

The Narrow Road to the Deep North Study Guide

**The Narrow Road to the Deep North by Richard
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Plot Summary

The Narrow Road to the Deep North spans decades of the life of Dorrigo Evans and the people he encounters over the course of his adult life. Dorrigo becomes engaged to a very correct young woman named Ella Lansburg one evening, without really intending to make the proposal. He falls in love with a young woman named Amy who Dorrigo later learns is married to his uncle, Keith Mulvaney. Amy and Dorrigo begin an affair though Dorrigo is already in the military and is expecting to be moved out at any time.

Dorrigo is in active duty only a short time when he is captured and held as a Prisoner of War. The POW camp is manned by Japanese and Korean soldiers. The situation is horrific with starvation and deprivation a daily occurrence. Dorrigo, a surgeon, becomes the commanding officer among the POWs and feels a personal responsibility for the well-being of all the prisoners. He feels the loss of each death and is often forced into situations of compromise. When the guards are brutally beating a man named Darky Gardiner, Dorrigo tries to intervene. When a Japanese commander offers Dorrigo quinine that might be used to save the lives of other men, Dorrigo accepts the offer, knowing he is trading the life of one man for the medicine. He later learns that Darky Gardiner is actually his biological nephew.

During his time as a POW, Dorrigo learns that the pub owned by Amy and her husband exploded and Dorrigo's fiancée, Ella, tells him that Amy's remains were identified among the victims. She actually isn't dead but Dorrigo doesn't know this for decades. Dorrigo and Ella marry upon his return after the war. They have three children and settle into an uneasy relationship, though Dorrigo hates himself for never being able to fully love Ella and his children. Dorrigo becomes a renowned surgeon and a known speaker among POW gatherings. He spends years in illicit affairs and seeking a way to feel alive, but never achieves it. He is fatally injured as an old man when a car driven by a drunk teen crashes into his Bentley.

Meanwhile, other people who met Dorrigo along the way go on with their lives. Jimmy Bigelow, the man who'd been the trumpeter at many funerals in the POW camp, lives to be more than ninety and forgets the atrocities of the camp by the time of his death. Ella reconciles herself to the marriage with Dorrigo, who is never faithful and never returns her love. Amy develops cancer and lives out the last days of her life peacefully, with her sister's family.

Several of the Japanese and Korean soldiers are killed as war criminals. The commander of the POW camp, a Japanese man named Nakamura, discovers that his name is listed among the men being sought for war crimes. He goes into hiding for some years until comes to realize that the hunt is no longer active. He then marries and has a family, and spends most of his life trying to reconcile himself with his crimes, which he sees as merely doing his duty. He tries to lead a good life as a kind man but sometimes believes the dictates that ruled his life as a soldier were all lies.



Section 1, Chapters 1-9

Summary

Chapter 1 opens with Dorrigo Evans recalling a very early memory, probably around 1915 or 1916, when a neighborhood man named Jackie Maguire arrives at the Evans home. Dorrigo recalls that Jackie is crying and that a grown man's tears made an impression on him. In Chapter 2, Dorrigo recalls more of that scene. He comes inside to have his mother tend a blood blister on his hand and Dorrigo listens to the adults' conversation. Jackie is crying because his wife, later identified as Ruth, has taken a train to Launceston with her youngest child, and has not returned. Jackie says that his wife had simply vanished.

Jackie sometimes works with Dorrigo's older brother, Tom. Dorrigo occasionally travels to Tom's house in a nearby community. Dorrigo doesn't reveal that he'd seen Tom in an erotic embrace with Jackie's wife just before her departure. He thinks about it for awhile but the event slowly becomes a dim memory and then Dorrigo no longer thinks about it. In Chapter 3, Dorrigo earns his way into the Launceston High School, the only one of his siblings to do so. He soon becomes accepted among the older students.

In Chapter 4, eighteen years have passed since the night of Jackie Maguire's tears. Dorrigo is in bed with a young woman named Amy. She is actually married to Dorrigo's uncle Keith Mulvaney, though Keith is much older than Amy. Dorrigo is twenty-seven. His mother died while Dorrigo was in medical school at the University of Melbourne. He has completed a medical degree and is now a surgeon. He reads a great deal and uses poetry and literature to express his thoughts.

In Chapter 5, Dorrigo wakes to find that Amy is dressed and preparing to leave. Dorrigo says he wants to spend more time with her. She asks if he plans to leave Ella, his fiancée, and Dorrigo asks if she's prepared to leave her husband, Keith. He tells her that he will be shipping out on his military assignment on Wednesday but that date is later moved up.

In Chapter 6, Dorrigo is much older. He has taken a pill to help with an angina attack and returns to the bed where a nude woman picks up an earlier conversation. He whispers the name, "Darky Gardiner," and realizes that he can't remember what Darky looked like. Darky is Dorrigo's biological nephew who dies in a Prisoner of War camp, though Dorrigo doesn't know of their familial relationship until after Darky's death. Now, years after the war, Dorrigo has risen to a level of fame he hadn't expected. He is hailed as a hero for his work in the prison camp, but he also has critics and is really just ready for the fame to die.

The woman in the bed is Lynette Maison and she asks why it is that he can quote so readily from literature but has trouble remembering the face of Darky Gardiner. Lynette knows that Dorrigo is much older than she, has a wife, and is currently engaged in other



affairs, but she is drawn to him anyway. She is sometimes angry and flings accusations at him, but doesn't leave the relationship.

In Chapter 7, Dorrigo and other prisoners arrive in Siam in 1943. They are forced to work on a railroad that begins near Bangkok and goes to Burma. The project becomes known as the Death Railroad. Early in the process, the prisoners are treated moderately well but conditions deteriorate. In Chapter 8, the reader learns the purpose of the railroad. The Japanese need to get material to Burma where they believe their forces can begin to take control of India and cut off supplies to the Chinese. The plan is difficult to the point of impossible but the Japanese begin work, using mainly prisoners as their labor force. Historians put estimated deaths up to two hundred thousand.

In Chapter 9, the prisoners begin to refer to the railroad project as “The Line.” Years after his release, Dorrigo always has a book on his nightstand. He has come to believe that a book by his bed provides protection, and that he would die if it wasn't there. He notes that he sometimes sleeps alone, without a woman in his bed, but he never forgets to have a book by his bed.

Analysis

Dorrigo's memories of Jackie Maguire does not seem important until much later in the book. Dorrigo is much younger than his brother Tom, who lives some distance away. There are several other siblings but Dorrigo never really connects with any of them other than Tom. It's not until many years later that Dorrigo discovers that Tom is the cause of Jackie Maguire's heartache. Tom eventually reveals that he and Jackie's wife, Ruth, had an affair and that she bore a child from that union. The child is put up for adoption. With additional details, Dorrigo learns that the child is Darky Gardiner, a man who is beaten to death in the Prisoner of War camp where Dorrigo spends several years during the war.

Some important aspects of one setting are revealed in the early chapters of the book as well as some details of Dorrigo's life. The family lives in Tasmania and Dorrigo doesn't really know anything about life outside his immediate world. His father, however, has lived a difficult life, surviving a major depression era. Dorrigo's family now lives in a “cottage” provided by the Tasmanian Government Railways because Dorrigo's father is an employee of that company. Dorrigo knows nothing different but his father considers their life one of luxury compared to the previous hardships.

There is some cursing throughout the book and some readers may find these distracting or offensive. The words are typically used as part of conversations and are obviously meant to mimic what the characters would have said in specific situations.

Dorrigo recalls an interview during which a journalist asks why Japan was bombed twice. The journalist says that dropping one bomb was effective and questions the need for a second. Dorrigo answers that the journalist couldn't possibly understand the monstrous attitudes of the Japanese and the journalist responds by pointing out that



women and children were also killed in the bombings. Dorrigo's response is that the fallout from the bombs would not affect future generations, and stands by his statement, saying it was necessary. The interview takes place years after the war and Dorrigo has, by this time, had many years to look back and evaluate. His thoughts are revealed in the memory and it's noted that he "relied on the increasingly fragile assumption that what he said was right." Dorrigo doesn't go so far as to admit that he might be wrong about things, which is an important part of his character. He is decisive and determined, even from an early age, and this aspect of his personality makes it possible for him to take charge as much as he is able in the Prisoner of War camp. That aspect of her personality continues in his private life after the war.

The idea that Dorrigo's memory of what's right may not be accurate becomes an underlying theme of the book when another character struggles with the same issue. A Japanese officer named Nakamura is devastated when he discovers that some of his actions were based on lies presented by his government. The characters who were fighting for their respective countries are all working on the assumption that their cause is right and just, and finding out that is not the case is difficult for some.

There is a mention of the "Book of Souls" that the Japanese have as a memorial to the soldiers who served in the war. The names listed in the book are to be excused for any actions while they were soldiers. However, more than a thousand of them were executed for war crimes. While the Japanese may have forgiven the soldiers for their acts, the rest of the world did not.

Dorrigo is called on to write a foreword to a book about the POW camps and he struggles to find the words. He ends up writing something but says it does not do justice to the prisoners or the situation. He seems to feel that anything he can say about the camps is inadequate to describe what truly happened. He also feels a great sense of responsibility for Darky Gardiner's death, which is described in detail later in the book.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Dorrigo's memory of Jackie Maguire important?

Discussion Question 2

What is known of Dorrigo at the end of this section? List some details of his character that have been revealed at this point.

Discussion Question 3

What would life be like for people living in the early years of the war?

Vocabulary

allegory, wattle, sanguine, sacrosanct, melee, phenomenally, melancholy, shambolic, veneration, adulation, hagiographies, alacrity, apposite



Section 1, Chapters 10-18

Summary

In Chapter 10, Dorrigo recounts the death haiku of the eighteenth-century poet, Shisui. The idea was that a poet wrote a final poem, on his death bed. When Shisui complied with the tradition, he merely painted a circle. Dorrigo notes that the circle is a mystery to him and that it is the opposite of a line.

In Chapter 11, Dorrigo is among the prisoners held by the Japanese. Because he is a colonel, he is second-in-command of a Prisoner of War camp with about a thousand prisoners. Conditions are severe but they pass the time with memories of home, education programs, and various sports. Prior to being captured, Dorrigo is second-in-command at a "casualty clearing station" and is left behind with a few men when the station is abandoned. They are supposed to be waiting for a truck but instead is instructed to advance with a mule train. In Chapter 12, Dorrigo begins the trek with the other men and the mules, but the two-day trek turns into a week. They encounter a group of seven Tasmanian machine gunners, stranded by a broken truck. The gunners are led by Sergeant Darky Gardiner and the two groups join forces. They finally reach their destination only to find the Royal Navy is bombing the town. The group remains outside the city until the bombing stops.

Gallipoli von Kessler, known as Kes, is among the men traveling with Dorrigo. After the French withdraw, several stores remain open for business and some of the Australian soldiers shop or look around for souvenirs. Dorrigo and his group go to sleep that night with the sounds of jackals "as they came in to feed on the dead."

In Chapter 13, Dorrigo and the men in his group wait for orders. Darky Gardiner has a large supply of food and cigarettes. Jimmy Bigelow, another of the soldiers, manages to find coffee and the men sit around, talking and waiting for new orders. Another soldier, Rabbit Hendricks, is sketching while they talk. Another soldier, Lizard Brancussi, has a photo of his wife, Maisie, but the picture is disintegrating. Rabbit sketches Maisie's likeness on the back of a post card. Another of the soldiers, Jack Rainbow, rants about their current location in connection to where he believes they are supposed to be. Dorrigo bets money that Darky Gardiner will make it all the way through the war and Jimmy Bigelow echoes that thought. Suddenly, there's an explosion and one of their group, Yabby Burrows, is blow apart. They spot an enemy plane headed their way. It's hit and the pilot bails out. Rooster McNeice, another of the soldiers, takes aim and shoots the pilot. Dorrigo initially tries to stop Rooster but Rooster points out Yabby's fate and takes the shot.

