transported during the Great Famine to Van Diemen's Land. Flanagan's father was a survivor of the Burma Death Railway and one of his three brothers is Australian rules football journalist Martin Flanagan.

Flanagan grew up in the remote mining town of Rosebery on Tasmania's western coast.

Flanagan left school at the age of 16 but returned to study at the University of Tasmania, where he was president of the Tasmania University Union in 1983. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts with First-Class Honours. The following year, he was awarded a Rhodes Scholarship at Worcester College, Oxford, where he was admitted to the degree of Master of Letters in History.

Discussion starters

- *The narrow road to the deep North* has been described by Richard Flanagan as a dance in and out of the light. For all its darkness, is this a book about hope?
- 'Love is two bodies with one soul,' we and Dorrigo read on the novel's final page. Do you think about love differently having read *The narrow road to the deep North*?
- Dorrigo Evans is a study in contrasts. What sort of character do you find him?

- *The narrow road to the deep North* is in part a novel about memory. How does the book explore different notions of memory?
- Discuss the many portraits of individuals in the act of survival – both prisoners and guards – on the Thai–Burma death railway.
- In a confronting, often savage novel, there are many moments of humour. What does this humour say about humanity?
- How does Shisui's death poem of a circle – a symbol of oblivion, eternity and eternal return – echo the novel's larger themes?
- What does the chapter in which Dorrigo and Amy, after twenty-five years of separation and thinking each other dead, walk past each other on the Sydney Harbour Bridge say about love?
- And what would you do?

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