

University of Fiji

Victoria Reeve

**Wandering in intersectional time: subjectivity and identity in Richard Flanagan's
*The Narrow Road to the Deep North***

Abstract:

Using hokku poet Bashō's aesthetics of wandering, as defined by Thomas Heyd, I argue that, by detailing the excruciating pointlessness of work undertaken according to commands that take little or no account of their feasibility, Richard Flanagan's novel, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (which takes its title from Bashō) transforms the features of this aesthetics into the lived experience of prisoners of war on the 'line'. In doing so, Flanagan transfers Bashō's aesthetics into a represented actuality through the privileging of subjectivity over identity and the dissolution of the body on the line. The three prongs to Bashō's aesthetics are found in Flanagan's novel. In this, Flanagan is identifying the complexity of meanings evident in the terminology of such aesthetics, rendering what appears positive in the context of Bashō's poetry negative in its practical application as this is articulated through the prisoners' wartime experiences. Rather than being formative, Flanagan's novel suggests wartime experience has a complexly 'opposite' effect. This is apparent in the complications of identity represented in post-war terms as a disunity (rather than a coherent unity), as articulated through the use of spatial metaphors that reverse the formative intensities of subjectivity and body through symbolic acts of dispersal and dissolution.

Biographical note:

Victoria Reeve is a Senior Lecturer in Literature, Department of Language, Literature and Communication, School of Humanities, University of Fiji. Her research interests include Australian Literature, Literatures of the Pacific, and writing about the Pacific.

Keywords:

Creative writing – Flanagan, Richard – Bashō – Identity – Aesthetics



Fig. 1. Ulrike Sturm, *Poppies*, Linocut, 2016

And it may be said that one great vocation of the novel has been to conduct the passage, for readers as well as characters, from the immediacy of appetite to the open arc of labor (Levenson 2009: 514).

Introduction

Richard Flanagan's novel *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (2013) tells the story of Dorrigo Evans: a man famous for his heroism and leadership as a prisoner of the Japanese on the Burma-Thailand Railway during World War II. Evans, a figure very much like the historical figure, Ernest Edward 'Weary' Dunlop, is a doctor who finds himself leading a body of men under the infamous campaign to build a railway linking Thailand and Burma. Flanagan's father served under Dunlop (Bourke 2014: 1738) and, while eliding all reference to Dunlop himself, Flanagan has said in interviews that the novel strives to convey his father's experience on the Railway (Wood 2014). By modelling his novel's protagonist on the figure of a famous man (Evans is described in terms that seem to match Dunlop's build, features and career) with experiences that convey (but do not necessarily replicate) something of his father's experience, Flanagan is already on the way to articulating the novel's central theme through its poetics: here we have a famous identity, 'embodied' (in fictive terms) in the figure of Dorrigo Evans, a man whose subjectivity is very much shaped by the experiences of Flanagan's father. That is, subjectivity and identity are represented in terms that abstract each from the unity of embodiment and each from the other. These are particularly useful concepts for writers working within the fields of fiction and non-fiction as well as the, often hybrid, space in between.

Time and again, identity and subjectivity are contrasted in ways that reinforce the novel's reliance upon there being distinction between the two. Consistently, it is identity that is questioned, and subjectivity that provides both the basis for its questioning and redemption.

Narratives of identity over time

Flanagan's novel takes its title from hokku master Matsuo Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi* ([c1691]2004). The novel pays homage to Bashō's aesthetics in its representation of subjectivity as durable and capable, through empathy, of transcending the constraints imposed by identity across time. Deploying a poetics of time that disrupts the chronological sequence of narrative events, Flanagan's novel privileges a conception of time as experienced subjectively rather than objectively organised in the way that identity is commonly understood. What I mean here is, although identity is situational and intersectional with many aspects of one's identity receding and coming into play according to the relevancies of the moment, that which is central changes over time across an individual's life when their life is formulated through narrative. Life as narrative depends upon the successful choreography of overlapping identities over time. The life narrative must respond to the eventfulness of an individual life by reconfiguring its identities accordingly. The concept of life in these terms is, after all, a consequence

of narrative: one might move, as Dorrigo Evans does, from son, to lover/husband, and then to father; from soldier to veteran; and from young to old, for example. To understand the identities that are central to the character of Dorrigo Evans is to understand his life narrative as it extends in time. In contrast, identity, when it is to be comprehended within a given moment, makes sense only when viewed in relation to others.