In Chapter 14, Dorrigo and the others are among a group of soldiers who surrender. They are forced to march to Changi Gaol where Dorrigo's men, haggard from their time as prisoners, stand out among the better-dressed and healthier prisoners. They are refused better provisions and after two weeks are put into rail cars where they are kept



for days without food and water, through impossible heat. They exit the rail cars and are forced to march again. They arrive at their new camp and a Japanese officer tells them they will have the honor of building a railway for the Japanese Emperor. The route of the railway is already staked out. The men begin the arduous work of clearing the teak from the rail and of building a camp.

In Chapter 15, the men sometimes put on plays and manage to find ways to entertain themselves during the early days of captivity though they are already beginning to feel the effects of malnutrition and lack of medical supplies. Jack Rainbow falls blind and a myriad of diseases spring up. In Chapter 16, the prisoners are forced to continue work with even smaller food rations. The monsoons arrive and the prisoners are “grateful” until they realize just how much rain will fall and the problems it causes. Colonel Rexroth dies, leaving Dorrigo as commanding officer. The Japanese give the prisoners with ranks as officers a small payment for work. Dorrigo pools that money to help buy some additional food and medicine. In Chapter 17, Dorrigo continues to struggle to be the leader his men believe him to be.

In Chapter 18, the time shifts back to Dorrigo's moments in bed with Lynette Maison. Lynette is often jealous and demanding but as Dorrigo confides in her that he sometimes can't remember details of his life during the POW camp, she invites him to talk about his life and about Amy. She says that Amy is dead and she is only jealous of the living women in his life.

Analysis

The significance of Shisui's death poem drawing is examined at the end of the book, when Dorrigo himself is facing death. Dorrigo then equates the circular drawing of Shisui to the obol, or coin, used in mythology to pay the ferryman for a ride across the River Styx.

Dorrigo briefly describes a situation in which his group is lost prior to being captured. As a surgeon, he held the rank of colonel, putting him in charge though he didn't have a military background. Dorrigo, as ranking officer, feels it necessary to make a decision about which way they should go. He notes that he doesn't really know what to do but he realizes that the men are looking to him for direction and that prompts him to make a decisive decision.

One of the first looks at the Cultural Differences is seen in Chapter 14. Dorrigo and his men arrive at the camp where they spend months working on the railroad. The Japanese commander who addresses them upon their arrival says they should be ashamed for having become prisoners. The Japanese culture makes it clear that being captured is a disgrace. A soldier who is being captured should kill himself before submitting to the enemy forces. The Japanese commander goes on to say that Dorrigo and the others have a chance to redeem themselves by building the railroad. The Japanese believe they are to follow the Emperor's will above all else and that doing so brings great honor.



Dorrigo knows that there is a camp filled with English prisoners nearby. He gets near enough one day to evaluate the camp and says it literally stinks with the smell of disease and death. The men are in poor condition and at least part of that is because the English officers are not working at keeping the men as healthy as possible. There is a river nearby and the fish from that river might have provided vital sustenance for the soldiers. However, the English officers refuse to allow the “common soldiers” to fish. Dorrigo doesn't talk about his reaction to the camp other than to say that the English commanders were doing “much for themselves” while doing nothing for the men under their command. This may have been yet another catalyst in Dorrigo's attitude about his own role in the POW camp.

One of the Japanese soldiers is named Kenji Mogami. He allows the prisoners a break after they build the first of the shelters in the POW camp. Darcy Gardiner says Mogami is “not such a bad bloke.” Jack Rainbow says he agrees but adds that he would but the man open “with a blunt razor blade” if he had a chance. These attitudes are common throughout the book with the prisoners sometimes seeming to connect with their captors, but only momentarily before returning to the animosity that governs the relationship.

The only man among the prisoners who outranks Dorrigo is Colonel Rexroth. Rexroth says he believes the “British spirit” will sustain the men but Dorrigo sees malnutrition and disease that will kill most of them. Jack Rainbow has lost his vision and another man has lost his fingers. Dorrigo sees that most of the disease around him is a direct result of overwork and malnutrition. The two commanders, Rexroth and Dorrigo, are a dramatic contrast. Rexroth continues to insist the men will get by on “stoicism” and “pluck,” which is not surprising considering Rexroth's military background. But Dorrigo, despite being an officer, knows that the men cannot withstand the demands being placed on them because their bodies simply won't stand up to it. This is also one of the earliest looks at Dorrigo's tendency to take care of the men to the best of his ability while Rexroth's background makes him believe that boosting morale is the best way to keep the men going. What's very interesting about Rexroth's attitude is that he's already sketched out a cemetery with a spot marked off for the officers. While Rexroth seems to be pushing the men to survive, it seems that he's really preparing for them all to die. Rexroth dies of dysentery and it's noted that he's buried in the jungle “with everyone else.”

After Dorrigo becomes the commanding officer, he becomes known as “Big Fella.” This nickname is a statement of the attitudes arising from the men under his command. They come to realize that Dorrigo is determined to do everything he can for the men, even to the point of major sacrifices himself. He puts everything he can toward the well-being of the men, many who die anyway. Ironically, the more the men show their adoration, the more Dorrigo feels he doesn't deserve it and the harder he works to be the “Big Fella.” A prime example of Dorrigo's struggles is seen in Chapter 17. The prisoners somehow come up with a large steak after some of the men manage to steal a cow. The majority of the meat is put into the camp's kitchen to help feed the men but they save a large steak and prepare it for Dorrigo. When they present him with the steak, his mouth begins to water and he desperately wants to eat it. As he considers the steak, he is



struck by the fact that his men believe he is a wonderful leader and he insists that the steak be shared among some of the sickest of the men. Dorrigo knows that the men gave him the steak as a show of their gratitude for the sacrifices he has made on their behalf, but he feels unworthy and that is the driving force that makes him give the steak away. Ironically, that earns him an ever higher place in the esteem of his men, which will drive him to be even better.

Discussion Question 1

Describe how Dorrigo becomes commander of the Prisoners of War. How does he handle the responsibilities?

Discussion Question 2

Identify at least three of Dorrigo's fellow soldiers and describe what is known of their characters.

Discussion Question 3

Compare the attitude of Colonel Rexroth to the attitude of Dorrigo.

Vocabulary

scree, dint, irreconcilable, virtue, stoicism, pluck, arbitrary, irrefutable, idyllic, catharsis, denouement



Section 2, Chapters 1-13

Summary

In Chapter 1, Dorrigo is in Adelaide in 1940. He is in the military and awaiting his next assignment. His Uncle Keith Mulvaney owns a pub near the coast and invites Dorrigo to visit. Dorrigo plans to visit Keith but winds up in a bookstore instead. There, he sees Amy Mulvaney for the first time. She is Keith's second wife and is much younger than her husband. Dorrigo is involved with a young Melbourne teacher named Ella. Her family is prominent in the Melbourne society and Dorrigo sees her as secure. While Dorrigo is thinking about Ella, Amy approaches him. Dorrigo doesn't learn that she is Keith's wife until later. In Chapter 2, Amy approaches Dorrigo. The fact that she has a captivated following makes Dorrigo determined that she won't captivate him. Despite that, he comments on a camellia blossom and she admits that she stole it. One of her friends tries to get her attention but she puts them off. In Chapter 3, Amy and Dorrigo continue their conversation and Dorrigo reads her a poem. One of Amy's friends interrupts, taking up a previous conversation. He says love is not necessary and the best marriages are based on compatibility.

In Chapter 4, the time shifts to Dorrigo's Prisoner of War days. Dorrigo is talking to Major Nakamura, Japanese commander of the camp. Dorrigo says the men need rest in order to keep working on the railroad. Nakamura responds that the men should be honored to die while working for the Japanese Emperor. Nakamura's words are translated by another Japanese man, Lieutenant Fukuhara.

In Chapter 5, Dorrigo wakes beside Lynette and says he has to go, carefully avoiding the words "home" and "Ella." Dorrigo has become something of a celebrity after a documentary that led to television appearances with Dorrigo taking a "conservative humanist" stand. Lynette cries as he prepares to leave.

Chapter 6 reverts back in time to a week after his first meeting with Amy. He arrives in Melbourne where he spends time with Ella. She refuses to have sex with him and Dorrigo is secretly relieved. Dorrigo can't stop thinking about Amy and Ella becomes much less interesting than she had been before he met Amy. Ella's society friends want to meet Dorrigo and he finds himself stepping back into the role of her boyfriend, imagining his place in this perfect life they'll have together. Back at his military assignment, Keith Mulvaney sends another postcard, again inviting Dorrigo to visit. Dorrigo agrees and arrives at Keith's pub, the King of Cornwall. Dorrigo arrives and finds Amy tending bar. She identifies herself as Keith's wife.

In Chapter 7, Dorrigo is so shocked at learning Amy's true identity that he makes an excuse and leaves without seeing Keith. He spends weeks trying to forget Amy and writes long love letters to Ella. When he is given an unexpected leave, he decides to return to the King of Cornwall. He calls Keith who assures Dorrigo he's welcome. Dorrigo is thinking of Amy as he hangs up.



Chapter 8 reverts to Dorrigo's time as a prisoner. Major Nakamura doesn't sleep well, largely because of an addiction to the drug Philpon. The drug is used to help keep soldiers alert and he has now come to depend on it even more than food.

In Chapter 9, Dorrigo meets Keith for the first time. He talks enthusiastically, often answering his own questions before Dorrigo has a chance to even comment. Keith announces that he's been called on to make an unexpected trip associated with his role in local government and asks Dorrigo to "look after Amy." In Chapter 10, Dorrigo and Amy go out to a nightclub and he learns that she is 24. Dorrigo is flattered by Amy's attention. When the club goes dark and the dancers find themselves in moonlight, the tension between Amy and Dorrigo increases. After that dance, Amy asks Dorrigo to take her home.

In Chapter 11, they wind up in the suite where Amy and Keith live. They become amorous. In Chapter 12, Dorrigo wakes to discover it's daylight and Amy has left a note. He recalls Amy's comment the previous night when she said "nothing happened" between them. Dorrigo agrees that there was nothing more than a hug but that he is falling in love. In Chapter 13, Dorrigo returns to his military assignment and resolves that he won't ever see her again.

Analysis

Dorrigo isn't really close with most of his family. He says at one point that he has sisters he seldom saw and that he felt little when he attended their funerals. Keith Mulvaney had been married to the youngest sister of Dorrigo's father, but that woman died in a car wreck. This means that Amy is no blood kin though their familial relationship makes their affair seem even more illicit. Amy and Dorrigo meet by accident the first time and it's interesting that Dorrigo doesn't particularly like her. She captivates everyone around her and she's surrounded by a group of people who are obviously vying for her attention. Dorrigo is attracted to her but he doesn't like the "power" she has over her followers.

In Chapter 5 of this section, the reader begins to learn more about Dorrigo's later life. He is featured in a documentary about the railroad line built by the Prisoners of War and that prompts the beginning of his life as a public speaker. It seems that Dorrigo, having lived through the horrors as a prisoner, would truly be a conservative humanist. He says he speaks on television shows and at various events from that perspective, but that it's just "another mask" he wears. By this point, Dorrigo no longer knows why he's married and he doesn't know why he is compelled to sleep with other women. But a greater question that is now weighing on him is why any of it matters. Dorrigo is struggling to make sense of his life and it might be called a typical midlife crisis if it hadn't been going on most of his life. His time in prison no doubt affected him but it seems that Dorrigo has struggled to find meaning and his place in the world for most of his life.

When Amy and Dorrigo meet for the first time, there's an instant attraction. At their second meeting, he rushes to leave, apparently so that he won't be tempted to follow through with that attraction. By the time he goes for a visit and spends time with her, he



has become more accepting of the relationship he believes he will have with Amy. She is married to Dorrigo's uncle and Dorrigo is in a serious relationship with Ella, which he identifies as a “prospective engagement.” It's this sense of security that causes Dorrigo to let down his guard and that apparently leads to sleeping with her for the first time. An important aspect of both their characters is seen when Amy offers her definition of their relationship. She says that she belongs to Keith. She then addresses Dorrigo, saying, “You're mine.” She amends that to say that Dorrigo really belongs to Ella, but that for this one night he belongs to Amy. Amy is a forceful young woman and seems to be accustomed to having control. That's why it seems so strange that she is married to Keith. The details of that marriage are later revealed but seem somewhat out of line with what the reader sees of Amy's nature.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Dorrigo's first meeting with Amy.

