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## The He(A)rt of the Witness: Remembering Australian Prisoners of War in Richard Flanagan's *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*

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**Abstract:** This paper engages Cathy Caruth's thinking about trauma, Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory, and Giorgio Agamben's theorising of bearing witness to examine the affective performance of remembering in Richard Flanagan's novel *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. Reading the narrative as a postmemorial account of Japan's internment of Australian POWs in Burma during the Second World War, I focus on the body as a site of both wounding and witnessing to show how the affective relays between pleasure and pain reanimate the epistemological drama of lived experience and highlight the ambivalence of passion as a trope for both suffering and love. Framed by its intertextual homage to Matsuo Bashō's poetic masterpiece of the same name, the Australian narrative of survival is shown to emerge from the collapse of the referential certainties underlying the binaries of victim/victimiser, witness/perpetrator, human/inhuman, and remembering/forgetting. In Flanagan's ethical imagination, bearing witness calls for a visceral rethinking of historical subjectivity that binds the world to consciousness as a source of both brutality and beauty.

**Keywords:** Australia, Richard Flanagan, POWs, trauma, postmemory, haiku, affective remembering

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### 1. Framing Postmemory: Trauma, Witness, Language

No matter where I fall  
On the road,  
Fall will I to be buried  
Among flowering bush-clovers.  
(Matsuo Bashō, *The Narrow Road to  
the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches*)

Japan's internment of thousands of Allied troops for the construction of the Thai-Burma Railway, also known as the Death Railway, during the Second World War was one of the most traumatic episodes in the history of modern Australia: "As a result of their sweeping early victories, Japanese forces captured roughly 320,000 prisoners, of whom 140,000 were Allied soldiers. The rest were civilians in areas that Japanese forces occupied. Of the Allied soldiers, about 22,000 were Australian" (Aszkielowicz 1). As Brian MacArthur writes in *Surviving the Sword. Prisoners of the Japanese 1942–1945*, "[w]ith one set of prisoners working in Burma and another much larger group in Thailand, the railway was to be driven 258 miles through some of the most hostile territory on earth, irrespective of the cost in human lives" (54). Set to be finished by December 1943, the railway bore immense significance: it had to open a secure supply line for the Japanese troops to escape the attacks of Allied aircraft and submarines, to which they were exposed when sailing across the East China and Andaman seas. In the end, the two parts of the railway "were united at Konkuita on 25 October 1943 in deep forest about 25 miles south-west of the border and 163 miles from Nong Pladuk" (MacArthur 161). As a consequence, of the 22,000 Australians captured by the Japanese, only 14,000 made it back to Australia in 1945: "Some were executed, but most died of malnutrition and disease" (Macintyre 195). Bound to the events of the Second World War, the railway became a material site for the memory of how the war appropriates technologies of discipline and punishment to transform the injured bodies of POWs into tools and weapons of war. What remains of the railway today bears the sign of the wound that recalls philosopher Dylan Trigg's reading of ruins as uncanny: "having outlived their death, the ruins occupy the spectral trace of an event left behind, serving to testify to the past through a logic of voids, disruptions, and hauntings" (xxvii). This is to say that in so far as the Thai-Burma railway contains the past through absence, it remains a vessel of traumatic memory, whose hermeneutics of belatedness unlocks new avenues of thought and affect, where alliance between the epistemic and the imaginary becomes not only a possibility, but a necessity in the ethical recognition of truth through "an asymmetrical emergence of the past" (Trigg 232).

If we accept Judith Herman's claim that recovering history begins with the understanding of the dialectic of trauma (2), then we need to acknowledge the epistemic disquiet created by the incongruity of the body's wearing of the wound and its bearing of witness, which calls for an articulation in words of the lived experience of suffering. While, as philosopher Edward Casey maintains, "in body memories we allow the past to enter actively into the very present in which our remembering is taking place" (168), in trauma, "a cohesive internal bonding in which past and present accomplish unique and lasting forms of intimacy with each other" (169) dissolves, leaving the body unable to reconcile its memory with the mind's need to interpret the events. It is for this reason that Trigg avers that "the body memory of trauma occupies a liminal realm, both revealing and

concealing itself simultaneously” (236). Building his arguments on Cathy Caruth’s conceptualisation of trauma, he rethinks Casey’s claim that “there is no memory without body memory” (172), alerting us to how the significance of language in the structure of traumatic remembering derives from the logic of delay that marks both the perception of the traumatic event, whose truth remains unavailable to consciousness other than through “repetitive actions of the survivor” (Caruth 4), and the “intergenerational acts of transfer” (Hirsch 2), which Marianne Hirsch attributes to the “oscillation between continuity and rupture” (6) in the “return of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience” (6). Like Hirsch and Caruth, Trigg insists that in trauma, “the symptomatic reappearance of the past is possible only in a deferred interval between past and present,” wherein “latency acts as a defensive shield, protecting the subject from the traumatic event as it is experienced” (237) and underscoring the non-coincidence of bodily absorption and cognitive awareness. As Caruth pointedly argues in *Unclaimed Experience*, by hijacking the embodied subject, trauma conveys itself through a referential drift in language, highlighting “the oscillation between *a crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival” (Caruth 7; original emphasis). At the core of this “double telling” (7) lies the history of trauma as the voice of the wound, manifesting itself through a “textual itinerary of insistently recurring words or figures” (5).

Arguably, for the veterans and the post-war generation in the English-speaking world, the narrative iconography of Japan’s prisoner-of-war camps came freighted with ambivalence that measured the moral endurance of the Allies against the material legacy of the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. While novels like the Australian Nevil Shute’s *A Town Like Alice* and Pierre Boulle’s *The Bridge Over the River Kwai*, together with the film adaptations, reanimated the past by taking bold representational ownership of the physical plight, Alain Resnais’ cinematic rendition of Marguerite Duras’ *Hiroshima mon amour*, for example, offered a far more nuanced view of the war trauma, one where history emerges “where *immediate understanding* may not” (Caruth 11; original emphasis). The film *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, in particular, reordered the scales of the factual in favour of affective rewiring, which ran against the prisoners’ actual survival tactics in Japanese camps, so that the men’s attempts “to sabotage the bridges by bad workmanship, even though they were under constant surveillance by the guards” (MacArthur 78), became erased in the narrative of British pluck and stiff upper lip. By contrast, both Shute’s “unforgiving novel” (Macintyre 195) and Duras’ screenplay explore the relation between history and the body as its phenomenological epicentre. But where Shute thinks in terms of moral and epistemological coherence, binding the survivor to catastrophic events, Duras opens “a deeply ethical dilemma” (Caruth 27), which presents trauma as a modality of being that coalesces the inability to know with the imperative “not to betray the past” (27). Caruth’s reading of *Hiroshima mon amour* diagnoses most aptly the