That is, although the life narrative of a single individual can be comprehended without reference to others (as an individual's generic identities function comparatively to those that come before and after in the life line), to contemplate identity of and in the moment – to pause and consider the individual in their spatial context – requires comparison with other individual identities. Thus, identity in these terms is hierarchical (and metaphorically spatial); and it privileges and discriminates across lives (placing the old above the young or the young above the old, for example). Identity is thus both closely tied to the constructive effects of life as narrative and relies upon hierarchical comparisons with others in order to situate the life narrative in relation to events in the wider narrative that forms the novel.

Subjectivity, in keeping with Georg Lukács' delineation of the poetics of the novel, provides the material by which narrative becomes composed as novel ([1920]1971). Subjectivity, although experienced across a range of orderable events, is given (in literary terms) as an almost timeless intensity – as something that endures across experiential time, though it is bounded in the chronological time of the body. Thus, subjectivity must be privileged over identity in this literary form. This is apparent in *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* where the novel's opening lines evince a privileging of subjectivity over identity when Flanagan writes of his protagonist's earliest subjective impressions:

Why at the beginning of things is there always light? Dorrigo Evans' earliest memories were of the sun flooding a church hall in which he sat with his mother and grandmother. ... Blinding light and him toddling back and forth, in and out of its transcendent welcome, into the arms of women (2013: 1).

Commencing with an expression of primordial subjectivity, the child's first recollection – that of light and moving back and forth between the bodies (arms) of women, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* fulfils Lukács' reading of this form in very clear terms from the outset by beginning with the focalised thoughts of Dorrigo Evans embedded within the narrative of his earliest experience. As a companion to the intricacy of this first experience, we have the detailed account of the final moments of another individual, Darky Gardiner. Gardiner dies in a latrine pit in the night, having dragged himself from his hospital bed, where he was taken after a gruelling beating. Gardiner's death is at the forefront of Dorrigo Evans' mind in his final days, many years later and well after the War has ended. That Dorrigo Evans ends his experiential journey contemplating the death of another individual whose name is associated with darkness rather than light, and whose death takes place in the dead of night in a slimy pit of excrement, is significant: the beginning and end of Evans' life are designed to draw attention to key distinctions in terms of subjectivity and identity and the impact that identity, in particular, has upon an individual's life narrative.

Beginning at the ‘beginning’ with Evans’ adult subjectivity questioning *why?*, the narrative goes on to recount the basic structure of that experience in terms of identity. This is apparent in the division of gender by way of the transcendence that is promised to men (the child, Dorrigo Evans, venturing into the light) and the immanence of women as symbolic homes to which the transcendent male returns. This aspect, which reflects the attitudes and lifestyle of the times (and possibly also the author’s unconscious assumptions about gender), reveals identity to be in the service of subjectivity at this early point in the narrative. A little further on down the page, when Flanagan describes how, ‘shadows came later in the form of a forearm rising up, its black outline leaping in the greasy light of a kerosene lantern’ (2013: 1), the child’s subjectively established awareness progresses to the anticipated experience of a harsh bodily form against light: the raised arm producing the shadow. Thus, the male body is identified with the darkening of experience through pain and the female body with nurturing; categories of identity therefore shape the subjective experience of the individual according to this reading of the novel; indeed, this would seem to be the underlying premise of the novel, which performatively illuminates the impact of identity divisions on its two key characters, Dorrigo Evans and Darky Gardiner. When, only a few lines on, as a boy, Dorrigo Evans encounters a neighbour, Jackie Maguire, weeping and ‘trying to brush the tears away from his pockmarked face with the back of his hand’ (Flanagan 2013: 1), Flanagan is articulating the child’s awareness of other subjectivities, which he realises through the other’s expressions of sorrow – articulated in the form of a hand wiping away tears. This highly stylised rendering of subjectivity in the presence of another, whose bodily performance functions as part of a hybrid metaphoric-cum-metonymic chain (from the gentle welcoming arms of women, to the masculine arm of paternal authority, and on to the [feminine] tears wiped away by the reproving [masculine] arm), has the effect of emphasising the significance of embodied subjectivity. And it is this emphasis on embodiment that makes room for the possibility of transcendence.