Discussion Question 2

What is your opinion of Amy at this point in the story?

Discussion Question 3

What is it about Ella that attracts Dorrigo? Is that enough for a marriage?

Vocabulary

languid, ossifying, slavering, innocuous, complicit, ebullient, annihilation, tropes, muster, maelstrom



Section 2, Chapters 14-27

Summary

In Chapter 14, Nakamura greets an officer, Colonel Kota, who has new orders regarding the railroad. Nakamura notes the changes to the rail line, the additional work it will cause, and the new completion date moved up to October. He is also ordered to choose one hundred prisoners to be moved to another work camp, one hundred fifty kilometers away.

In Chapter 15, Amy is restless. She has not always been faithful to Keith but recalls vomiting after one particular romantic encounter, and pledging that it would never go that far again. She doesn't know why she took off her wedding ring when she met Dorrigo for the first time.

In Chapter 16, Colonel Kota recounts the first time he'd beheaded someone. He says he was angry that the man simply knelt and accepted his death. After that first beheading, Kota always noted the necks of men he encountered.

In Chapter 17, Amy picks up Dorrigo outside his barracks. She lies to Keith about her plans. At one point during their drive that day, she tells Dorrigo that Keith is a good man. He agrees. What Amy doesn't vocalize is that she believes every conversation with Keith is superficial and that she wants him to say something that's "real." The sexual tension between them heightens when they are at the beach and Amy gets a scratch on the inside of her thigh. Dorrigo kisses the spot. In Chapter 18, Dorrigo and Amy go for a swim. Back on the beach, Amy confides that she hates being with Keith because she can't stop thinking about Dorrigo. They make love on the beach.

In Chapter 19, Dorrigo and Amy meet in his room at the King of Cornwall. Amy confides in Dorrigo that she was pregnant at one point, and that Keith was the father. He'd urged her to get an abortion and she'd done so. In Chapter 20, Amy continues the story. After her return from Melbourne, Keith had wanted to marry. Amy says she believes it was to make up for pushing her to have an abortion. Soon after their marriage, Keith accuses Amy of having tricked him into the pregnancy and the marriage. Amy says they love each other in their own way, and that she can't bring herself to leave Keith. Dorrigo doesn't understand his attraction to Amy. He also doesn't understand why he allows himself to continue deeper into his relationship with Ella as his attraction for Amy grows. In Chapter 21, Amy examines her feelings for Dorrigo. She asks if he'd be scared if she says, "I love you," and he assures her he wouldn't. They lay down on the bed together and Dorrigo falls asleep. She returns to the suite she shares with Keith.

In Chapter 22, Dorrigo and Amy spend every possible moment together. Their passion makes them reckless until the night Keith tells Amy he's always known about the affair. In Chapter 23, Keith and Amy are driving when he tells her that he knows.



In Chapter 24, Amy recalls getting to know Keith. He is older than she, and he gives gifts and attention. When he proposes after the abortion, she feels it's "the only way out of the mire" her life has become. She knows her life with Keith is comfortable but wants more. However, she wants to avoid hurting Keith, which prompts her to try to keep the affair a secret. After Keith says he knows about the affair, Amy lies in bed and listens to him crying beside her.

In Chapter 25, Amy and Keith are playing cards with friends, the Robertsons, when the talk turns to affairs and love. Mrs. Robertson says cheating is "easy" but Amy knows that's not the case. On the way home, Keith reveals that he knows about Amy's affair with Dorrigo. He says he had hoped he was wrong and that he should have allowed her to keep their baby. In Chapter 26, Amy telephones Dorrigo and reveals that Keith knows about the affair. Dorrigo believes he and Amy can now become a "real couple" but Amy says he has to go back to Ella. Dorrigo says he'll come back for Amy as soon as he is able. He then learns he is to be shipped out immediately and won't have another chance to see Amy before he leaves.

In Chapter 27, Amy is busy at the pub. Two years have passed since Dorrigo shipped out. Amy and Keith are talking after the pub closes and Keith relates information about Prisoners of War. He says an escaped prisoner named Dorrigo as one of the men who died in a POW camp. He doesn't tell Amy that he doesn't have official confirmation of Dorrigo's death. Keith believes their marriage might be revived if Amy isn't pining for Dorrigo. Amy leaves the room and Keith is still in the bedroom when the explosion occurs.

Analysis

Chapter 15 holds another important look at the idea of the Japanese spirit. Nakamura is talking to Colonel Kota about the new orders. Nakamura knows that he can't possibly complete the task he's been assigned, especially with the new deadline, two months earlier than the previous deadline. He hints that he needs tools, machinery, and healthy men. Kota is instantly talking about the fact that the Prisoners are expecting kindness that they don't deserve. He says that a Japanese soldier who doesn't carry out an order expects to be slapped. While Nakamura knows he has an impossible task ahead of him, he instantly picks up those ideals and begins spouting them back to Kota. He says that an honorable man would not allow himself to be captured, but would commit suicide first. Nakamura makes a comment then that provides an important look into his character. He says that it's difficult for him to be so harsh with the prisoners and that he wouldn't if they would accept their part in Japan's destiny. Nakamura will, in later life, become a kind man who is careful not to hurt others. It might be that he truly hates what he is doing to the prisoners and sees it as his duty because of the Japanese propaganda he's been fed all his life.

Colonel Kota is a very minor character in the story but he provides an important look into the Japanese culture. Kota and Nakamura share drinks and talk for awhile. Their conversation turns to poetry and each recites a favorite haiku. They also talk about their



dedication to their country and the Japanese Emperor. At one point, Kota pulls Nakamura close and utters a few choked words, including “men” and “love.” When he can't go on, Nakamura pulls away and it's noted that Kota “hoped he had been misunderstood.” It's not entirely clear what he's talking about but his thoughts then go to a time in a prison camp when dead soldiers, both Japanese and prisoners, had been eaten because everyone was so near starvation. It's left to the reader to determine the importance of the conversation.

When Dorrigo and Amy are about to make love on the beach, they hear a loud squeal. Dorrigo then sees a large dog that has caught and killed a penguin. The squeal was the penguin's death cry. Dorrigo then looks back down at Amy and realizes that everything has changed for him in that instant. He says that he's been able to think about nothing but Amy up to this point, but that the entire affair now seems “charmless.” This is important because it's a look at Dorrigo's true character. He will continue the affair with Amy, eventually marry Ella, and enter a series of extra-marital affairs over the course of his life, all apparently seeking something that he can't even name. While it might seem that the time as a Prisoner of War or that his love for Amy colors the remainder of his life, the truth is that Dorrigo's nature is such that he can probably never find true fulfillment.

Amy tells Dorrigo about her abortion, but only in basic terms. She says she became pregnant out of wedlock and that Keith arranged for the abortion. She had wanted to marry Keith to protect the baby from gossip but Keith hadn't wanted to marry because he didn't believe Amy was in love with him. The situation is a look into the characters of Amy and Keith, caught up in the social standards of the day. Amy's thoughts are as much a contradiction as those of Dorrigo. She knows that men have the capacity to lie, and believes that to be true of all men. She wants to break out of her boring life but fears being without the stability of her marriage to Keith.

The affair weighs heavily on Dorrigo as seen in his reaction when Amy reveals that Keith knows about them. Dorrigo's first reaction is that he and Amy will now become a couple in the fullest sense of the word. Dorrigo fully believes he can break off his engagement to Ella and that Amy will accept him. Amy, however, says that he has to return to Ella. It could be that she's once again ashamed at having ignored what's socially acceptable and is trying to do the right thing given the current circumstances. Dorrigo is relieved. He realizes that if he ends his affair with Amy and moves on with his life, he will be able to escape the whirlwind that Amy creates around her. He seems to believe, again, that life with Ella will be stable and that he can be happy with that. But his attraction for Amy outweighs his other thoughts and, without thinking it through, he pledges that he'll return for her once the war is over, and that they'll marry. An interesting aspect of this is that he has plenty of opportunities after this point to write Ella and break off their engagement, but he doesn't. This indicates that he isn't quite certain he should give up on the stability Ella represents.

The explosion in the pub is a case of misdirection. The reader is led to believe that Amy is in the pub when the explosion occurs. She has actually left the building and survives, though Dorrigo doesn't learn this until many years later.



Discussion Question 1

Describe Colonel Kota and his preoccupation with beheading people.

Discussion Question 2

What is Dorrigo's reaction when he learns that Keith is aware of Dorrigo's affair with Amy?

Discussion Question 3

Why would Amy's pregnancy have been cause for shame? How does this compare with modern attitudes?

Vocabulary

epoch, intransigence, privations, antiquated, contradictory, tumult, procuring, undecipherable



Section 3, Chapters 1-13

Summary

In Chapter 1, several prisoners are forced to march down the hill from their camp to help retrieve a truck stuck in the mud. Rabbit Hendricks has two duck eggs, given to him by the Japanese for sketching postcards they will send home. Rabbit also sketches scenes from everyday life in the POW camp. Rabbit traded Darky Gardiner one of the duck eggs for a paint brush Darky stole from a Japanese guard. Darky also has a small can of condensed milk he stole from a Japanese truck. After he returns from helping to retrieve the truck, Darky decides to eat the egg, knowing the milk will keep longer.

Tiny Middleton and Darky are partners drilling holes in stone along the rail line. Tiny is a huge man who has also begun to waste away after the time as a prisoner. However, he continues to work hard and meets his daily quota far ahead of the others. Tiny's hard work makes the Japanese push the others even harder and makes the other prisoners hate Tiny, but he won't slow down even when the others plead with him. Then Tiny develops malaria and collapses during work. A Korean guard known only as the Goanna beats Tiny. Tiny cries, something none of the prisoners allow of themselves. Afterward, Tiny and Darky exchange places with Tiny holding the steel drilling rod and Darky wielding the hammer.

In Chapter 2, Darky halves his boiled duck egg with Tiny. They return to sleep but Darky wakes later. He has diarrhea and doesn't make it to the ditch used for sanitation in the camp. In Chapter 3, Jimmy Bigelow rouses the camp by playing "Reveille" on his bugle. Rooster MacNeice has been memorizing "Mein Kampf" as a means of trying to keep his mind sharp. Rooster rants about his hatred of Hitler and his ideals, but says that was the only book he could find.

In Chapter 4, Darky obeys the rules of the Japanese officers by folding his blanket in a specific way. The Korean called the Goanna discovers the blanket fold is pointed incorrectly and brutally beats Darky for the infraction. Dorrigo is aware that the prisoners lie and cheat "with gusto." Some claim illnesses when they are relatively healthy and some claim health when they are near death. In Chapter 5, letters arrive for the prisoners, a rarity. Dorrigo has a letter from Ella and his thoughts turn to Amy and a pearl necklace he'd bought for her, though they both knew she can't wear it in public.

In Chapter 7, the men get their meager rations for breakfast and then gather in the muddy compound. Some of the men are so weak they have to crawl, including Tiny. In Chapter 8, Dorrigo begins the daily haggling with the Japanese officer Nakamura over how many men were able to work that day. When a man collapses and Dorrigo says the man will not be able to work that day, Nakamura repeatedly slaps Dorrigo. Tiny dies that morning. In Chapter 9, the men selected for the day's work choose their tools and head out. Darky hurts his foot and is struggling with the pain in his head from that morning's



beating. In Chapter 10, Darcy falls again and the men halt for a few moments while he gathers his strength.