incompatibility of the “bodily referent” and “the reality of the event” (29), which accounts for the collapse of knowledge in the morphology of trauma. Organised around the trope of sight, the narrative juxtaposes the French woman’s insistent “seeing” of Hiroshima to her “blindness” at the site of her German lover’s death, suggesting, as Caruth argues, that the loss of sight, both literally and figuratively, is the body’s mandate to remember the singularity of the traumatic event: “It is thus utterly deprived of sight and understanding, and only as a fragment, that the body can become, for the woman, the faithful monument to a death” (31). Witnessing, in this perspective, must by default include an ethical awakening to what it means *not to see*, recalibrating thereby the subject’s aptitude for a sensual, if belated, recollection of the past.

The *aporia* of seeing in trauma also provides a conceptual anchor to philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s theorising about witnessing and testimony as measures of the impasse of survival. Conceding in *Remnants of Auschwitz* that the Holocaust destroyed witnesses because “the ‘complete witnesses’ are those who did not bear witness and could not bear witness” (2002, 34) as they perished in the extermination camps, he calls our attention to the double bind that holds the surviving subject in relation to body memory, language, and being human. For Agamben, the human capacity for destruction and suffering suggests that “humans bear within themselves the mark of the inhuman, that their spirit contains at its very center the wound of non-spirit, non-human chaos atrociously consigned to its own being capable of everything” (2002, 77). This means that subjectivity is always in excess of itself and it is this paradox of the inhuman within the human which constitutes the *aporia* of bearing witness as an agency of both sight and language. If we accept Agamben’s contention that testimony brings together the impossibility of seeing, “the Gorgon, whose vision transforms the human being into a non-human” (2002, 54), and the impossibility of speech, then it produces the subjectivity of the survivor-witness as someone who recognises in the feelings of shame and guilt his or her inability to distinguish between speech and silence. As Agamben puts it:

Testimony takes place where the speechless one makes the speaking one speak and where the one who speaks bears the impossibility of speaking in his own speech, such that the silent and the speaking, the inhuman and the human enter into a zone of indistinction in which it is impossible to establish the position of the subject, to identify the “imagined substance” of the “I” and, along with it, the true witness. (2002, 120)

As a traumatised body, whose experience is “of a radical bifurcation in the self” (Trigg 250), the surviving witness is always divided from within, assuming the agency of that which exceeds by virtue of his or her silence and thereby consigning testimony to a conceptual abyss of shared lack and excess.

At the same time, however, the *aporia* of testimony, “a potentiality that

becomes actual through an impotentiality of speech” (Agamben 2002, 146), ensures by means of bearing witness to the inhuman that “it is not truly possible to destroy the human, that something always *remains*. *The witness is this remnant*” (2002, 133–134; original emphasis). In this, Agamben’s theorising of the non-identity of subject and language links up with the enigma of survival conceived as “an endless testimony to the impossibility of living” (Caruth 62). The paradox of this relation works in alliance with the motility of affect, which exceeds individual bounds and makes it possible for traumatic memory to find a receptacle beyond the original perimeter of lived experience. Embedded in such conception of the transmission of memory is an ethical aperture, which reactivates the channels of intersubjective transactions so that witnessing and remembering may be re-embodied in the cognitive and affective frames of what Hirsch calls “postmemory”: “In these ways, less directly affected participants can become engaged in the generation of postmemory that can persist even after all participants and even their familial descendants are gone” (33). In this reasoning, the affiliative knots in the memorial fabric have the capacity to reconfigure acts of witness by “imaginative investment, projection, and creation” (Hirsch 5), promoting the figural passages of time to an order of memory where trauma becomes the origin of historical consciousness and an object of visceral interchange, as acknowledged in Lauren Berlant’s observation that an “aesthetic or formal rendition of affective experience provides evidence of historical processes” (17).

“For postmemorial artists,” Hirsch argues, “the challenge is to define an aesthetic based on a form of identification and projection that can include the transmission of the bodily memory of trauma without leading to the self-wounding and retraumatization that is rememory” (86). Keeping in mind the emphasis on “a language that preserves connections” (Herman 4), I read Richard Flanagan’s novel *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* as a narrative attempt to reexamine the history of Australian POWs in Burma. By focusing on how the novel enfolds into each other the phenomenologies of bliss and bruise, injury and imagination, I cast in relief the affective connections between the novel’s ethics of remembering and the aesthetics of haiku, from which it derives by alluding to the work of Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō. Conceived as “a remnant” that can “bear witness” (Agamben 2002, 161), the poetic frame of Flanagan’s novel enables a “heteropathic memory” (Hirsch 86), where the history of violence and pain solicits a renewed attentiveness to the complexity of the ethical and epistemic bonds of the present to the past.

## 2. Affective Remembering: Desire and Pain

The visceral performance of remembering runs through all of the novel’s five sections, with each drawing on the memories of its fictional protagonist, Tasmanian surgeon Dorrigo Evans, and his troops as Japan’s prisoners of war in Burma during

the Second World War. From the outset, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* brings to surface the somatic premise of historical experience and, by conflating the perceptual frames of the past and present, calls into question the referential ties between body, memory, and language. Opening with Dorrigo's childhood memories of "sun flooding a church hall in which he sat with his mother and grandmother" (Flanagan 1) and their neighbour Jackie Maguire's emotional breakdown over his wife's leaving him, the novel cross-hatches these memorial threads with the intensely sensual recollections of, on the one hand, Dorrigo's love affair with his uncle's wife Amy, and on the other, the horrors of battle and internment in a POW camp. The conflation of these different referential contexts appears to have been occasioned as much by the postmemorial gestures of the Australian media, which casts Dorrigo in the role of "a war hero [...] the public image of a time and a tragedy" (16), as his own apprehension of the fragility of memory and the uncertainty of truth: "A happy man has no past, while an unhappy man has nothing else. In his old age Dorrigo Evans never knew if he had read this or had himself made it up" (3). His "relentless womanising and the deceit that went with it" (17) are of a piece with the referential crisis, outlining the limits of a living memory, which Dorrigo is asked to transmit into a book about the Australian prisoners of war. In the reproduction of his preface, we trace the novel's metadiscursive motion of narrative self-awareness:

The suffering, the deaths, the sorrow, the abject, pathetic pointlessness of such immense suffering by so many; maybe it all exists only within these pages and the pages of a few other books. Horror can be contained within a book, given form and meaning. But in life horror has no more form than it does meaning. Horror just is. And while it reigns, it is as if there is nothing in the universe that it is not. (23)

The distinction the narrative makes between storied and embodied life reinforces the novel's concern for the ethical work of memory and the struggle of language to contain the past in the form of lived events. Concurrent with the epistemic links between third-person narration and multiple focalisation in *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* is the dispersal of sensory perception orienting the material record of the wounded body and the shared concern for survival. Conveying thereby the logic of fragmentation and cognitive delay, through which trauma presents itself, Flanagan amplifies the figural and tropological capacity of the body, as "a place of meeting and transfer" (Casey 180), to reenact, rather than merely represent, the past "by an internal osmotic intertwining with it" (Casey 178). By making Dorrigo's war experience coterminous with his passion for Amy especially, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* heaves into view the affective labour of remembering, which gives access to the material intimacy unavailable to the vernacular of institutional history.

In Dorrigo's life, the metonymic thrust of the grammar of love, which ties the amatory to the atrocious as modalities of being, unfolds in relation to his

love of reading. A particular significance is attributed to Alfred Tennyson's poem "Ulysses," which connects his past relationship with Amy to his present affair with Lynette Maison, "the wife of a close colleague, Rick Maison, a fellow council member of the College of Surgeons" (Flanagan 18). Dorrigo, who had grown up with the idea that life may be conceived in "the shadow of a single poem" (77), recites from Tennyson to both women, turning it into a connective tissue between the promise of life before the war and the failures after: for while with Amy he could discuss the Trojan conflict, to Lynette he can only admit that he has forgotten the faces of his dead comrades, especially Darky Gardiner. Lynette's wondering at Dorrigo's ability to remember Tennyson's poem but not a man's face is suggestive of the extent to which his consciousness has been affected by trauma, replacing memories of suffering with literary pleasures as a form of self-protection. In Dorrigo's recitation, the poem acquires metaphorical resonance, aligning both his valour and womanising with the Greek hero's need for adventure and his staunch loyalty to his family, while metonymically tethering Dorrigo to Amy and his unspent grief: "He read and reread 'Ulysses.' He looked back at Amy" (13).

In so far as all of Dorrigo's philanderings echo his romantic past with Amy, his memories of this passion partake of the history of war, whose meaning is postponed in the cycles of his serial womanising. Tied to his love of "the Victorian poets and the writers of antiquity" (62), Amy is also a sign in the language of trauma, emerging as much in contrast to its destructive agency as in complicity with it. The bookstore where they meet for the first time is filled with "second-hand books jammed and leaning at contrary angles like ill-disciplined militia on floor-to-ceiling shelves that ran the length of the side wall" (62). The military simile, while anticipating Dorrigo's life in the army and the image of "a straight line of surveyors' pegs hammered into the ground by Japanese Army engineers to mark the route of a railway" (22), also prepares the ground for the material assault on his senses brought on by the sudden appearance of a young woman with a red camellia in her hair, who interrupts his bookish meditation by engaging him in a conversation about literature. Presented in concrete terms, his perception of her speaks of the magnitude of sensual attraction, which Dorrigo himself finds "dizzying" and "bewildering" (66): "Her eyes burnt like the blue in a gas flame. They were ferocious things" (65). Dorrigo's appraisal of Amy as "a series of slight flaws best expressed in a beauty spot above her right lip" (66) culminates in a recognition of her power "at once conscious and unconscious" (66), which he fails to understand as his own falling in love, but which comes to haunt him in his relationship with his fiancée Ella. The emotional rift this encounter opens up estranges Dorrigo from the Melbourne world of social security that Ella embodies: "Ella's world – which had until then looked so comforting in its security and certainty that he had wished to belong to it – Dorrigo suddenly found pallid and bloodless" (80). Their consequent lovemaking rides on a wave of affect that blends "her kindness and his pity" (81), allowing Dorrigo to suspend Amy's incomprehensible intrusion in the margins of lived experience: he

“immersed himself in life, the furious work and frenetic partying, and let everything else wash ever further away” (83).

The physical and emotional impact of Dorrigo’s eventual discovery that Amy is his uncle Keith’s wife defines his passion as a dialectic of pleasure and pain. The narrative calls our attention to desire’s peristaltic motions, which disperse suffering throughout his pulsating body: “His pounding head, the pain in every movement and act and thought, seemed to have as its cause and remedy her, and only her and only her and only her” (86). His determination to overcome his yearning is similarly based in the body: we learn that he “ate little, lost weight and seemed so oddly preoccupied that the company commander, both impressed and slightly concerned by Dorrigo’s extraordinary zeal, gave him a special twenty-four-hour furlough” (87). Predictably, it is the body that takes centre stage when Dorrigo and Amy meet again and go out dancing: “Her touch electrified him, paralysed him, and amidst the noise and smoke and bustle that touch was the only thing he knew. The universe and the world, his life and his body, all reduced to that one electric point of contact” (103). The sensual exchange here may remind us of philosopher Michel Serres’ observation in *The Five Senses* of how the epidermal surface intermingles the senses: “Touching is situated between, the skin is the place where exchanges are made, the body traces the knotted, bound, folded, complex path, between the things to be known” (80). On the novel’s figural plane, this intermingling of pain and pleasure manifests itself most explicitly in the episode where Dorrigo applies his mouth to a wound on Amy’s thigh: “Very slowly, the tips of his lips just touching her skin, he kissed the blood ball away, leaving a crimson smear on her thigh” (Flanagan 132). Beyond words, as Serres points out, the “skin, multisensorial, can pass for our common sense” (81), producing a recognition of shared desire: “A wild, almost violent intensity took hold of their lovemaking and turned the strangeness of their bodies into a single thing” (Flanagan 135). The emphasis on carnal entanglement magnifies the sensual reciprocity that holds the characters together, all the time preparing their inevitable separation and its dramatic consequences. When Keith tells Amy that he knows of her affair with Dorrigo, the narrative catalyses the body as a trope for both individual self and marital union, refiguring blood as a testimony to the wound opened up by the “shards of broken glass” (158) in Amy’s stomach and in her marriage: “They bled and bled and would not stop bleeding” (159). In the novel’s topological network, her body’s visceral depths produce a catachrestic effect, subsuming into its ambit the memory of Amy’s abortion, her affair with Dorrigo, and the future bloodshed of the war.

