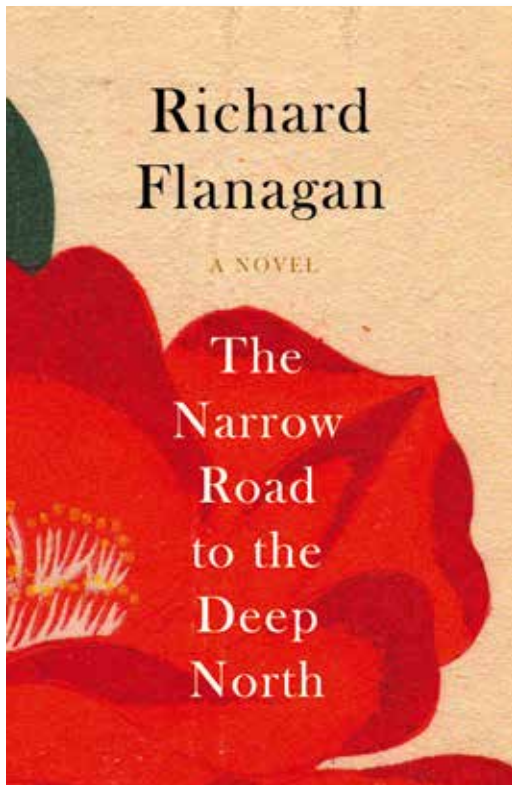




# Reader's Guide



Other novels by Richard Flanagan

*Death of a River Guide* (1997)

*The Sound of One Hand Clapping* (1998)

*Gould's Book of Fish* (2002)

*The Unknown Terrorist* (2007)

*Wanting* (2009)

# The Narrow Road to the Deep North Richard Flanagan

Chatto & Windus

[www.themanbookerprize.com](http://www.themanbookerprize.com)

## About the author

Born in Tasmania in 1961, Richard Flanagan is one of Australia's leading novelists. His novels have received numerous honours and been published in 26 countries. His father, who died the day Flanagan finished *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, was a survivor of the Burma Death Railway.

## *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*

*The Narrow Road to the Deep North* is a love story unfolding over half a century between a doctor and his uncle's wife.

Taking its title from one of the most famous books in Japanese literature, written by the great haiku poet Basho, Flanagan's novel has as its heart one of the most infamous episodes of Japanese history, the construction of the Thailand-Burma Death Railway in World War II.

In the despair of a Japanese POW camp on the Death Railway, 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.

## Discussion points

What is the significance of the name of the novel, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*? Why might Richard Flanagan have chosen to name his book after Basho's well-known travel narrative by the same name?

Richard Flanagan describes *The Road to the Deep North* as 'a dance in and out of light'. For all its bleakness, is this a novel about hope?

*The Narrow Road to the Deep North* examines what is good and bad in a man. Does the novel indicate whether man can choose which side of his nature prevails over the other or is this beyond man's control?

Does *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* ultimately answer the question 'What is a hero?' Or is it trying to present a larger idea of humanity that makes the notion of heroism look untrue to what we are as human beings?

'But always, for Flanagan, there is the possibility of redemption: in love, in friendship, in literature (the book's epigraph is a quote from Paul Celan: "Mother, they write poems")'. Alex Preston, *The Observer*. But is there, finally, any redemption for Dorrigo Evans? What is your response to the ending of *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*?

## Themed reading

Matsuo Basho *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*  
David Guterson *Snow Falling on Cedars*  
Max Hastings *Retribution*  
Kazuo Ishiguro *Remains of the Day*

## Useful links

[www.themanbookerprize.com](http://www.themanbookerprize.com)  
<http://literature.britishcouncil.org/richard-flanagan>  
[www.vintage-books.co.uk/blog/author-interviews/Flanagan-Narrow-Road-to-the-Deep-North/](http://www.vintage-books.co.uk/blog/author-interviews/Flanagan-Narrow-Road-to-the-Deep-North/)