In Chapter 11, Dorrigo makes his rounds of the sick men. There is an effort to separate them by illness to avoid further contagion. He struggles to find a way to help but continues to try. They use makeshift medical equipment, some stolen from the Japanese. In Chapter 12, Jimmy Bigelow works in the camp so that he can play the bugle at the daily funerals. Rabbit Hendricks is among those cremated one day. In Chapter 13, the cremation fire is lit and Jimmy plays, though he has sores in his mouth and the task is painful.

Analysis

Rabbit Hendricks' sketches are dangerous because they show scenes from life in the camp, including the atrocities against the prisoners. The Japanese would certainly have punished him if the drawings were discovered. When some diseases wipe through the camp, the practice is to burn everything they possess to help stop the spread of disease. When Rabbit dies, his sketches are among his possessions and Dorrigo orders that they be burned as well. However, the sketches fall out of the fire, charred but intact, and Dorrigo impulsively saves them. He keeps them hidden for the rest of his time as a prisoner and they are later published as a book.

The men are so malnourished that most have not had an erection in a long time. One morning, Tiny has one an obvious erection before waking. The sight is heartening for the men, many who worry that they won't later be able to have sex. Rooster MacNeice seems offended that the men are looking at Tiny so Darcy offers to "cover" Tiny's erection. He picks up the duck egg shell from the previous night and places it atop Tiny's erection. There follows a great many jokes, including that Tiny has been "promoted to pope." The men are desperate for the levity the situation affords. Rooster, however, is angry and says it's indecent to make fun of Tiny. Rooster reaches out to remove the shell just as Tiny wakes, and Tiny mistakes the situation, calling Rooster a "pervert." Rooster later goes through his bag and discovers that a duck egg he had purchased a few days earlier, was missing. He assumes Darcy stole the egg but doesn't confront him, believing that Darcy would deny it and the others would side with Darcy. When Darcy is later being beaten to death, Rooster fails to step up and accept his share of the blame, still angry over the theft. However, Rooster later discovers that the egg is really at the bottom of his bag.

The details of the letter from Ella are not revealed until later in the book. She tells him of the explosion at the pub owned by Keith and Amy. She also lies to him, saying that Amy's body was found. It's not clear how Ella knows that Dorrigo is so deeply in love with Amy but it's apparent she is trying to put an end to it.

Rooster MacNeice is a minor character in the story but he does have some depth. He spends some time each day memorizing sections of Hitler's book, "Mein Kampf." The book is a study in Hitler's ideals and methodology, and most believe it is something of a



bible for teaching hatred and prejudice. It's important to realize that Hitler is a major player in the war that's raging around the POWs. Rooster rants about the fact that it's the only book he can find but he seems to secretly believe in Hitler's mandates. At one point, Rooster talks about the beauty around the POW camp. He points out the bamboo and the fact that it bends to form a natural "cathedral." Rooster admits to himself that he has no idea what all that means and was actually repeating what he'd heard from another prisoner. He seems to want to appear normal but he may actually be something of a sociopath without true empathy for his fellow man.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Rooster. What do you think of his character?

Discussion Question 2

Describe Tiny Middleton. What do you believe drives him to work so hard? What do the other prisoners say about his tendency to drive himself to work so hard?

Discussion Question 3

What is the infraction that causes Darky's beating during a routine inspection? What does the reaction of the soldiers to this infraction say about the soldiers?

Vocabulary

gusto, feign, eludes, striving, virtue, inflict, quagmire



Section 3, Chapters 14-27

Summary

In Chapter 14, Darcy continues to try to reach his work place but he keeps falling and gets farther behind. He passes out and wakes when Rooster MacNeice wakes him. Rooster, Kes, and several other prisoners are hiding, taking a day to rest from the work, and Darcy has gotten near their hiding place. Darcy argues that it's not fair to the others but the hidden prisoners say they have been doing this once a week for some time, and that they haven't yet been caught. Darcy continues on his way to the rail line and the others head deeper into the jungle.

In Chapter 15, Colonel Kota is still in the camp and goes out to see the work on the railroad. He encounters Darcy and plans to behead him, but doesn't. The Japanese soldiers all leave and Kes goes to Darcy, urging him to get up and get to work before the soldiers return. The Goanna returns and begins beating Darcy, then yells at him to go to the hospital. In Chapter 16, a prisoner named Shugs finds Darcy collapsed, near the camp. Shugs manages to help Darcy get a shower. Darcy is obviously seriously injured from the beating that morning.

In Chapter 17, Dorrigo goes to the tent set aside for patients with open sores. Jack Rainbow is there. Dorrigo has already amputated Jack's leg but gangrene has set in again. An orderly named Squizzy Taylor talks with Dorrigo about options. They decide that if Squizzy holds pressure on an artery, Dorrigo might be able to amputate the small piece of leg remaining and save Jack's life. In Chapter 18, Dorrigo performs the surgery and it seems it might be a success but then the stitches holding the femoral artery give way and Jack bleeds to death.

In Chapter 19, Kota inspects the workers at the railroad. He's furious about failing to behead Darcy. Kota orders the soldiers to count the prisoners at work. There are nine missing. By the time they count again, Kes, Rooster, and the others are back among the prisoners. The count then comes up one short and they soon discover that it's Darcy. There is a question of who will be punished for the missing prisoners. Rooster considers speaking up but doesn't. The Goanna is ordered to punish Darcy even though it was he who sent Darcy back to camp. In Chapter 20, the scene is back at the POW camp. The Goanna beats Darcy in front of the assembled prisoners. When the Goanna tires, other soldiers take over. Dorrigo, having lost Jack Rainbow during surgery, arrives and tries to intervene.

In Chapter 21, Nakamura is bored with the beating but knows it's a way for the soldiers to reassert their authority. Dorrigo tries to argue for the beating to end. Finally, he says that the Goanna had ignored Dorrigo, a ranking officer. He said the Goanna had "demeaned his rank an honor." Nakamura goes to the Goanna, brutally hits him with an ax handle for offending Dorrigo, and orders him to continue the beating. In Chapter 22, the beating continues. Nakamura leaves the compound and forgets all about it. An hour



later, he wanders back outside to discover that the beating is still going on. In Chapter 23, Darcy passes out, very near death. In Chapter 24, Darcy is taken to the hospital when the beating finally ends. His body is found in the ditch that serves as the camp's sanitation system the following morning.

In Chapter 25, Rooster discovers the missing duck egg in his bag. Rooster is horrified that he was angry at Darcy over a theft that never occurred. He is ashamed and puts the egg back in his bag. He can't focus at all on his daily memorization.

In Chapter 26, Jimmy Bigelow knows that folding the blanket incorrectly led to Darcy's beating and death. Once he's back home, Jimmy urges his children to fold their clothes in a specific way, mimicking the requirements in the POW camp. In his mind, that will keep his children safe from a beating like the one Darcy endured. However, when they don't follow the directive, Jimmy can never bring himself to spank them.

In Chapter 27, the Line is abandoned at the end of the war when "the dream of a global Japanese Empire" is "lost to radioactive dust." The bones of prisoners who worked and died along the route remain. A few sections of the route would later be cleared as memorial sites.

Analysis

The scene in which Kota was about to behead Darcy is a look into the more human side of the Japanese soldiers. Kota has beheaded men prior to this moment and brags about his ability. He says he always looks at a man's neck before any other feature, and always imagines the optimum spot for beheading that person. He seems to want to behead Darcy just because he has a new audience. It's not entirely clear what happens, but it seems that Kota has a momentary prick of conscience. He detects "an overwhelming odor of rotting fish" and can hear the blood rushing through his veins and the veins of those standing around him. Somehow, in that moment, Kota forgets the words to a haiku that he always recites just before beheading someone. Without that haiku, he becomes unable to go through with it.

Rooster considers speaking up when the Japanese discover there are prisoners missing from their work on the railroad. When Darcy is identified as the ranking officer among the work detail that day, everyone knows he'll be the one punished. Rooster has been angry at Darcy ever since he discovered that Darcy had eaten a duck egg that Rooster believes was stolen from his bag. But after Darcy's death, Rooster finds his egg.

There are hundreds of prisoners and a much smaller number of guards, which prompts the reader to question why the prisoners don't rise up and take over. That never seems to be an option among the prisoners. When Darcy is being beaten to death, the prisoners are forced to stand and watch. They do so but none of them moves to help him, obviously fearing the same punishment themselves. Most of them find something else to think about in order to avoid the horror of what's happening. Dorrigo himself feels



the only way he can stop Darcy's beating is to argue with Nakamura about it. He tries that and eventually Nakamura says he has some "extra quinine" that Dorrigo can have. Dorrigo understands in that moment that Nakamura can't really stop the beating either. A combination of expectations and cultural dictates are in play and Dorrigo accepts that the beating will continue indefinitely. He realizes that Darcy has a role to play in the war and that by giving in to the beating, Dorrigo will have the quinine to help some of the other men survive malaria.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the significance of the duck egg.

Discussion Question 2

Describe the beating that leads to Darcy's death. What are the attitudes of the various characters watching the beating?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you believe Dorrigo and the other prisoners stand by while Darcy is beaten to death?

Vocabulary

trod, perennially, demeaning, enraged, zeal, immense, equivalent, ascetic, pragmatic, bartered, imperial, colossal



Section 4, Chapters 1-7

Summary

In Chapter 1, Tenji Nakamura is repatriated and living among the ruins of Tokyo. One day he sees a list of soldiers being sought as war criminals. Nakamura's name is on the list. He considers suicide but hears shouts from a nearby hole in the rubble. When he goes inside, he sees a young prostitute, known as a pan-pan girl. A young Japanese man is also in the room and the body of a dead American soldier. Nakamura sees some food on a table in the room. In Chapter 2, Nakamura enters the room. The Japanese boy attacks but Nakamura kills him and then wolfs down two dumplings. The girl has taken some money from the soldier's body and Nakamura demands it. Nakamura works on the scene to erase any trace of his presence and knows he'll be safe as long as the girl doesn't talk. With the money, Nakamura buys false identity papers and goes to Kobe. He monitors the trails against captured war criminals.

In Chapter 3, the Korean guard known only as the Goanna is really named Choi Sang-min. He is in prison awaiting his execution. During his trial, he was found guilty of murder and ill-treatment of prisoners. He wants to argue that his rank meant he only followed orders. Colonel Kota is among the witnesses against the Goanna. Kota serves as witness in several other trials as well. The trial is in English and he understands little of it. He wants to say that the prisoners were lazy and only worked hard if they were afraid of being beaten, but he's given no opportunity to talk.

In Chapter 4, many of the prisoners who return home die off quickly. Lizard Brancussi survives but is devastated when a man answers the phone of his girlfriend, Maisie. Lizard drowns himself in his anguish. Jimmy Bigelow struggles with his marriage, admitting that he's changed but is trying to hold it together. In Chapter 5, Jimmy Bigelow has given up on the idea of being a musician. The music changed while he was a prisoner. He no longer feels that he fits in with his old life.

Then one night, a group of former POWs, including Jimmy and a man named Sheephead Morton, go to the fish shop Darcy had talked about. They break the front window, catch the fish in the tank, and release them in the bay. In Chapter 6, the story of the break-in is repeated but Jimmy is ashamed of his actions. Some of the men go to the shop and offer to pay for the damages. They explain about Darcy's story and the Greek who owns the shop invites them for a meal. They sit around for hours, talking and drinking wine. For awhile, Jimmy felt comfortable.

In Chapter 7, Dorrigo arrives home from the war in the fall of 1948. He accepted several assignments, delaying his return as long as possible. Dorrigo has almost forgotten that he proposed to her seven years earlier in an effort to get permission to kiss her breasts. She has waited for his return. Though he hardly recognizes her, he allows himself to be led into the parties and events at Ella's side.



Analysis

The reader sees into the mind of the Goanna during his trial and the weeks leading up to his execution. He doesn't see that he's done anything wrong. He recounts his own beatings as a child laborer, indicating that he doesn't expect any kindness and doesn't expect to show any kindness. He remembers being slapped brutally as a soldier. At one point, he is paired with another soldier and they are to slap each other. They try to take it easy on each other but an officer sees they are holding back and they are beaten for that as well. He freely admits to himself that he felt powerful while beating the POWs. He chose the military over a life of servitude and the payment for his military service haunts his final days. Some of the war criminals have final statements, most standing by their decisions and swearing allegiance to Japan. The Goanna's final thought is that he is still owed money.