The affective structure of Dorrigo’s relationship with Amy also yields its ambivalence to the visceral imprint of memories he associates with his war experience, which haunt him in his dreams: “The old man was dreaming he was a young man sleeping in a prisoner-of-war camp” (75). For Amy herself, love “was annihilation, the destroyer of worlds” (158). Unsurprisingly, then, by amplifying

the dialectic of desire, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* unfolds the landscape of war through a conflation of perceptual frames that bring sensation into conceptual affinity with violence. The operation in the Middle East, where Dorrigo and his troops fight before being sent to Java, is a good case in point:

They walked on through the dead, the dead in the half-moon sangars of rocks pointlessly piled up as a defence against death, the dead bloating in a durra field turned to a hideous bog by water spilt from an ancient stone water channel broken by a shell, the fifteen dead in the village of seven houses in which they had tried to escape death, the dead woman in front of the broken minaret, her small rag bundle of possessions scattered in the dust of the street, her teeth on top of a pumpkin, the blasted bits of the dead stinking in a burnt-out truck. (32)

The visual record of this contracted world collides with the senses of smell and taste to bring to the fore the material operations of war as force, something that Simone Weil has defined as that which “turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing” (3). Turned into stones, the dead bodies, which orient the soldiers’ seeing and walking, become of a piece with the “the dust of the street,” with the memory of life clinging to a pumpkin as a tragic substitute for a head. The ubiquity of death, which “had transformed the Australian defenders into things not human, drying dark-red meat and fly-blown viscera” (Flanagan 33), we understand, absorbs Dorrigo’s own body, gradually desensitising him to the morphology of violence, wherein he forgets “the sharp taste of stone dust that hung around the broken village houses, the dead skinny donkey’s smell and the dead wretched goats’ smell, [...] the heavy odour of spilled olive oil, all melding into a single smell he came to associate with human beings in trouble” (32).

The use of animal imagery in alliance with the human sensorium retains its moral significance in the narrative’s shift to Dorrigo and his troops’ transportation to a POW camp. A thousand of them, we learn, are “sardined in the greasy hull of a rustbucket boat to Singapore then marched out to Changi Gaol” (39) and later jammed into trucks “like cattle” (40–41), where they hang on to each other “like monkeys” (41) and sleep “like logs in their swags” (41) before arriving at the site where they have to build their own shelters in preparation for the work on the railway, toiling “like cockroaches” (117) and dying “like stick insects” (266). Notably, the camp guards, too, find a place within the novel’s remit of animal imagery: while the Australians live “like ants” (49), Major Nakamura’s face is likened to “the snout of a wild pig” (217), a Korean guard goes by the nickname “the Goanna,” and an old Japanese guard models himself on the mountain lion: “[...] Kenji Mogami. He thumped his chest. It meana mountain lion, he told them, and smiled” (42), crooning in comic ungainliness a Bing Crosby song: “You go-AAA-assenuate-a-positive / Eliminanay a negative / Lash on a affirmawive / Don’t mess with a Misser In-Beween” (43). The grotesque inadequacy of the lyrics

here puts us on notice to how the poetic lines find a place in the regiment of the Line, which is what the Australians call their work on the railway and their “slow descent into madness” (26).

In the postmemorial frame of *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, the life of the POWs is reduced to the “scabies-ridden bodies and groggy guts,” “fevered heads and foul, ulcerated legs,” and “perennially shitting arses” (48). Divested of nourishment, medicine, and human dignity, they operate as no more than a set of fungible resources, whose being seems consonant with Agamben’s notion of “bare life,” which is to say, “the life of *homo sacer* (sacred man), who may be killed and yet not sacrificed” (1998, 8; original emphasis). Specifically, as “a living pledge to his subjection to a power of death” (Agamben 1998, 99), the notion of *homo sacer* calls our attention to how the body of the prisoner of war is transformed into a machine “in service of the Emperor” (Flanagan 95) to be exploited in the making of “the railway, like the teak sleepers and steel rails and dog spikes” (Flanagan 114). The “[i]njured bodies,” as Elaine Scarry points out in *The Body in Pain*, “are the material out of which the road is built” (74). Likewise, in a syntactic slope of repeated similes, the novel’s railway emerges as an engine of death fuelled by the material substance of Dorrigo’s men, who bring the metaphor of war as a road, or the Line, to a physical embodiment:

As naked slaves to their section of the Line, with nothing more than ropes and poles, hammers and bars, straw hands, they began to clear the jungle for the Line and break the rock for the Line and move the dirt for the Line and carry the sleepers and the iron rails to build the Line. As naked slaves, they were starved and beaten and worked beyond exhaustion on the Line. And as naked slaves they began to die for the Line. (49)

The ethical appeal of “bare life” here, as indeed throughout the narrative of *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, recalls Scarry’s and Hannah Arendt’s observations about violence and pain, correlating the prisoners’ suffering and survival to the technologies of torture employed by the Japanese in their attempts to defeat the Allies and demonstrate the superiority of the Japanese spirit of Bushido. Like Arendt and Scarry, Flanagan inclines us to see how violence operates as a language of war, which applies the logic of instrumentalisation “to create conditions under which men are dehumanized” (Arendt 63) through a world-destroying use of coercion in the production of pain (Scarry 29). Some of the techniques used by the Japanese captors, we learn, included subjecting the prisoners to starvation, which “hid in each man’s every act and every thought” (Flanagan 50), and the Speedo, an intensified period of labour both during the day and night. Underlined in the description of the Australian prisoners’ plight is the merging of the human body with the material tools, ushering in an understanding of how the building of the railway functioned as a spectacle of power: “Lit by fires of bamboo and