Embodied subjectivity and suffering

Transcendence is an important theme in this novel – one that Flanagan links to empathy as a feasible alternative to the self-centredness of subjectivity as it is sketched in the novel. The importance of empathy is articulated in the story of Darky Gardiner, later revealed to be the child of an Indigenous mother, Ruth Maguire, and Dorrigo Evans’ older brother, Tom. Although reviewers have focused on the love story recounted in this novel in terms of the affair between Amy and Dorrigo (Dorrigo is Amy’s nephew by marriage), it is the performatively elaborated relationship between Evans and his unacknowledged nephew that supplies the context through which identity and subjectivity come into relevance in this novel.

To all intents and purposes, Darky Gardiner is a minor character. It is Dorrigo Evans whose life drives the narrative; the ordering of events is determined according to his subjectivity for the most part. Most of the novel engages with Evans’ life narrative, although the most interesting aspects occur in the context of Evans’ experience of that life. Like Weary Dunlop, Evans is tall and plays football in his youth (in Dunlop’s case,

it is rugby). A pivotal moment in Evans' life is described when, leaping for a football in a game of Australian Rules, he experiences a sense of 'joyfully entering a new universe while your old still remained knowable and hold-able and not yet lost' (Flanagan 2013: 10). This moment is described as something towards which the young Dorrigo Evans had journeyed and from which he 'would now be journeying away ... forever after' (Flanagan 2013: 10). A paradoxically embodied experience of transcendence – with Dorrigo Evans holding onto a sense of his body at the moment that he flies 'into' the transcendental light of the sun – the moment also pointedly marks the novel's thematic interest in questions of subjectivity and embodiment, while signalling a parallel concern with identity and its relationship to embodied subjectivity. Names are important in this novel in the sense that they represent an individual's public identity and enable the articulation of terms that are taken to signify the 'essence' of a man (as in the sobriquet of 'the Big Fella', by which Evans is known to his men).

Flanagan seems to insist upon referring to Evans as 'Dorrigo Evans' throughout the narrative. 'Dorrigo' is not even Evans' first name. Clearly a preferred name, its use in this way emphasises Evans' stake in the naming rights to his identity and serves as a gesture of self-determination and an indication that identity is symbolically significant here. Evans' thoughts reveal a sense of disquiet over the names he is given. He feels, at times, too small for the appellation his men 'wanted him to bear' (Flanagan 2013: 50). His thoughts indicate that for him, names represent aspects of identity imposed upon an individual, which that individual may affirm, resist, or negotiate, but ultimately not escape. Thus, identity and questions pertaining to identity and the role of subjectivity (as something in tension with the external show of identity) are central to this novel whose title arguably posits the instability of identity as a construct by taking the name of another work.

Beyond merely borrowing its translated title, the homage to *Oku no Hosomichi* is evident in the way Flanagan's *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* transforms features of Bashō's aesthetics into the lived experience of prisoners of war on the Thailand-Burma Railway. Thomas Heyd has argued that 'Bashō describes a practice that concerns the experience of wandering in and for itself' and that in doing so 'he has set out the rough parameters of ... an "aesthetics of wandering"' (2003: 293). In terms of Flanagan's novel, this is superficially evident in a narrative structure that winds its way around the experiences and identities of the two characters, Darky Gardiner and Dorrigo Evans. It is a narrative structure that disrupts sequential time, making it difficult for the reader to place the protagonist's durable experiences of suffering and remembering in precise terms along an ordered, linear conception of time. It also enables what J. Hillis Miller has described as the performative function of narrative through its representation of Gardiner's alienation from his family as something beyond explanation – with that alienation brought about by the shaping forces of identity that render him illegitimate and racially other (1995).