The Goanna is one of the first to voice the idea that the Japanese Emperor expected a great deal from the soldiers but won't be held accountable for the soldiers' actions. That idea will later be echoed by Nakamura as he begins to look past the propaganda and search for the truth.

As Dorrigo tries to settle into his life, he struggles with putting the past behind him. At one point, he is at a barbecue with Ella and recalls the smell of rotting flesh at the hospital tent in the POW camp. He remembers that Jimmy Bigelow had sometimes been forced to run outside to throw up because of the smell. Dorrigo doesn't mention any of this to the people at the party and apparently doesn't talk to Ella about it either. It's simply a case of a scene prompting a horrific memory and it seems that Dorrigo and the other prisoners will have to deal with that for the rest of their lives.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the Goanna and his thoughts during his final days of life.

Discussion Question 2

How does Nakamura begin to rebuild his life after the war?

Discussion Question 3

Give examples of at least one theme seen in this section.

Vocabulary

fragmented, contradictory, adulation, tarmac, fidelity, vindicated, ferociously, stench, taut, mesmerizing



Section 4, Chapters 8-13

Summary

In Chapter 8, the Goanna is held in Chagi's P Hall where all the condemned prisoners live together. The guards routinely notify the men who will be the next to be hanged. Each time the notification occurs, all the men not notified are relieved at having a little more time to live. One day, the guards measure and weigh the Goanna and he knows it's so that the hangman will ensure that he dies quickly. He knows that some of the condemned men had shouted out for their country as they died but he believes his country has done nothing for him. As the hours tick down toward his death, he realizes that he wants desperately to have an idea that is wholly his own. He wishes he could feel fulfilled but can't. Guards take him to the gallows and ask if he wants to say anything. His final thought is that he wants to ask about the money he's owed for his military service.

In Chapter 9, Nakamura goes on with his life. He meets a nurse named Ikuko Kawabata. Her parents and brother died as a result of the war. She helps Nakamura get a job in the hospital where she works. He spends most of his time with Ikuko or alone but eventually befriends a doctor named Kameyo Sato. Sato reveals that some of the atrocities being alleged against the war criminals are true. He says he witnessed a doctor dissect a live prisoner in the name of science. Sato was responsible for taking the soldier to the dissection room and the man trusted Sato, obeying his commands and even getting onto the dissection table. Sato says the prisoner's heart was still beating when the doctor removed it from his body. Sato then says that the doctor killed himself and some others were executed. Sato points out the name of the founder of the Japan Blood Bank and says that man was also guilty of war crimes, but with the passing time most people just want to put the entire war behind them.

In Chapter 10, Nakamura and Sato grow apart after the heartfelt talk. The last of the war criminals are released and Nakamura gives up his false identity. In 1959, Nakamura applies for a job at the Japan Blood Bank. He is waiting for his interview when he feels a finger trace a path across his neck. He then hears Kota's voice recite the first part of a famous haiku. Nakamura finishes it. The interview is a formality and Kota offers Nakamura a job.

In Chapter 11, a commander named John Menadue is supposed to be giving the medals to those who earned them in prison. John is actually not a good leader and recognizes that Dorrigo has a quality John simply doesn't possess. He tells Dorrigo that he went to see the widow of one of the prisoners, Les Whittle. Les survived through the end of the war. He was still in a prison camp when the Allied Forces began dropping supplies for the prisoners. A huge barrel of chocolate bars fell on Les, killing him. John says he told Les Whittle's widow "the right things." But then Mrs. Whittle says she didn't really know Les at all and that she would have liked the opportunity to get to know him.



John says he couldn't stand the thought of going to any of the other widows on his list. Dorrigo says he'll take Jack Rainbow's medals to Jack's widow.

Dorrigo begins the trip by plane and then catches a ride with a delivery driver. He finds Jack's widow working in the dairy shed. She takes Dorrigo inside and he catches a glimpse of the bedroom. He hopes that she and Jack had some opportunities for happiness in that bed. In Chapter 12, Jack's widow says she and Jack have five children. The fifth was born after Jack left for the war. She unexpectedly asks Dorrigo if he believes in love. She says she doesn't believe love is a gift, but is an achievement. She believes she and Jack would have made their marriage work. She then says she doesn't really believe in love at all, because the word is "too small" to describe the emotion. Dorrigo says that he was with Jack in his final moments of life.

In Chapter 13, Dorrigo and Jack's widow go to bed together. He gets dressed when the delivery truck honks for him, headed back to the nearby town. When Dorrigo is gone, she throws the medals in the fire. Years later, she marries again and is happy, but they don't fit together like she had with Jack. Her second husband dies in a tractor accident. Dorrigo and the truck driver talk a bit on the way back down the mountain. He says he believes some people never know love at all.

Analysis

Nakamura believes that his actions as a soldier were all justified. When he hears about the more serious atrocities – such as the live dissections – he dismisses them as being lies propagated by the enemies of Japan. Sato reveals that he witnessed some of those atrocities and that he was proud to be part of the scientific experiments at first.

Nakamura argues that the Japanese soldiers are also "victims of war." He seems determined to believe that and, to some degree, it's true. But ultimately the men must all take some level of responsibility for their actions. Sato conveys this by telling Nakamura another detail of the live dissection he'd witnessed. He asked if Nakamura had ever felt the slight tremors that followed an earthquake. He described it as a "shudder."

Nakamura says he knows what Sato describes. Sato says that's the sound the soldier's heart made when it was placed on the scale.

A journalist tries to interview Kota when he is very old but can't gain access. His daughter says her father just wants to be left alone but the journalist is persistent. He continues to try to gain access but continues to hit roadblock. He eventually contacts a friend in the police force who enters Kota's house and finds that he has been dead for decades.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the conversation between Nakamura and Sato. What is Sato's attitude about war crimes?



Discussion Question 2

Describe the conversation between Dorrigo and Jack Rainbow's widow.

Discussion Question 3

What are some of the issues that Dorrigo continues to struggle with at this point?

Vocabulary

subterfuge, rectify, distinguished, intentions, formidable, rendered, intimacy, cusp, revelation



Section 5, Chapters 1-9

Summary

In Chapter 1, Nakamura learns he has throat cancer. A tumor is removed but soon comes back. Ikuko gets up two hours early each day to help him prepare for his day before she goes to work. Her kindness makes him work at being a better person. He even helps a charity that delivers meals to the elderly.

In Chapter 2, Nakamura receives a letter from a corporal in his platoon, Aki Tomokawa. Nakamura has avoided all his “old comrades” except Kota, a decision he made after discovering he was a wanted war criminal. But now he feels that he was selfish to distance himself from them all. Despite how ill he is, Nakamura makes the trip to Sapporo to visit Tomokawa. He arrives safely but the trip becomes a nightmare as Nakamura becomes sicker. He is in and out of consciousness during the visit but realizes that he is dying.

In Chapter 3, Dorrigo approaches middle age. He has become famous for his work in the POW camps. He does surgery that is sometimes reckless. He is bored by everything and everyone. In Chapter 4, Ella hates that she is in a loveless marriage. She has aged well and is an attractive woman. Dorrigo sees her upturned nose as a fault but most other people don't notice it at all. She is trusting but knows that Dorrigo has affairs.

In Chapter 5, Nakamura is still visiting with the Tomokawas. Tomokawa says he says the POWs “had it easy” and should have been proud of their work on the railroad. He then says it's unfair that soldiers were punished as war criminals for the atrocities visited on some prisoners while the crimes against the Chinese were ignored. Nakamura survives the trip home. The next spring, his family notifies the Tomokawas that Nakamura had died. His wife doesn't write about the pain and ravings of his final days but does include a haiku written by Nakamura as his death poem. It reads, “Winter ice, melts into clean water, clear is my heart.”

In Chapter 6, Ella announces to friends that Dorrigo is really a lonely man. None of them believe her. Ella knows that Dorrigo is always with people but that an emptiness surrounds him. They have three children, Jessica, Mary, and Stewart. He loves them but doesn't pay any attention to them. He doesn't consider his marriage a failure and doesn't see his infidelity as cheating. Ella knows he has sex with many other women but she never confronts him about it. She supports Dorrigo in everything and he sees that as weak, but she is becoming stronger as she ages. When he notes a new level of “candor” in Ella, he realizes he has “made her hard,” and wishes he could change that.

In Chapter 7, Dorrigo realizes that he often doesn't think of Amy for days at a time. He and Ella reach a new level of understanding because of the shared experiences of raising a family and years of a shared life. His career advances.



In Chapter 8, Dorrigo gets reacquainted with his brother, Tom. In 1967, Ella plans for the family to go for a week's visit with her sister. Dorrigo learns that Tom has had a heart attack. He opts to visit Tom before joining Ella and the children at her sister's home in Fern Tree. He spends some time with Tom and they seem to enjoy the visit. They talk about memories from Dorrigo's childhood and Tom brings up the wife of Jackie Maguire. Dorrigo says he remembers seeing Tom with Jackie's wife, Ruth, just before she disappeared. Tom initially tries to deny there was anything romantic about the encounter. Just as Dorrigo is about to leave, Tom says he fathered a child by Ruth. He says she hid the pregnancy and then gave the baby up for adoption. Tom goes on to say a family named Gardiner took the child and raised him. He says he later learned the young man died in a POW camp and Dorrigo realizes the boy was Darky Gardiner.

In Chapter 9, Dorrigo is in Sydney. He is walking across a bridge when he suddenly sees Amy coming toward him with two little girls in tow. He knows without a doubt that the woman is Amy. He can't decide whether to talk to her or pass on by and ends up walking past without greeting her. When he reaches the end of the bridge, he knows that Amy continued living her life all those years while he had not.

Analysis

Nakamura slows down to take stock of his life after being diagnosed with throat cancer. The fact that his wife works so hard to take care of him makes him look more deeply into his own life. He begins to focus on being a kind man. He volunteers some of his time to a charity. This is a relatively major level of change for Nakamura but some would argue that it doesn't make up for the past crimes of his life. However, Nakamura considers himself a "good man." He still struggles with the questions through the rest of his life, wondering if the good he's done outweighs the bad. He also struggles with his conception of the government and his role in the war. It's a struggle that will never be completely resolved for Nakamura though he "resolves" that he will "conceive of his life's work as that of a good man." It's up to the reader to decide if the changes are deliberate, if they are enough to make up for his past crimes, or if the answers to these questions even matter.

Dorrigo remains confused about his attitudes toward Ella, their marriage, and his family. He says he doesn't look on his infidelity as cheating. He never considers divorcing Ella and she apparently never considers divorce either. Dorrigo says at one point that he wishes Ella would come to hate him. He also talks about specific aspects of Ella that he hates, such as her upturned nose. It's not a fault that others see but it bothers Dorrigo. He should have come to realize that he has to work at his marriage if he wants to be truly happy, but he never has. He also never seems to believe that he could be happy with someone else either. He's simply an unhappy person and doesn't take any steps to make his life better.

Dorrigo sees Amy and there's no doubt in his mind that it really is her. She has two little girls with her and he believes they must be her daughters. They are actually her nieces. Amy's thoughts are described in the next chapter. Chapter 9 ends with Dorrigo saying



that Amy had continued with her life while Dorrigo “had died.” He isn't describing a literal death but is referring to the fact that he has put off living his life, mourning her for years when she wasn't dead. Dorrigo continues to see the loss of Amy as the major factor in his life but it seems he might have become unhappy with her if they had married and spent years together.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the end of Nakamura's life. What are the big issues with which he struggles?

Discussion Question 2

Describe Dorrigo's conversation with Tom after Tom's heart attack. What is the important piece of information Dorrigo learns from that conversation?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the moment Dorrigo sees Amy on the bridge in Sydney? Why do you believe he didn't approach her?