crude torches made of rags stuffed in bamboo and fed with kerosene, the naked, filthy slaves now worked in a strange, hellish world of dancing flames and sliding shadows. For the hammer men it required greater concentration than ever, as the steel bar disappeared into the darkness of shadow as the hammer fell" (183). The men's succumbing to cholera and other diseases, which turn their bodies into "shrivelled husks" with "barked skin, mud-toned and black-shadowed, clutching twisted bones" comparable to "mangrove roots" (236), speaks back to the mechanism of torture by "bestow[ing] visibility on the structure and enormity of what is usually private and incommunicable, contained within the boundaries of the sufferer's body" (Scarry 27). In this way, every death in the camp becomes a shared act of lethal precariousness, with the body abandoning its cognitive agency and shutting down on itself altogether. We recognise this in the passing of Tiny Middleton, whose "magnificent body" (Flanagan 186), used to absorbing "blows and kicks in a manner that bordered on insolent" (184), signals the approaching end before the man himself becomes aware of it: "The lice knew it [...] And Tiny seemed not to care that his body was overrun with them, no longer worried about washing or where he shat. Then came the ringworm. As if even fungi knew it, sensing the moment a man gave up on himself and was already as good as a corpse rotting back into the earth" (186). A site of parasitic invasion, Tiny's body becomes metaphorical of the scale of dehumanisation practiced as the camp ethos, highlighting the sadism of the Japanese guards in their attitude to the Australians, as voiced by the camp translator: "Nippon prepared to work, Major Nakamura say, Australian must work. Nippon eat less, Australian eat less. Nippon very sorry, Major Nakamura say. Many men must die" (217).

The affective knot of cynicism and nihilism in the Japanese insistence that "health follows will" (217) unleashes its ethical weight in the depiction of the torture of Darky Gardiner, a young Australian of Aboriginal descent, who is punished for overlooking the absence of nine men from his squad. His beating, which is synchronised in the narrative with Dorrigo's operating on Jack Rainbow's gangrened leg, recalls Caruth's and Agamben's reasoning about the *aporia* of sight in the structure of the traumatic event. All the men who are made to witness the punishment find themselves unable to sustain their looking, their mind blocking out both the sight and sounds of the wounded man: "So they saw, but they did not see; so they heard, but they did not hear; and they knew, they knew it all, but still they tried not to know" (285). For Nakamura, "the punishment of a prisoner offered a way for the guards to reassert their authority and for all the prisoners to be reminded of their sacred duty" (Flanagan 288), bringing back to us Arendt's remark about how "violence is neither beastly nor irrational" (63). But the empathy for which the novel calls in its description of Darky's torture alerts us to the inadequacy of language to contain and convey pain, which has colonised the human body, turning it into the savage attacker's double: "Blow after blow – on the monster's face, a monster's mask" (285). This "liturgy of punishment" (Foucault 34), which marks

Darky out for destruction, breaks his body into mechanical parts that can no longer support life: “His head snapped sideways, he gasped and reeled backwards, trying not to fall, but his body had grown clumsy. He tripped and fell to the ground” (Flanagan 291). His ultimate drowning in a pit of excrement, to which he stumbles during the night, epitomises the lived experience of immersion retrieved through the meshwork of narrative imagination: “There was a world and there was him and the thread joining the two was stretching and stretching, he was trying to pull himself up that thread, he was desperately trying to haul himself back home to where his mother was calling” (297). In giving us access to the dying Darky’s consciousness, the narrative also awakens us to the power of the literary imagination to preserve the man’s humanity in a postmemorial account of moral, if not material, endurance. Far from its emphasis on the unsharability of pain highlighted by Scarry (4), *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* affords us, through a visceral re-enactment of the past, moments of revelation, where memory takes stock of itself as affective intensity as well as epistemic perplexity, giving rise to new modes of readerly responsibility in the ethics of remembering.

### 3. The Impasse of Survival and the Art of Witnessing

If we accept Scarry’s claim that imagination is as anomalous a state as pain is, both constituting the “‘framing events’ within whose boundaries all other perceptual, somatic, and emotional events occur” (165), then it is reasonable to consider the ways in which the domain of art, which in *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* encompasses poetry, music, and painting, links up with the postmemorial imperative to do justice to the past. Music and visual art, in particular, are keyed to the acts of witnessing, reinforcing the novel’s abiding concern to translate the body of trauma into the voice of memory. The ambivalence of poetry, in turn, unfolds alongside the oscillating narrative point of view, which expands the interiority of perception, yoking the Japanese guards to the Australian prisoners of war and rescaling the measure of survival in the record of moral and material atrocity. By acknowledging Matsuo Bashō’s *haibun*, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* as a structuring model for blending prose and poetry in an attempt to create what Bashō’s translator calls “a monument [...] against the flow of time” (Yuasa; qtd. in Bashō 37), Flanagan re-cuts the affective ties between the victims and perpetrators, which organise the shared space of historical experience, and gives poetry a latitude of ethics to reanimate the voice of the wound and produce a more nuanced understanding of history.

The power of art to convey testimony in Flanagan’s novel takes its heart from the idea of mateship as a mode of survival shared by the Australian POWs. Darky Gardiner thinks about this when he looks at the dying Tiny Middleton: “Because courage, survival, love – all these things didn’t live in one man. They lived in them

all or they died and every man with them; they had come to believe that to abandon one man was to abandon themselves” (186). MacArthur has observed in *Surviving the Sword* that “[a]mong the Australians there was also a closer bond between officers and men – and the tougher the conditions, the tighter that bond became” (154). This is certainly true of Dorrigo’s actions when despite his own hunger, he gives away a steak to be shared by his men: “It’s yours, not mine! Take it! Share it! Share it!” (Flanagan 52). Inasmuch as Dorrigo hates “the people who pretended he had virtue or pretended to virtue themselves” (53), he interprets the offering of the grilled meat as “a test that demanded witnesses, a test he had to pass” (51) to not only provide his men with a story, but also organise them “into surviving” (439). A similar emphasis on shared survival is brought to relief in the episode of Darky’s feeding a stolen egg to Tiny: “Tiny grunted, and Darky halved the egg with his spoon. Tiny held out his hands in a cup, as if it were a sacrament he was receiving, to make sure no crumbling yolk was lost. And into Tiny’s cupped hands Darky now added half a small fried rice ball he had saved beneath his blanket from a previous meal” (187). The metaphor of the Holy Communion, while magnifying the scale of the men’s suffering and foreshadowing their deaths, also lends itself to Serres’ conceptual association, *pace* Leibniz, of “the French *blessor*, to wound, with the English *bless*,” which in both cases means “to mark with a sign, defamatory and painful, or fortunate and salutary two values for whomever receives it, marked with a beneficial or deadly seal, and sometimes both at once” (72; original emphasis). Read in this light, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* subverts the logic of *homo sacer*, refiguring Darky’s death as martyrdom. What is more, given that in Greek “martyr” means witness, Darky’s ordeal becomes symbolic of a conceptual impasse, in which he constitutes both trauma and its transcendence, calling to mind Agamben’s quip that “human beings are human insofar as they bear witness to the inhuman” (2002, 121). An agent of agony as well as moral dignity, Darky’s butchered flesh exceeds the act of ontological erasure, to which he is subjected by Major Nakamura, soliciting the reader’s affective reciprocity as a shared form of a postmemorial recognition of the truth of suffering.

