

Remembrance in *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* and *Wanting* using Theories of Memory.

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Abstract

“ A happy man has no past, while an unhappy man has nothing else.” *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (2014) is the Man Booker Prize Winning book of 2014, it was authored by Richard Flanagan , an Australian writer. *Wanting* (2008) is the fifth novel of Flanagan. The novels narrate the mental trauma of the characters involved. The paper aims to analyze the select novels in the light of Theories of Memory. Dorrigo Evans, an nonagenarian doctor is the protagonist of *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (2014), he narrates his story using flashback technique. Dorrigo Evans was the lieutenant surgeon during the building Death Railway constructed by the Japanese empire. *Wanting* (2008) narrates story strands of two characters, one is an aboriginal girl Mathinna and the other character is the word renowned author Charles Dickens. Their fate is bridged by the author using memory as a technique. The paper aims to analyse the element of memory using the theories of memory.

“We always have some understanding of an ending but it’s trying to understand how we came to that point that consumes us” says Richard Flanagan whom The Economist praises as “Considered by many as the finest Australian Novelist of the generation.” The paper aims to analyse his select novels: *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* and *Wanting* theories of memory. Flanagan uses memories of characters to narrate the plot. In *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, Dorrigo Evans, a ninety four years old surgeon narrates his life. In *Wanting* the memories of Mathinna, Lady Franklin and Sir Charles Dickens narrates their memories.

Flanagan is an Australian novelist from Tasmania and has written six novels. The first novel *Death of a River Guide* (1994), has won National Fiction award. The second novel *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* (1997) has won National Booksellers Award for Best Book (1998). The third novel *Gould’s Book of Fish*

(2001) has won Commonwealth Writers Prize. The fourth novel is *The Unknown Terrorist* (2006). The fifth novel *Wanting* has won New Yorker Book of the year. The sixth novel, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* has won Man Booker Prize.

A world of dew
and within every dew drop
a world of struggle.(NRDN 175)

The Narrow Road to the Deep North shares its title with a work by famous Edo period haiku poet Basho. Basho's *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* which can be translated as *Narrow Road to the Interior*, is one of the classics of Japanese literature. The poet's travel in the text have since inspired many people to follow in his footsteps and trace his journey for themselves. *The novel is dedicated to his father, prisoner san byaku san ju go (335), the Japanese number given to him as a PoW.* In an interview the man Booker prize winner records that his father died the same day he completed the novel. The story of Dorrigo Evans is a ninogenerian surgeon and the novel proceeds in the form of flashback. It deals with the five stages of his life and his loves. He is married to Ella, but when his regiment is shipped out, he indulges in adultery with his uncle's wife Amy. The central event of the novel is an extended atrocity on the Burma Death Railway. Dorrigo Evans becomes a legendary in post war Australia for his wartime courage in the face of Japanese captors. Dorrigo's memory pursues all the repatriated personnel of the camps, including cancer ridden Nakkamura who huddles in squalor in a ruined capital. Dorrigo remains awestruck by the Japanese soldier's dedication to the emperor.

Flanagan has based the novel on the historical Death railway. Flanagan has spun the entire novel based on this historical event by making the protagonist live during the war period. The railway earned its nickname from the suffering, the tens of thousands of PoWs and cheap labour went through to construct it, surviving on meagre rations, sleeping on lice-infested bamboo mats and working with ribs clearly visible beneath their burned skin and furrowed brows. The Thai Burma Railway was built in 1942-43 to supply the Japanese forces in Burma, by passing the sea routes that were made vulnerable. When Japanese naval strength was reduced in the battles of the coral sea and midway in May and June 1942. The Burma Railway or the Burma Siam railway was 415 km between Thailand and Burma, built by empire of Japan in 1943. Thus a Fiction is spun around the historical event.

The fifth novel *Wanting* has threads from his previous novel *Gould's Book of Fish*. The novel has parallel plots, the protector's story, Mathinna's tale and Dickens' life story. The character Trowterer aka King Romeo is the chieftain of a Tasmania tribe. Along with his family, he comes under the sway of George Augustus Robinson aka The Great Conciliator aka The Protector- A former London builder who as a colonial official with conflicted relationship with the colonial state conducted a notorious experiment involving capture and removal of aboriginal people from Tasmania. Robinson imprisoned a couple of hundred people in camps first at Wybalana on Flinders Island and finally at Oyster Cove in the south of mainland. Trowterer's daughter Mary, christened as Mathinna, is adopted by the governor Sir John Franklin and his wife Jane. Sir Franklin is better known as the Arctic explorer who had a mysterious end. Lady Jane tries to reduce her husband's infamy with the help of Charles Dickens. Lady Jane craved for a child's love and thus adopted Mathinna, and tried to make her a civilized savage. Initially Mathinna was happy to read and write because she thought it to be magical. Later she realized that her words could not reach her parents. She lost her interest in learning. When the governor was removed from his post, Lady Jane abandoned her in an orphanage. The beautiful girl turned into culturally estranged, prostitute and alcoholic, and was doomed to die in a ditch at the age of twenty one. The novel also includes the life of Dickens' relationship with his friend Wilkie Collins, wife, dead daughter Dora and his mistress Ellen Ternan. They are brought together for the play *The Frozen Deep* which is based on Franklin's expedition.

Theories about Memory is classified into fifteen subdivisions, out of which Flanagan makes use of eight memory techniques. They are

1. Availability Heuristic, it deals with recent events seem more likely. Dorris Evans speaks about his life when it was full of activity. Charles Dickens is the person whose memory revokes the memories of Lady Franklin.

2. Choice- Supportive Bias: when we recall a past decision we distort memories to make the choices one made appear to be the best that could be made. Mathinna tries to recollect and preserve her culture and tradition of Aborigines throughout the novel. Evans pleasantly remembers his mother's memories during the war time

3. Counterfactual Thinking: The process in which we change our own memories. Evans' account of his brother Tom. He narrates story of infidelity with his aunt, later changes it.

4. Fatigue: Effects of tiredness. The theory points out that based on the physical ailments memories keep changing. That means in tiredness one has negative or pressurizing memories.

5. Hindsight Memory: the theory states that it is embarrassing when things happen unexpectedly. To cover up embarrassment we tend to view things which happened as inevitable and unpredictable. Reconstructive nature of memory. It creates I-Know it-all -along -Effect.

6. Mood: Memories are aroused based on the current mood.

7. Imagined Memory: the Theory claims that we can differentiate real memory from imaginary memory. It lacks sensory data like colour, smell, it lacks irrelevant details, It won't have association with other memories. Logically the incidents mentioned in Imaginative memory is impractical. Evans' description of his illicit affair with Aunt, Lady Franklin's imagination of her husband's death.

8. Youth Bias: Remembering when one is young syndrome. It is the basis for all flashback technique. People usually compare their youth and its vitality once they are old. Almost all the characters in both the novels reconstruct youthful memories.

The novel records historical events like Europeans behavior on the aboriginals. The novel has historical figures like Charles Dickens, Sir John Franklin, Wilkie Collins and Ellen Ternan. The readers get to know yet another perspective of the historical giants through the technique of memory.

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