Vocabulary

saliva, reedy, stoicism, tranquility, reciprocal, accumulating, concurrent, consecutive, apex, quixotic, requital, oppressive, lucidity, vile, candor



Section 5, Chapters 10-18

Summary

In Chapter 10, Amy continues to walk across the bridge. She had gone to the beach the night of the explosion, which is why she wasn't killed in at the pub as Ella had told him. Amy had spent years believing Dorrigo died in the POW camp. She came to realize the misinformation after Dorrigo begins to become famous on the speaking circuits. At that point, she imagines that he had changed his mind about her and had chosen not to contact her. She had imagined writing Dorrigo a letter but the mere idea exhausted her. She had remarried but there was no love involved and it didn't last. Now, she lives with her sister. She has cancer and knows she doesn't have a great deal of time left. She is buried with the pearl necklace, which is precious to her.

In Chapter 11, Dorrigo goes to Melbourne where he has a speaking engagement. He is then to meet up with Ella and the children. There are bush fires nearby and Dorrigo learns that the town of Fern Tree is in the line of fire. That's where Ella is staying with her sister. Dorrigo tries to reach her. When he can't, he borrows a car and heads toward Fern Tree. He is stopped by a police officer who says it's too dangerous for Dorrigo to enter the area. Dorrigo ignores the advice and drives through the roadblock. The fire is raging and at one point he thinks he hears shouts. He stops and gets out of the car.

In Chapter 12, Ella and the children are alone at her sister's house when the fire hits the neighborhood. She finally realizes it's not safe for them to remain at the house and they set out across the neighborhood. The fire is near and they are injured by falling cinders. When it's clear they are going to be overtaken, Ella urges the children into a "fibro shed." They hear a car and Ella rushes outside, calling out. Dorrigo and Ella see each other. They rush to each other and hug tightly. In Chapter 13, Dorrigo, Ella and the children return to the car. The situation grows even more serious before Dorrigo finally gets the family out of danger.

In Chapter 14, Jimmy Bigelow is growing older. His daughter, Jodie, once asks him to tell her about the war. He'd retrieved his bugle and played "Last Post." Jodie says the song is lonely but Jimmy says it feels "the opposite" of lonely. Over time, Jimmy's memories begin to fade. He eventually gets to the point that he can barely remember his time as a POW at all. Like many, he finds a peaceful place and spends his time enjoying the simplest things in life. After his death at an old-folks' home, Jodie sells the bugle at a yard sale.

In Chapter 15, Dorrigo's car collides with a stolen car driven by inebriated teens. The reason he was in that part of town at three in the morning is never questioned. He lingers for three days before giving in to death.

Chapter 16 reverts back to the time in the POW camp. Nakamura says Dorrigo has to choose one hundred men to make the march to another camp. Dorrigo knows none of



the men is healthy enough to survive the march. He argues but it does no good and he knows that he has to choose or Nakamura will arbitrarily select the men or will deliberately choose the sickest who are of the least use to Nakamura. While Dorrigo is considering which men will be sent on the march, a group of Japanese soldiers march by. They are obviously malnourished and ill-treated, an indication that the Japanese are not taking care of their own any better than they are caring for the POWs. One of the soldiers is staring at Dorrigo. A Japanese officer sees it and strikes the soldier, indicating the soldiers are also beaten regularly.

After the Japanese soldiers have passed, Dorrigo goes back to his selection process. He knows many of the men he selects will die on the way or will be so weak upon arrival that they succumb soon after. He looks for men with good shoes and relatively good health. He chooses Jimmy Bigelow from the lineup. Dorrigo expects the men to curse at him but each shakes his hand, wishes him well, and thanks him for his care up to this point. When they are gone, he cries.

In Chapter 17, Dorrigo is in the hospital and the nurses say it's not clear whether he can hear what's going on around him. He remembers many scenes from his life and thinks about the circle drawn as the death haiku and thinks about the price due to the ferryman before crossing the River Styx into Hell. He utters a final sentence that is meant to be, "Charge the windmill," but it comes out, "Charge the windowsill." He then dies.

Chapter 18 reverts to the POW camp on the day the mail arrives. Dorrigo receives the first letter in months and he wants to save it but can't bring himself to wait. He opens the letter from Ella to find a newspaper clipping of the story of the explosion that killed Keith Mulvaney. Ella's letter includes additional information about the explosion. She says police had identified Amy's body but were keeping that from the press because they felt the morale of the country was already low. Dorrigo doesn't know that Ella is lying and that this is the only lie she will ever tell him.

Analysis

Dorrigo and Ella are not publicly affectionate with each other and the children probably never see their parents hug or kiss. When Dorrigo and Ella rush to each other in the midst of the fire, they hold each other tightly. The children are amazed. It seems that Dorrigo isn't ready to lose his wife, even though he says he doesn't love her.

Dorrigo has a saying that he uses in dangerous situations. It's "Charge the windmill" and he indicates that it means a person should simply push forward, regardless of the dangerous or the obstacles. He uses that when he is rescuing Ella from the fire.

Jimmy Bigelow is among those who deals with the effects of the war long after the war. When his daughter asks about his time as a POW, he says the only job of a prisoner was to suffer. He called that "lucky." When Jodie asks him to talk about it, Jimmy plays the tune he played so often at the funerals of his fallow brothers in arms. To Jimmy, that song sums up his time as a prisoner.



Discussion Question 1

Describe the later years of Jimmy's life.

Discussion Question 2

Why does Amy decide not to contact Dorrigo? How might her life have been different if she had?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you believe Ella sends Dorrigo the letter about the explosion at the pub? Why does she tell him that Amy has died?

Vocabulary

immaculate, denial, subsequently, buffoons, cajoled, hoodwinked, sloughing, carrion,



Characters

Dorrigo Evans

Dorrigo Evans is a young doctor who is beginning a career with the military as the story opens. As of this point in his life, he has mainly coasted through, doing what was expected without any real dreams of his own. He becomes engaged to a young lady of some standing, recognizing that her family will accept him as a matter of course because he is a doctor. His proposal is done in the heat of a moment of passion and he almost doesn't expect that she will still be waiting for him for the years it takes him to escape from the war. Dorrigo is waiting to be deployed when he learns that his uncle, Keith Mulvaney, lives nearby. He decides to visit on a whim and encounters an attractive young woman that he later learns is his uncle's younger wife, Amy. Dorrigo and Amy begin an illicit love affair and he is completely captivated. The fact that he continues the affair until he is sent out of the country is an important aspect of his character. It makes him seem selfish and uncaring but he spends the next several years living as selflessly as possible in an effort to save the lives of the men in a POW camp. While there, Dorrigo is determined to exceed the expectations of the men under his command. The fact that Dorrigo takes his job as commander so seriously is another important aspect of his character. Dorrigo believes that Amy dies and he loses hope that his life will ever again have true meaning. After his release, Dorrigo spends years in loveless affairs and pushing himself to the top of his field, all in an apparent effort to find something that will stir him into truly living. He hates that he is lackadaisical in his attitudes but cannot find anything that makes him feel alive.

Amy Mulvaney

Amy Mulvaney is the wife of Keith Mulvaney and the lover of Dorrigo Evans, who is Keith's nephew. Amy is a happy young woman, much younger than Keith, who seems to have spent a great many years of her life mourning a baby she aborted at Keith's insistence. She draws people to her and is surrounded by admirers the first time she meets Dorrigo. Amy is clearly conflicted about her marriage and hates that she has come to despise everything about Keith. The night Keith tells her that Dorrigo has died in a Prisoner of War camp, Amy leaves the pub to go to the beach where she and Dorrigo had sometimes gone. This indicates her grief over Dorrigo is far greater than any lingering affection she has for Keith. Amy learns that Dorrigo wasn't killed only years after his return. She doesn't contact him, which means she wasn't entirely certain of their relationship or that he would want to return to her. When he doesn't contact her, she doesn't consider any possibility other than the fact that he doesn't want to find her, another indication of her insecurity. This insecurity is what prompts her to remain quiet after she learns that Dorrigo is alive. She discovers that after he has become a popular figure in the media but she chooses then not to contact him, deciding that it should have been his move. The fact that Amy finds peace at the end of her life is a contrast to the excitement and vitality of her earlier life. She had been the center of attention as a



young woman with several men vying for her attention all the time and it seems obvious that she sought romantic encounters even after she was married to Keith. However, she is content to settle down with friends and family as her life comes to a close, basking in their friendship and love.

Ella Lansbury Evans

Ella is the wife of Dorrigo, having waited for seven years for his return from the Prisoner of War camp and from additional military duties. She is proper, even as a young woman. She and Dorrigo are apparently involved in a make-out session when Dorrigo pleads with her to see her breasts. Ella's refusal seems to prompt Dorrigo's proposal, which he doesn't really mean but which she takes seriously. Ella's one and only lie to Dorrigo is when she tells him that Amy has died. It's not clear how she comes to realize that Dorrigo and Amy are having an affair, but that lie effectively ends it. Ella is presented as a woman with few ideas of her own but she's much stronger than Dorrigo realizes. She supports him wholeheartedly, even when she knows that he is involved in extra-marital affairs. She repeats his thoughts and ideals and he takes that to mean that she doesn't have the sense to think for herself. In fact, it's her love for Dorrigo that molds her into the woman she believes he wants and the reader should realize that it takes a great deal of self-discipline for Ella to stand by Dorrigo's side throughout the loveless marriage.

Keith Mulvaney

Keith is Dorrigo's uncle who marries the much younger Amy. There are several important aspects of Keith's character, including his sense of failure in his marriage. Keith and Amy become pregnant out of wedlock which would have been a serious offense in this time period. Rather than a rushed marriage, Keith urges Amy to have an abortion. She does so but he marries her anyway. His motivations are not clear but it seems obvious that he feels guilty. He later admits that he made a mistake by forcing the abortion. He says he should have allowed Amy to have a child. He knows about the affair between Amy and Dorrigo long before he confronts Amy, which is another look into his character. Keith dies in an explosion at his pub and leaves Amy a wealthy young widow.

Darky Gardiner

The illegitimate biological child of Tom Evans and Ruth Maguire. Darky is among the POWs working on the railroad. He is beaten by a guard for having the fold of his blanket turned incorrectly and apparently suffers a concussion. When he is unable to stand and work later that day, he is sent back to the hospital but is then beaten for not working. The beating goes on for more than an hour and he eventually dies. Dorrigo initially tries to intervene, stopping the beating before Darky is killed, but an officer offers Dorrigo



medicine and Dorrigo accepts, realizing that he has traded Darky's life for the chance to save the lives of other men.

Jimmy Bigelow

Jimmy is the bugler who plays “Last Post” during many funerals at the POW camp. Jimmy has a dream of becoming a musician before the war but by the time he is released, the music has changed and he knows his opportunity has passed. He, like all the prisoners, is greatly affected by the war and his time as a prisoner. He fusses at his children for folding their clothing incorrectly, somehow believing that their adherence to this rule will keep them safe. But even when they fail at this task, he can't bring himself to actually strike them. He lives into his nineties and discovers that his memories of being a POW changes as he ages. Eventually, he is unable to recall any details, even of deprivation, starvation, or death.

Rooster MacNeice

Rooster is a prisoner who memorizes pages of “Mein Kampf” as a means of keeping his mind sharp during his captivity. Rooster claims that he hates Hitler's ideals, but seems to secretly embrace the hatred Hitler preaches. He believes Darky Gardiner stole a duck egg from him and is later ashamed to discover that the egg is actually still in his bag. Rooster and several other men come up with a plan to skip work one day each week, taking a day of much-needed rest. It's their absence that leads to Darky's beating.

Jack Rainbow

Jack is a prisoner who has a leg amputated. On the day of Darky's death, Jack has developed gangrene again in the stump of the leg that remains. The stump is very short and Dorrigo has trouble cutting away enough to get the gangrene without getting into Jack's hip. Dorrigo manages to complete the surgery but the artery is rotted and won't hold the stitches. Jack bleeds out and dies on the operating table.