Inasmuch as *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* gives us access to the economy of torture as a field of power relations, it recalls Michel Foucault’s observation in *Discipline and Punish* about how “torture forms part of a ritual” (34), whose material inscription on the victim’s body carries the weight of the perpetrator’s triumph. For the novel’s Japanese commanders, the ceremonial nature of violence stems from its conceptual link to the ethical code of Bushido, which organises their actions into a structure of honour. Thus, for example, Major Nakamura “cared about the railway, honour, the Emperor, Japan, and he had a sense of himself as a good and honourable officer” (116). Central to the tenets of this structure is, we understand, the figure of the Emperor, who, by embodying the spirit of the nation, orients the Japanese war effort. As Dean Aszkielowicz argues in *The Australian Pursuit of Japanese Criminals, 1943–1957*, “[b]eyond

the question of his culpability as a leader of Japan, an emperor cult was said to have driven Japanese soldiers to behave fanatically and according to what was assumed to be the style of the warrior code of bushido [...]. In this system, soldiers supposedly showed no mercy, compassion, or regard for a surrendered soldier” (24). Colonel Kato’s actions also adhere to this logic, measuring human worth in violently synecdochic terms: “I meet someone new, I look at his neck, I size it up – easy to cut or hard to cut. And that’s all I want of people, their necks, that blow, this life, those colours, the red, the white, the yellow” (Flanagan 124). As a form of ritual performance, decapitation invites an analogy to the writing of haiku, whose poetics, though not necessarily evocative of death, depends on “the ‘cutting word’ (*kireji*), which splits the poem in two and allows the two halves to reverberate” (Shirane 461; original emphasis). By literalising this metaphor in Kato’s actions, Flanagan’s novel amplifies the grotesque horror and perversity of ritual torture. Nowhere is it more evident than in the scene where Kato attempts to behead Darky, but has to give up because in “his mind, he kept muddling the poem” (258).

The scene also needs to be thought in conjunction to the cultural significance of haiku poetry, which is keyed to both the Japanese spirit and individual destiny, it being a poem one traditionally writes at the end of life. Nakamura’s death haiku encapsulates his unwavering belief in the morality of his actions during the war: “Winter ice / melts into clean water – / clear is my heart” (395). Similarly, by quoting Bashō, Colonel Kato subsumes his poetry into the railway project, in which Bashō’s work becomes part of the catachresis that erases distinctions between the Emperor, the railway, and haiku poetry. Nakamura’s thinking that “the Japanese spirit is now itself the railway, and the railway the Japanese spirit, our narrow road to the deep north, helping to take the beauty and wisdom of Bashō to the larger world” (126) is in line with the same ethos that celebrates the discipline of body and soul to the extent where human life is bound to the Emperor, as “a poem of one word [...] – a poem that encompassed the universe and transcended all morality and all suffering” (392).

Nakamura’s using of haiku to reinforce the idea that he is “a good man” (378) goes together with his notion of memory as an obstacle to survival: “You survive if you forget, he said angrily” (316). By contrast, to Dorrigo and his fellow POWs, poetry reminds of the ethical imperative to remember, binding their own acts of witnessing to memory as “the true justice” (243). But remembering here, too, bears the threat of forgetting, as suggested in the lines from Rudyard Kipling’s poem “Recessional” quoted by Dorrigo: “Judge of the Nations, spare us yet, / Lest we forget – lest we forget!” (243). His reading of Kipling’s hymn as “a poem about how everything gets forgotten” (243) links up with the failure of his own memory of Amy, of whose “face he could remember nothing” (206), but whose sensual imprint haunts him in Burma: “His world beyond here has shrunk to her. Not Ella. Her voice, her smile, her throaty laugh, the smell of her asleep” (203). A hymn composed for Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee, “Recessional,” in *The Narrow Road to the*

*Deep North* has wider implications still. The poem's use of the language of liturgy correlates with the novel's acts of ritual torture, consecrating the dying Australian prisoners of war as martyrs, while also lending its power to claim witness beyond the material conditions of survival. We may recall here Agamben's observation that "the poetic is the one that is always situated in the position of a remnant and that can, therefore, bear witness. Poets – witnesses – found language as what remains, as what actually survives the possibility, or impossibility, of speaking" (2002, 161). Coupled with Rabbit Hendricks' drawings of the camp life and the bugle music Jimmy Bigelow plays at Rabbit's funeral, Kipling's poem performs the ethical work of memory by lending its voice to the camp witnesses locked in suffering. The fact that Rabbit's sketchbook, with drawings of "the hideous labour, the beatings, the torture" (Flanagan 179) as well as "Darky Gardiner sitting in an opulent armchair covered in little fish, drinking coffee in a ruined street of a Syrian village" (251) survives his funeral pyre is a further testimony to the capacity of art to endure human destruction. Likewise, Jimmy's bugle call gathers a force of temporary sustenance that "spiralled out towards a shared dream of human transcendence that perished in the same sound, that was just out of reach, until the next note, the next phrase, the next time –" (248).