Michael Levenson has noted that 'the characteristic movement of the novel [as a form] is not the breathless succession of punctualities [but] a rhythm of containments: events incorporated within one another' (2009: 514). The effectiveness of literary narrative in establishing interest through the intensification of events (as either happening

immediately, quickly, slowly, across a range of other ordered life experiences and within other time frames) is apparent in the rendering of subjective impressions in both *Oku no Hosomichi* and Flanagan's *Narrow Road to the Deep North*. This quality is what Levenson observes when he notes that it is not possible to give sequence to all events contained in a narrative as these will likely 'intersect, traverse, subsume and contain one another' in some form (2009: 513). A strictly linear narrative is bound to leave something out, in other words. The idea of the complex historical narrative – one in which time is played with to present a distant past as being more recent – is taken up by Carla Lever (in another article in this Special Issue). In particular Lever looks at how we remember social conflict and make that, which is often intangible, real through the production of the physical: the sculpture. Louise Harrington's work (also in this Special Issue) looks, too, at violent conflict through an examination of the role of the screen play writer and filmmaker.

A sequential account of Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi*, for example, would be aesthetically devastating as a determined focus on temporal ordering would likely disrupt and disfigure the poetic language. Levenson (after Hegel) emphasises the importance of the social relations formulated through the work of narrative, which is usually initiated by some punctuating desire. For Levenson, desire originates with subjectivity whereas work, in Hegelian terms, is external or objective; further, its sustained effort results in social relations. That is, intersubjectivity is the product of the novel's labour and is that which overcomes (in temporal terms) the fleetingness of desire (2009: 514-515). Work, on these terms, is transcendental, we might say. On this view, the work of Flanagan's novel is, I argue, the performative force of empathy. Empathy is the means by which intersubjectivity is enabled, since (on Flanagan's terms) it is the only way in which subjectivity can be transcended in anything but fleeting terms. Fleeting moments of transcendence such as Evans' leap into the sun, are merely the punctuations of a self-centred desire for transcendence or achievement. His anticipated failure to experience transcendence ever after reflects a deeper awareness of this:

And in the deepest recesses of his being, Dorrigo Evans understood that all his life had been a journeying to this point when he had for a moment flown into the sun and would now be journeying away from it forever after. Nothing would ever be as real to him. Life never had such meaning again (Flanagan 2013: 10).

Desire, in this instance, has enabled an intersubjectively configured experience of transcendence—intersubjective because the leap is enabled by the embodied empathy of others whose cooperation is necessary for Evans' Cazaly-like ascendance of their own positions in the playing field; Roy Cazaly (1893–1963) being an Australian Rules footballer known for his high marks (Counihan 1979).¹ Thus, it is subjectivity that enables the expression of time in terms of duration (where duration is understood as a temporal intensity capable of going beyond sequentially ordered time) and it is empathy, rather than desire, that enables intersubjectivity. Evans' sense, at the age of fifteen, that he is moving away from this peak-experience of transcendence and will never experience anything like it again (that it will diminish his experience of life thereafter), is the result of the durability of subjectively rendered time. What Evans

senses at this moment is the capacity of this experience to extend beyond the chronological ordering of his life narrative and imbue all subsequent experiences with an awareness of their comparative failure. It is because he has achieved the experience out of his own desire that the short-lived nature of the moment is brought to the fore of his consciousness. As the product of his desire to achieve the accolades of his peers through the high mark, the transcendental moment falls back upon itself, so to speak, once it is achieved. This reflects its origins in desire, rather than empathy; Dorrigo Evans' failure to appreciate the significance of his peers' embodied empathy (to engage in the game of Australian Rules football is to understand and promote the achievement of such high marks), tether that experience to the fleeting nature of desire. Desire is within subjectivity, in other words, and it is subjectivity that sustains desire either side of its material manifestations in 'a laugh, a slap, a glance, a storm'; but, as Levenson observes, 'the immediacy of appetite' does not supply durable experiences (2009: 514). Indeed, 'narrative moves alternately between punctual events ... and broader, slower events: a feud, a quest, the decay of influence [for] the characteristic movement of the novel is not the breathless succession of punctualities ... but a rhythm of containments: events incorporated within one another' (Levenson 2009: 514).