Rabbit Hendricks

Rabbit is the prisoner who has a great artistic talent. He is hired by the Japanese to draw postcards that they will send back to loved ones. Rabbit also draws pictures of everyday life in the POW camp. Rabbit's sketch pad is among his possessions to be burned but it is thrown out of the fire when another prisoner's body literally explodes from the heat. Dorrigo finds the sketch pad and almost throws it back up onto the fire, but keeps it on a whim and the pictures are later published.



Tenji Nakamura

The Japanese soldier who is in command of the POW camp where Dorrigo is interred. Nakamura is a proud man who is cruel to the prisoners but sees his cruelty as a necessity. After the war, he returns to civilian life and spends years scrounging for survival. He eventually marries and has a family. For years, he defends his actions as a soldier, believing the propaganda his government issues. As he matures and learns that not all his information was correct, he comes to question his life as a soldier. He becomes a kind man but can never come to terms with his life, his actions, and the world's view of the Japanese soldiers.



Symbols and Symbolism

Bugle

The instrument that Jimmy plays during the many funerals at the POW camp. Jimmy has a great deal of trouble playing as his health deteriorates, but he continues to work at it and notes that there is mystery in the song, "Last Post." The bugle is among Jimmy's few remaining possessions when he dies in an old-folks home, and his daughter puts it in a yard sale.

The King of Cornwall

The pub owned by Keith Mulvaney, this is where Amy and Dorrigo spend a great deal of their time during the early days of their affair. The pub is destroyed in an explosion and Keith is killed. Dorrigo believes Amy is also killed in the explosion but she was actually not at the pub at the time of the explosion.

Big Fella

This is the nickname given to Dorrigo in the Prisoner of War camp. The nickname is partly as an acknowledgment of Dorrigo's position as ranking officer of the prisoners but is also an indication of the attitude of the men toward him. Dorrigo believes he should be a better man and the nickname is an important look into his character. His men have more respect for him than he has for himself.

The Death Railway

The railroad built mainly by Prisoners of War during their captivity. Thousands of prisoners died along the route, most simply dropping dead while trying to work. It is not possible to know the number of men who died along the railroad.

Blanket

The Japanese require that the prisoners fold their blankets in a specific way and each of the prisoners comply with this each morning. Ducky accidentally leaves his fold pointed incorrectly one morning and that leads to a beating. Ducky is obviously seriously injured and he is beaten to death that evening. The incorrectly Folded Blanket haunts Jimmy Bigelow the rest of his life. As a father, he urges his children to fold their clothes in a specific way, believing that this will somehow save them from harm.



Pearl Necklace

Dorrigo gives Amy the necklace while they are involved in their affair prior to his capture. Amy is thrilled with the gift though they both know she will not be able to wear it in public because she is married to Keith. When Amy and Dorrigo happen to see each other years later, she is wearing the necklace.

Duck Egg

The prisoners are starving and duck eggs are sometimes used by the Japanese as payment to the prisoners. For example, Jack Rainbow is “paid” two duck eggs for painting post cards for the Japanese officers. He later trades one to Darcy for a paintbrush Darcy steals from the Japanese. Rooster believes Darcy stole an egg from him and this prompts Rooster to remain quiet when Darcy is blamed for the shortage of workers on the line. When Rooster finds the egg, he is ashamed of his lack of action.

Nikitari's

Darcy Gardiner talks about the fish in a tank at Nikitari's, a fish shop back in his home town. He says the fish were captive just as he and the other prisoners are captive to the Japanese. Once they return home, Dorrigo and several others break into Nikitari's and release the fish in the tank. Their action is an effort to honor Darcy's memory.

Sketch Book

A book of sketches created by Rabbit Hendricks. The drawings depict the daily lives of the prisoners and Rabbit would undoubtedly have been beaten if the Japanese had discovered it. The book is thrown on the funeral pyre when Rabbit is cremated but is thrown clear when one of the bodies explodes. Dorrigo finds the book and plans to throw it back on the fire, but hides it instead. It is released and published at the end of the war.

The Book of Souls

A list created by the Japanese of the soldiers who carried out atrocities against Prisoners of War and who are forgiven for these acts by the Japanese. However, the rest of the world doesn't feel the same and many of the soldiers are tried as war criminals. Most are executed.

Settings

Adelaide

This is where the King of Cornwall is located. The city is not described in much detail but there are mentions of several specific settings there. Dorrigo is stationed nearby and there are beaches close to the pub Keith owns. There is a bookstore where Dorrigo meets Amy for the first time. Amy and Dorrigo go to a nightclub together the first night Keith leaves them alone.

Siam

Siam is the location of the Prisoner of War camp where Dorrigo and hundreds of others are held for years during the war. The weather is often rainy and the camp is filled with serious health problems caused by overcrowding, poor sanitation, and the moisture. The prisoners live in crude bamboo dwellings they built themselves. There is a great deal of mud and it's impossible to keep the prisoners and their few belongings clean. There are several additional shelters that serve as hospital barracks. Dorrigo tries to keep the prisoners suffering from communicable diseases separate from the rest of the camp, meaning there is a tent for those with cholera and another for those with open wounds. The operating room is very primitive and the equipment is made up of things the prisoners have scavenged or stolen.

Fern Tree

This is the small town where Ella's sister lives and where she and her three children are visiting when a wildfire burns much of the neighborhood. Dorrigo arrives and rescues them and the children are amazed at the display of affection between their parents.

The Death Railroad

A long section of railway that the Japanese believe will be the key to winning the war. The railroad goes through rough terrain and is being built with no machinery. Prisoners of War are the only labor and the tools are inadequate and primitive. The project is impossible and is brought to a halt by the fall of the Japanese Empire. It's noted that the railroad passes by the bones of the prisoners who died trying to complete the project.

Post-War Japan

The country is devastated when the Allied Forces drop bombs. Nakamura lives for awhile in a bombed out building in Tokyo that is actually little more than a cave. Other

cities have less structural damage but the scars of the war remain evident in the people, services, and attitudes.



Themes and Motifs

The Importance of Culture

Dorrigo and several of the other main characters are from Australia while the soldiers overseeing the Prisoner of War camp are a mixture of Japanese and Korean. There are major cultural differences and these are seen in detail as the perspective moves to those soldiers. Nakamura is a Japanese commander in charge of the POW camp where Dorrigo is interred. The railroad is an incredibly huge project and one that can't possibly be completed under the circumstances. However, Nakamura feels it is his duty to finish the line using the resources available to him. Basically, the prisoners are the only source of labor available and he believes it is his duty to finish the project. This duty he feels is ingrained in Nakamura as a basic part of his culture. He feels it necessary to do whatever he is commanded and his very life depends on it. This makes Nakamura seem ruthless and cruel when he actually doesn't see it that way until much later in his life. As Nakamura sees it, he will have failed his emperor and his country if he fails to complete the project as ordered. Failure, in the Japanese culture, means Nakamura will be obliged to commit suicide. Nakamura doesn't really see the punishments and conditions of the prisoners as cruel. While he is not subjected to routine beatings as commander of the camp, the Japanese force their soldiers to slap each other as hard as possible as part of their training. The Japanese forces seen near the POW camp look as starved and sick as the prisoners, further proof that Nakamura doesn't really see the treatment of the prisoners as unusually cruel. A major twist in this theme is seen when Nakamura takes up his civilian life. He comes to realize that a great deal of the information he accepted as truth from the Japanese Emperor was false and this forces him to question his entire life and all the choices he has made along the way. Nakamura exhibits a general shift in the Japanese culture, prompted at least partly by outside influences during and immediately following the war. A lesser example of this theme is seen in the commander, Rexroth, who talks about the British spirit, assuring Dorrigo that will be enough to get the men through their time in the prison camp.

Adhering to Social Dictates

This theme is the driving force behind Amy's marriage to Keith, and is part of the reason their marriage was doomed. Amy becomes pregnant out of wedlock, which is a serious social blunder in this time. Though the sexual rules were relaxed somewhat as men went off to war, a stigma was attached to any mother who bore a child out of wedlock. The child would also be branded because of the mother's transgression. When Amy becomes pregnant, she wants to marry Keith but he initially refuses, another sign of the expectations of the era. He knows that Amy doesn't love him and he probably doesn't want to enter a loveless marriage just because of a child. However, the abortion devastates Amy and Keith marries her anyway. The entire situation is a consequence of what was socially acceptable in this time period. Amy says she and Keith were both ashamed. Another example of this theme is seen in the life Dorrigo leads after his time



in the military. He has become engaged to Ella and initially believes that her life will be one of comfort and stability. By the time he returns home, he doesn't really care about marrying her anymore but everyone expects that he will go through with the wedding. Ella has waited years for Dorrigo's return and he doesn't really see that he has a choice in the situation. He does, however, enter into a series of extra-marital affairs though these are completely taboo in this time period. Dorrigo, ironically, comes to care little for what society demands and sees little sense in the social norms.

Loyalty

The idea of Loyalty is that one person remains devoted to another, to an ideal, or to a country. Several of the characters deal with various aspects of this theme throughout the book. One of the earliest examples is seen in Amy's willingness to cheat on her husband. She doesn't love Keith any longer but can't bring herself to leave him, mainly because she doesn't believe she can make a living for herself. A very important aspect of this theme is seen in the Japanese commander, Nakamura. Nakamura believes his work as a soldier is important and that he is to be loyal to the Japanese Emperor, regardless of what that entails. He pushes himself to meet the demands of the Emperor, even when those demands are impossible. He is cruel but sees it as necessary. As his life comes to an end, Nakamura spends a great deal of time trying to come to terms with what he did in his efforts at Loyalty. An interesting example of this theme is seen in the actions of Dorrigo after his marriage to Ella. He does go through with the marriage to Ella but he doesn't truly love her and remains conflicted about his love for Amy. He sees his many affairs as a means of exhibiting his Loyalty to Amy, as if his failure to keep his marriage vows makes it less of an affront to the love he shared with Amy. He never lets any of the affairs become serious but the affairs also keep his marriage to Ella on an uneven keel, and he sees both as important factors in keeping his Loyalty to Amy.

Loss of Love

Dorrigo and Amy meet initially by chance at a bookstore but they later spend a great deal of time together because of their familial relationship. Their attraction is instant and they only fight it for a short time before giving in to it, though both are in another relationship. Amy is married to Dorrigo's uncle, Keith, and Dorrigo is engaged to Ella. Despite the complications, Dorrigo and Amy are soon very much in love and both are devastated when Dorrigo is shipped out on a military assignment. Dorrigo believes that Amy dies in an explosion and Amy believes that Dorrigo dies in a POW camp. When Dorrigo returns home, he has no reason to look for her and he goes forward with his engagement to Ella though he knows he doesn't love her. When Amy discovers that Dorrigo is alive, she doesn't reach out to him because she believes he might have changed his mind about her. This loss haunts Dorrigo and he spends the rest of his life seeking to make up for it. He knows that he makes dangerous decisions, mostly because he is seeking to find meaning without Amy. The devastating loss is more than he can withstand and it shapes the rest of his life. A slightly different aspect of this theme is seen in other characters, though less so than with Dorrigo. Keith realizes that



he has lost Amy's affection and is deeply hurt by the betrayal. Ella knows that Dorrigo is not in love with her and she works for the rest of her life to attain his affection and loyalty even when she cannot make him return her love.

Accepting Consequences

There are many trials following the war and many of those who were directly responsible for atrocities during the war were executed for the war crimes. When Nakamura is released from military duty, he realizes that the Allied Forces are likely searching for him and he changes his name, moves, and focuses on survival. Years later, when it becomes obvious that the war criminals are no longer being sought, Nakamura resumes his own identity and makes a new life for himself. He marries and has a family, and in this new life he focuses on being a good and kind man. But Nakamura can never quite escape his conscience as he spends a lifetime remembering his time as a soldier. While he tells himself that he was following orders, he continues to feel some level of guilt. That guilt eats away at him as he grows older and weighs heavily on his conscience as he nears death. Dorrigo is another example of this theme and guilt also weighs on him for most of his life. When Darcy Gardiner is being beaten to death, Dorrigo is involved in a complicated surgery. He doesn't manage to save the man's life and always feels that he should have been able to do more. By the time he arrives at the scene of the beating, it is too late to save Darcy's life. Nakamura offers to provide some quinine for the soldiers and Dorrigo accepts that he is basically trading Darcy's life for the hope of trying to save some other soldiers. He is never quite able to accept the consequences for that decision and the thought eats at him most of his life, especially after he discovers that Darcy is his biological nephew.