Despite its emphasis on the affective powers of art, however, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* is far from melodramatic in its engagement with the traumatic history of the Second World War. Nor does it draw on the logic of binary oppositions, where the Japanese captors and Australian POWs operate as distinct agents of evil versus good. On the Australian side, next to the moral fortitude of the characters like Darky Gardiner, for example, we find the cynicism of Rooster MacNeice, who begins every morning "by reciting under his breath the page of *Mein Kampf* he had memorised the night before" (191). Unsurprisingly, he "hated chinks, nips and slopes, and, being a fair-minded man, he also hated poms and yanks" (193), channelling his racism into his relationship with Darky, whom he saw as "a common and dirty man, and like most half-castes not to be trusted" (192–193). The responsibility the narrative attributes to Rooster for not stepping up to save Darky from punishment is part of the self-serving behaviour that post-war investigations uncovered among some Australian POWs. Thinking that Gardiner stole his breakfast egg, Rooster decides that "he would not help such a man" (299). This recalls Aszkielowicz's observation that "Australian POWs were alleged to have stolen from each other or otherwise to have taken advantage of each other. The details in the trial records thus reveal that not everyone was able to cope with the intense pressure on Australian POWs as stoically as the popular stereotype suggests" (41). Calling into question his moral integrity, the novel ties Rooster's conscience to that of Major Nakamura, who, when working in a hospital after the war, dismisses the American accusations of the Japanese "vivisection of live American airmen, without the use of anaesthetics" (Flanagan 354). When his *go* partner, Dr. Kameya Sato, explains that he was there and helped

perform the vivisection, so the doctors could “prove themselves worthy servants of the Emperor,” Nakamura agrees that they were “acting correctly and ethically” (355). Yet, when Sato asks him why the American airman trusted him, we hear the doctor’s recognition of his betrayal of the Hippocratic oath: “Because he thought my white coat meant I would help him” (358).

Flanagan inquires into the reasons for the cruelty of Japanese soldiers in the POW camps, drawing parallels between the indoctrination to which soldiers were subject in the Japanese army and the failures of conscience among the Australians imprisoned in Burma. Corporeal and psychological violence, we learn, was part of the Japanese military training, reducing human life to its instrumental worth. This works towards explaining why after the war, when recalling his training in Japan, where he was regularly beaten for any misdemeanour, the Goanna, now a war criminal, cannot understand why it was wrong to punish the Australian POWs: “He was vaguely aware that some had died because of his beatings. They probably would have died anyway. It was that sort of place and that sort of time, and no amount of thinking made any more or less sense of what had happened” (322–323). The Goanna’s lack of empathy echoes in Major Nakamura’s memories of his own army training, which points back to the injured body:

He had been beaten with a baseball bat on his buttocks for showing ‘insufficient enthusiasm’ when washing his superior’s underwear. He had been beaten senseless by three officers when, as a recruit, he had misheard an order. He had been made to stand-to all day on the parade ground, and when he had collapsed they had fallen on him for disobeying the order and beaten him unconscious. (317)

Without suggesting that the old code of warrior culture should offer a moral justification for the war atrocities, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* problematises any simplified reading of the historical conflict, showing how, by annihilating human bodies, the violence of war institutes a “fluidity of referential direction” (Scarry 115), which blurs the lines of ethical distinctions. For example, when Dorrigo sees the Japanese troops marching to the Burmese front, he is struck by their resemblance to the Australian POWs: “But these Japanese soldiers, who had clearly been marching all day and long into the night on their way to the horror of another front, looked as much the wretched of war as the POWs themselves, broken, bedraggled, exhausted” (Flanagan 437). The shared vulnerability of the soldiers and POWs looms especially large when a Japanese sergeant assaults a young soldier with a bamboo cane for looking at Dorrigo, who finds himself thinking that “this soldier no more understood his beating or purpose than the POWs did their miserable fate” (438).

#### 4. Haiku as a Language of Trauma

The delay in understanding is intrinsic to the narrative structure of *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, as both a thematic thread and a formal principle of text organisation. Thematically, cognitive deferral figures as a consequence of war trauma, wherein the impasse of survival makes living unbearable for the former POWs: “They died off quickly, strangely, in car smashes and suicides and creeping diseases” (327). Similarly, Jimmy Bigelow feels “some nameless terror that was beyond him to explain” (300) and develops an obsession about folding clothes “ever outwards” (300), like he was made to do in the Japanese camp. Discouraged by “the army quacks” (328) from sharing their experience because “that talk was no good” and it “was hardly a hero’s tale in the first place” (328), many former POWs, we learn, took to alcohol as a means of gaining emotional relief: “They drank to make themselves feel as they should feel when they didn’t drink, that way they had felt when they hadn’t drunk before the war” (329). Carrying within himself “a great slumbering turbulence he could neither understand nor reach” (385), Dorrigo also drinks “sometimes a whiskey in his morning tea, a negroni or two before dinner [...] and wine with it, brandy and whiskey after and some more whiskey after that and after that again” (385). Like Jimmy Bigelow, who finds it “hard to believe that all the things that had happened to him had ever really happened, that he had seen all the things he had seen” (249), after the war Dorrigo accepts “unreality as the greatest force in life” (383), staying the course in marriage with Ella, whom he nevertheless ceaselessly betrays as a way of “honouring Amy” (401).

Consigned to “the most complete and unassailable loneliness, so loud a solitude that he sought to crack its ringing silence again and again with yet another woman” (401), he cannot escape “the fatality of memory” (400), wherein “pursuing the past inevitably only leads to greater loss” (400). This is especially true of his memories of selecting a hundred men for a death “march to a camp near Three Pagoda Pass” (436) in Siam, which haunt him on his own deathbed. Enhanced through its emphasis on the morphology of the broken body, with its “[s]loughing tendons and [exposed] fasciae” alongside the tunnelled muscles and “a raw tibial bone that looked as if a dog had gnawed it” (440), the description of the scene of selection exposes the extent of Dorrigo’s sense of shame and guilt in not being able to save his men. In Agamben’s terms, Dorrigo’s shameful self-perception as “a carrion monster” and a “Charon” reigning over “a feast of death” (Flanagan 440) partakes of the *aporia* of survival, where he “becomes witness to [his] own disorder, [his] own oblivion as a subject” (Agamben 2002, 106), lost in the double bind of victim and victimiser. All the more poignant, then, is Jimmy Bigelow’s and the rest of the hundred men’s expression of gratitude “for everything” (Flanagan 441), for it recaptures the ethical power of testimony, which emerges in the abyss of Dorrigo’s moral dilemma, endowing “the non-place of articulation” (Agamben 2002, 130) with the capacity to turn shame into postmemory. In other words, if

we accept Agamben's reading of shame as a relation of desubjectification that translates body into voice and gives speech to the unspeakable, then Dorrigo's observation that "to share life is to share guilt" (Flanagan 398) paves a way for a reciprocity of historical understanding that binds the present to the past in an infinite loop of ethical responsibility.