Thus, blending Levenson and Lukács, we might see that it is subjectivity that supplies the brief and the durable features of narrative, with empathy extending the transcendental experience to an intersubjective realisation that becomes durable in time and recognisable in terms of its extended duration across time and in ways that transcend the punctuating events of the narrative. One example that Levenson gives of time-as-duration is marriage, which must be worked towards, ultimately requiring the cooperation and agreement of others in intellectual and emotional terms. As Levenson points out, marriage is often the manifestation of the intersubjectively realised work of the novel (2009: 514–6). If identity (whether pertaining to persons or places) provides the means by which recognisable temporal changes are given, then subjectivity represents time in terms of duration whereas alterations to identity enable the representation of sequential time.

Embodied identity and privilege

Bashō's writing presents subjective impressions within a chronologically given narrative of moving along a path and it is in these impressions (whether voiced in poetry or as recounted conversation) that cut through and across the linearity of that journey to supply it with far greater depth than the simple ordering of its events would allow. As the source of the sometimes fleeting immediacy of desire, subjectivity in the novel, I argue, functions in similar terms – not as something that can be organised, but as something that endures. The edges of subjectivity are defined by its embodiment – the experience of embodiment is subjectivity's originary context. Yet, it necessarily exceeds these limits through intersubjectivity. Ultimately, subjectivity develops through its capacity for transcendence. In Flanagan's novel, that transcendence is figured through empathy. Identity, on the other hand, although intersectional and intersubjectively established, can be understood when ordered along the different contexts that privilege a definable role: as when a man performs his identity as, for

example, husband, father or soldier. Each identity, though intersecting within his subjectivity, may be disentangled from all other identities for the purposes of narrative time. That names can be duplicated (indeed, are duplicated) brings to bear the spatial quality of identity in terms articulated by Paul Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative* (1984). This presents the possibility of a socially constructed identity being duplicated and yet embodied in different terms – in this case, a collection of poems that reflect upon of nature of the world and human existence (Visenor 1993: 58) while wandering along a ‘Narrow Path to the Deep North’ *vis à vis* representing the cultural identity of the Japanese in Flanagan’s novel. Thus, the title serves as a means of representing one society – the Japanese – while offering another construction, this time based on the prisoners’ experience of suffering on the Line. In this latter sense, the identity that is intimated is that of a generation who begins to feel the problematic distortions and inequalities that the wartime experience has revealed about its social values and practices. I am talking here about Australian identity.

The scope of Australian identity is limited in this novel, I argue, for aesthetic and thematic reasons, to the borders defining Australia’s central ethical question on the point of subjectivity and identity: its identification of its Indigenous peoples under various names and the experience of individual Indigenous Australians as a result of such identifications. This central question is one that Australians have yet to fully articulate, and Flanagan’s novel is superb in terms of its ability to indicate the issue without pinning it down to a limited scope by naming it. The novel’s concern with identity is indicated in its alternative narrative of the impact of identity given in reverse order to Dorrigo Evans’ fragmented but diachronically figured life cycle. This is the story of Darky Gardiner, whom we meet as a young man who ultimately dies on the Line, and whose childhood is only faintly sketched in terms that starkly contrast with the way in which Evans’ childhood is given. Gardiner’s early life is told purely in terms of identifications of relationship – mother, father and adoptive parents – with Evans’ familial connection to him obscured until well after the young man’s death and Evans’ return to Australia. Thus, Gardiner’s narrative takes up that strand of the novel’s poetics that relates to the identification of something ‘determined for us in some way’ or already known, which Heyd locates in the (re)cognition of places (2003: 294). Places, after all, like identity, mark what is known or understood of their referents. Flanagan, in this way, is able to show the effects of identification, where transcendental empathy is lacking, by configuring identity as immanent and inescapable – an imposed boundary that is embodied through identification with physical attributes and corporeal connections. In other words, we encounter in this novel a thesis on the nature of racism and the possibility of its transcendence through coming to know the experience of another. This experience is essentially that which the reader encounters upon realising that Darky Gardiner is the son of Dorrigo Evans’ brother Tom – an embodied yet paradoxically unrecognised identity that has been obscured by the imposed identities of racist discourse that bestow on Gardiner the soubriquet of ‘Darky’.