Another important aspect of this theme is that some don't see themselves as having done anything wrong. This is seen in the Korean known as the Goanna. He is tried and hanged as a war criminal but remembers that he only chose to be a soldier because the pay was much better than he could earn anywhere else.



Styles

Point of View

The story is written from the omniscient perspective of the narrator but is limited by the author's decision to reveal specific details about the characters. A major example of this is seen when Keith confronts Amy about her affair with Dorrigo and gives Amy the false information that Dorrigo has died in a POW camp. Amy leaves their rooms after the conversation and goes downstairs. A short time later, there's an explosion that kills Keith and the reader is led to believe that Amy might have caused the explosion, or that she was at least killed in it. It's not until much later that Amy's perspective of this is revealed. She was actually at a beach where she had sometimes gone with Dorrigo. The reader is left to believe that Amy dies in the pub until much later in the book. Another aspect of this limitation is seen with the letter Dorrigo receives from Ella while he is in the POW camp. The author reveals that there is a letter and that Dorrigo can't wait to read it, but the contents are not revealed until much later. Ella lies in that letter, saying that police had confirmed that Amy died in the explosion. It's not until this letter is revealed that the reader realizes what drives Dorrigo for much of his life. The limitations are used mainly for the author's efforts at creating surprises and twists in the story. The fact that the perspective is omniscient means the reader learns more about the depth of the various characters. For example, Dorrigo believes Ella is stupid without thoughts and ideas of her own. He bases this on the fact that she parrots his own statements, regardless of how ridiculous they really are. But Ella is actually a strong character, as the reader learns when the perspective shifts to her point of view. Overall, the perspectives are acceptable and appropriate to the story.

Language and Meaning

The tone is one of despair and helplessness to overcome life's situations. There are many examples of this tone, seen through the affair between Amy and Dorrigo, the scenes from the Prisoner of War camp, the hopelessness of the Japanese and Korean soldiers who are merely doing their duty, and Dorrigo's loveless marriage. This hopelessness is underwritten by a sense of longing though none of the characters ever really achieve what they are longing for. The story begins with a typical young man of the day, Dorrigo Evans, who is merely living his life as a military doctor and killing time while waiting for his first combat assignment. Dorrigo is upbeat and happy when he meets Amy for the first time and she seems to be as well. It's later revealed that Amy despises her much-older husband and hates her life but feels trapped to make changes. The sense of helplessness continues through the POW camp scenes, including through the eyes of several of the soldiers who oversee the camp. There are a few instances in the story in which the tone shifts slightly. When Ella is caught up in a wildfire with her three children, Dorrigo rushes through walls of flames to rescue his wife and children. He holds tightly to her once he finds her and it seems that in that moment there is a hope of a happy marriage. That hope apparently dies once they are out of danger.



While the hopelessness lasts throughout the book, there is one stark change in this tone, seen from Amy's perspective after she is diagnosed with cancer. She is already dying when she meets Dorrigo on a crowded street. She and Dorrigo are each aware of the other but they don't speak. Amy returns to the home of her sister, where she is to live out the remainder of her life. Ironically, she is not bitter during this time, but finds peace and comfort in the company of her family and friends.

Structure

The book is divided into five parts, each with a varying number of chapters. Part one has eighteen chapters. The first chapter opens with a scene in which Dorrigo sees his older brother, Tom, with a young married woman just before her disappearance. That scene is not explained until near the end of the book when Dorrigo learns Tom and the woman, Ruth, had been involved in an affair and that a child was born of that affair. The first section of the book skips around over the course of Dorrigo's life and the final chapter of this section is much later in his life.

Part two has twenty-seven chapters. The opening chapter of this section focuses on Dorrigo's time in Adelaide where he is awaiting deployment to his military assignment. There is a great deal of Dorrigo's life missing here, during which time he becomes a doctor. The final chapter of this section focuses on Amy and her final scene with Keith. The chapter ends with the explosion that kills Keith and the reader is left to believe that Amy is dead as well.

Part three has twenty-seven chapters and opens with a story about Darky Gardiner in the POW camp. The section focuses mostly on the time Dorrigo spends in the camp and ends with the dropping of the bomb that turns the Japanese Empire into "radioactive dust."

Part four has thirteen chapters. The opening chapter focuses on the Japanese officer in charge of the POW camp where Dorrigo was held. Nakamura is now out of the military and forced to try to figure out how to survive in this new world. The section focuses mainly on Nakamura and Dorrigo.

Part five has eighteen chapters and opens with Nakamura's discovery that he has throat cancer.

The book is not presented in chronological order and this may present a problem for some readers, especially early in the book before the characters are fully introduced. For example, the final chapters of the final section jump in time, covering the wreck that leads to Dorrigo's death, additional details of Dorrigo's time as a POW, back to Dorrigo's final moments of life, and finally back to the POW camp. An interesting aspect of the book's structure is the lack of quotation marks. This makes it sometimes difficult to figure out where quotes begin and end, and may be difficult for some readers to follow.



Quotes

He understood that he was admired by the nation, if despaired of by those who had to work him as an ageing surgeon, and mildly disdained and possibly envied by the many other doctors who had done similar things in other POW camps but who sensed, unhappily, that there was something in his character that was not in theirs which had elevated him far above them in the nation's affections.

-- Narrator (Section 1, Chapter 6 paragraph 13)

Importance: Dorrigo is very aware of himself as a public figure. He sometimes hates the level of attention, or at least says he does. His character is such that he feels he has to live up to the expectations of his men during his time as a prisoner, meaning he sacrificed and worked harder than most POW commanders.

They had smoked to keep the dead out of their nostrils, they had joked to keep the dead from preying on their minds, they had eaten to remind themselves they were alive, and Darky Gardiner had run a book on whether he himself might get killed, believing his chances were improving all the time.

-- Narrator (Section 1, Chapter 12 paragraph 3)

Importance: This sort of dark humor is often seen as people try to cope with horrific situations and conditions. Dorrigo has only recently met with Darky Gardiner when this scene takes place. It's not clear from the quote whether Darky believes his chances are good at surviving or whether he believes it is likely he will be killed. Joking about his own impending death is likely a coping mechanism.

And with her came a world that seemed to Dorrigo secure, timeless, confident, unchanging; a world of darkwood living rooms and clubs, crystal decanters of sherry and single malt, the cloying, slightly intoxicating, slightly claustrophobic smell of polished must.

-- Narrator (Section 2, Chapter 1 paragraph 11)

Importance: Dorrigo is describing what he believes his life will be like with Ella and he seems to be hoping for a level of stability that he has yet to find in his life. However, he also realizes that that stability comes with a price and that he will be giving up a great deal of freedom and the opportunity for excitement by marrying Ella. The next sentence states that Ella's parents are willing to welcome Dorrigo into their world, mainly because he is a promising young surgeon, and that he understands he will have to live up to that welcome by committing wholeheartedly to "that world." The use of the word "must" in this quote is not defined.

What was a prisoner of war anyway? Less than a man, just material to be used to make the railway, like the teak sleepers and steel rails and do spikes.

-- Narrator (Section 2, Ch14 paragraph 24)

Importance: This comes as part of a conversation between Nakamura and Kota after



Kota hands Nakamura new orders regarding the railway. At one point, Nakamura says that the men are dying because of the heavy demands on them. Kota says it doesn't matter if they all die. This is an example of the cultural attitude about honor and it's pointed out that a Japanese soldier who is captured would then be forced to commit suicide anyway, his honor lost because he allowed himself to be captured.

He just didn't – this sounds so terrible – he just didn't think it was right to have a baby out of wedlock.

-- Amy (Section 2, Chapter 19 paragraph 39)

Importance: Amy is talking to Dorrigo, explaining how she and Keith came to be a couple. She became pregnant while they were first seeing each other and the social dictates of the time would have made that a shameful thing.

Yet everyday he carries them, nurses them, holds them, cuts them open and sews them up, plays cards for their souls and dares death to save one more life. He lies and cheats and robs too, but for them, always for them.

-- Narrator (Section 3, Chapter 5 paragraph 5)

Importance: The “he” in this passage is Dorrigo. He is the commander and doctor for the camp and is working as hard as he can to try to save the prisoners. Everyday, he argues and bargains with Nakamura about the number of men who are able to work on the railroad. The reference to playing cards goes back to Nakamura as well, who has sometimes made bets about the men while playing card games with Dorrigo.

That's what Rabbit wanted. That people will remember what happened here.

-- Bronx Baker (Section 3, Chapter 12 paragraph 9)

Importance: Bronx Baker is a very minor character who happens to be helping burn the corpses of cholera victims. On this particular day, Rabbit Hendricks is among the dead. Dorrigo makes them burn everything the cholera victims have touched and Rabbit's sketchbook is among his possessions. Dorrigo initially insists that they burn it as well, but it's thrown out of the fire when one of the corpses explodes, and Dorrigo hides it for the remainder of the war.

And though they would carry the memory of Darky's beating to their own deaths six days or seventy years later, at the time the event seemed no more within their control, and therefore no more within their consciousness, than a rock falling or a storm breaking. It simply was, and it was best dealt with by finding other things to think of.

-- Narrator (Section 3, Chapter 20 paragraph 4)

Importance: The prisoners feel completely powerless and they stand by while Darky is beaten so severely that he dies later that night. It's clear from Dorrigo's memories throughout his life that the beating impacts them greatly and that they all remember the beating as particularly cruel for years to come.



But in their hearts they all knew that the Emperor would never hang and that they would. Just as surely as they had beaten and tortured and killed for the Emperor, the men who didn't accept responsibility were now to hang for the Emperor.

-- The Goanna (Section 4, Chapter 3 paragraph 17)

Importance: The Goanna is really the first to voice the opinion that the Emperor was the person who demanded the loyalty of the Japanese soldiers but who would never actually be punished for the orders handed down to the soldiers. At this point, the Goanna is in prison awaiting his execution for war crimes.

He spoke of how the dissection of subjects before death helped obtain important scientific data that would help our soldiers in the great battles to come.

-- Sato (Section 4, Chapter 9 paragraph 19)

Importance: Sato is telling Nakamura about witnessing the dissection of a prisoner at a Japanese medical facility. Sato says the young man trusted Sato and obeyed his requests, going so far as to get onto the dissection table on his own, without a struggle. The young man was then tortured and Sato talked about the “shudder” of the heart as it was removed from the body and placed on a scale. Takamura believes the Japanese soldiers did what was expected of them and that they hold no responsibility for their actions, but Sato obviously disagrees.

I am, he decided, a good man. And this thought gave him immense comfort and a tranquility in the face of his cancer that amazed all who knew him.

-- Nakamura (Section 5, Chapter 1 paragraph 5)

Importance: Nakamura does seem to find some peace during this period of his life. He has moved on into a good job with the Japan Blood Bank, is married with a family, and even does volunteer work after having surgery for throat cancer. But he struggles with himself, trying to assure himself that he's been a good man, and he seems to find this peace only briefly.

And when he looked up, there stood around him a circle of the men he had condemned. He expected the men to curse him, to turn away and revile him, for everyone understood it was to be a death march.

-- Narrator (Section 5, Chapter 16 paragraph 31)

Importance: Dorrigo has just selected the one hundred men who are to march miles through the jungle to another POW camp. He knows most of them won't make the journey, let alone survive the work they'll be called on to do there. He expects that they'll hate him for choosing them, but Jimmy Bigelow is the first to step forward and thank Dorrigo for his dedication to keeping them alive. This is the first time the reader learns that Jimmy was among those selected for the march.