The sharp end of this understanding, however, coincides with the cognitive delay as a structural principle, which works in unison with the intertextual frame of Bashō's 18<sup>th</sup>-century poetic masterpiece, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, lending its title to Flanagan's novel. As the Japanese poet's metaphor for life (Yuasa; qtd. in Bashō 37), the 18<sup>th</sup>-century text calls our attention to what literary critic Ian Marshall describes as haiku's capacity to "attune us to the present moment, reinforce seasonal awareness, promote social bonding, and provide practice in cognitive play, especially in terms of filling the gaps inherent in the haiku form" (92). The significance Marshall locates in haiku's appeal to the senses, overriding the call of the past in order to "place us bodily and sensuously in the world" (93), conflicts with Flanagan's concern for the body as an ethical agent of postmemory. It summons up Major Nakamura's self-image as "a blessed and lucky man who had led a good life" (Flanagan 395) and Jimmy Bigelow's gradual descent into dementia, where "he could recall no acts of violence" (433) in the POW camp. Yet as a poetic form keyed to the agency of the reader, who "must enter into the 'cut,' the open space, and connect the two parts in her head" (Shirane 461), Flanagan's use of haiku in his novel makes it imperative for us to recognise the historical dimension of the visceral truth of trauma, reminding us of the tangible links between haiku's "communal setting" (Shirane 461) and its seasonal world, which make this poetic form amenable to the work of remembering.

Opening the first section with a Bashō haiku and following up with four Issa haikus in the subsequent sections of *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, Flanagan stages an act of reading that works against the idea of the line as a narrative principle of life. Informed as it is by the lived experience of war, the novel's textual itinerary unfolds as a recursive loop of passion associated with both love and suffering, memory and forgetting, life and death. In connecting the five haikus, which give the novel its formal backbone, we share in the testimony of trauma that signifies through anamnesis, which "both fulfils and lacerates" us (Barthes 217), awakening into a tragically delayed truth. Structurally, the two crucial points of this truth concern the significance of Amy and Darky Gardiner in Dorrigo's life, something that the narrative conveys as part of its hermeneutics of trauma. Towards the end of the novel's second section Keith tells Amy that "Dorrigo's dead" (Flanagan 173), basing his conclusion on the testimony of an escapee from a camp: "He died six months ago" (173). As it zooms in on Amy's body crouching, in shock, "on the floor, like a child" (174), the chapter ends with a reference to the explosion that reduces Keith's "gracious four-storey stone hotel to smouldering rubble" (174), allowing us to believe that Amy died in it. This,

in fact, is what Ella writes to Dorrigo, when sharing her news from home: “Poor Mrs Keith Mulvaney is now among the confirmed dead” (446). The scene, where Dorrigo, many years after the war, sees Amy on a bridge in Sydney like “a ghost walking in the sunlight” (410), magnifies the tragedy of delayed knowledge, whose affective residue solidifies into an “abyss of years” (411), from which he cannot escape: “He had thought her dead. But now he finally understood: it was she who had lived and he who had died” (413). A gap in the “texture of memory,” which Roland Barthes compares to the Japanese haiku’s ability “to articulate [the past], without recuperating it in any destiny” (216), Dorrigo’s seeing Amy alive only exacerbates his sense of loss, deepening his emotional solitude in an understanding that they cannot be together.

In the novel’s economy of pain Amy’s survival is tethered to Darky Gardiner’s death in the POW camp, both being events that sustain Dorrigo’s sense of guilt. Recalling the novel’s opening scene, where as a child, he saw their neighbour, Jackie Maguire, cry over the disappearance of his wife, the narrative links this memory to Dorrigo’s witnessing of his brother’s kissing of Mrs Maguire: “his brother with his hand reaching up inside her skirt, as she – a small, intense woman of exotic darkness – leaned up against the chicken shed behind the coaching house” (7). The story comes full circle when, while visiting his brother Tom in hospital after his heart attack, Dorrigo learns the meaning of his witnessing. Revealing that he had had an affair with Mrs Maguire, Tom explains that Dorrigo saw her telling him about her baby: “That day I, sort of, well, broke down about the war, she held me like I said. And she told me about the baby. She had just found out what had happened to it” (408–409). What emerges as another belated effect of trauma is that the baby was Tom’s son, adopted by a family called the Gardiners. In contrast to Darky’s own thinking that his life “would ultimately be forgotten and mean no more than a fallen bamboo” (259), our learning of his being Dorrigo’s nephew amplifies the novel’s ambit of grief, whereby it folds the hidden lines of descent into the historical events on the Line and makes possible a postmemorial conception of a genealogy of trauma, where the experience of loss, like witnessing, is never complete and therefore remains infinitely ambiguous and open to reinterpretation.

## 5. Conclusion

Beyond any illusion of recuperation, the postmemorial allegiance to the past in Flanagan’s *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* ultimately rests on the figure of the loop, rather than the line, visually conveyed through the image of a circle painted by the haiku poet Shisui. Evoking the confluence of life and death, this image, which is visually reproduced twice in the novel, binds its beginning to its end, troping Dorrigo’s body memory into “an endless mystery, lengthless breadth, the great wheel, eternal return” (28). A staggering “antithesis to the line” (28), it

honours the historical experience of the Australian POWs, by acknowledging the recursive nature of traumatic memory, whose affective labour catalyses our ethical engagement with the material history of the Second World War and the visceral imagination that pays heed to it. By highlighting the tropological weight of the body as a historical agent, Flanagan brings to relief the material conditions of bearing witness that organised the affective relays between thought and action in the POW camps. In this respect, the narrative's postmemorial imperatives coordinate the effort to bring its readers into a shared space of heteropathic understanding, where addressing questions of witnessing and survival includes an acknowledgment of the ethically entangled structures of violence and their collapse of referential certainty. Affective remembering in the novel extends across the boundaries and bodies of time as well as space to elicit a hermeneutics of reciprocity that constitutes the postmemorial subjectivity of Flanagan's readership. The catachrestic effect of using haiku poetry as an epistemological frame insists on revising the ethical dichotomies of victim/victimiser and human/inhuman in order to restore attention to the shared vulnerabilities of historical subjects and their place in the hierarchies of mourning. Out of the depths of the narrative structures in *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* emerges an exegesis of passion, which, by intertwining love, violence, and suffering as modes of historicity, turns the lived events of the Second World War into a narrative scene of making sense that is simultaneously sensuously imaginative and historically truthful.

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