With the question of the relationship between identity and subjectivity posed in this way through the figures of Dorrigo Evans, who stands for white settler society, and Darky Gardiner, who represents Indigenous Australians, the novel works through issues

that Australians of World War II and post-War years faced in terms of questioning their shared humanity with the enemy in light of the traumas of war. These issues, heightened by the racial differences typically observed between the Japanese and those of European descent, reproduce the under-acknowledged context of trauma experienced through white settlement and, in this novel, effectively repose the question of shared humanity between settler descendants and Indigenous Australians. What it determines is that subjectivity is a matter of feeling for others as well as one's embodied self. That is, subjectivity is not formed merely out of personal experience; rather it takes into itself the anticipation of how others feel in their bodies.

Taking Bashō's aesthetic as a measure for Flanagan's poetics, we might see that the two characters represent major strands of the 'Australian experience' as something forged through embodied identity (as in identification with Empire through white settler society) and embodied subjectivity (through identification with the sentient world). Gardiner is described as feeling sorry for monkeys in the rain and pities the fish that swim in a fish shop aquarium while awaiting transmogrification in the deep fat-fryer; and Evans questions his identifications in name and expectation. The tragic lateness of transcendental empathy in Evans' case stands alongside Gardiner's capacity to feel pity even in the midst of his own suffering. With Darky Gardiner robbed of his familial identity whilst evincing sensitivity to the experiences of other beings, Flanagan's novel would seem to align Indigenous Australia with embodied subjectivity and settler society with embodied identity. Certainly, this makes sense if we contemplate that Gardiner's function in this novel is to illustrate his suffering and Evans' is to demonstrate the benefits of status that an emphasis on identity produces. When subjectivity is ignored and identity privileged, relations become hierarchically configured. Disadvantage, suffering and injustice are outcomes of such formulations.

Narrative time and the aesthetics of wandering

Arguing that Bashō 'describes a practice that concerns the experience of wandering in and for itself', Heyd begins his reflection on Bashō's aesthetics of wandering by remarking that 'space appears to be shrinking, places are losing their uniqueness, and nature is fading from our view' (2003: 291). For the prisoners of war in Flanagan's novel, place and space are diminished through the intensity of their bodily experiences: 'suddenly *Australia* meant little against lice and hunger and beri-beri, against thieving and beatings and yet more slave labour. *Australia* was shrinking and shrivelling, a grain of rice was so much bigger now than a continent' (Flanagan 2013: 52). Heyd (and, as we will see, Flanagan also) evinces in his opening lines the structure of the aesthetics of wandering he elaborates. This aesthetics has as its objects space, place and nature (Heyd 2003: 300). Proposing 'that wandering – the act of leisurely, [and] attentive[ly] traversing the land in a relatively unaided [and unmediated] way – has an aesthetic that may help us to recover a sense of the depth of space, of the real diversity of places, and of our human lives within the larger context of nature' (291), Heyd builds his aesthetics around three events undertaken in respect to its three objects, that of: 'traversing space, ... coming to know places, and ... coming to an understanding of the nature of things' (296).

‘Space’, Heyd explains, ‘stands for ... that which is relatively unknown, where one is not present (at least not at the time one is thinking about it) but where one could potentially be’ (2003: 294). Bashō’s aesthetics would seem to be reproduced in the toddler Dorrigo Evans traversing the space of the church hall (which he presumably comes to know over time to be such) and moving back and forth between the arms of women. It is by these means that he (symbolically) comes to know the nature of life as a state full with transcendental promise, represented by the light flooding the hall. Contrary to the novel’s opening focalising statement, experience begins with bodies and the effect that light produces in enabling distinction between forms in space. The light and the welcoming arms of the women provide the difference between what is known and what is not known – with the light bathed space representing the unknown and the transcendental, and the arms of the women the known places to which one returns, over and over.

Translating the focus of this aesthetics of wandering from the nature of the world through which the poet moves to the persons he might encounter through such activity, we might see how Flanagan’s novel articulates a similar structure. This time the aesthetic objects of the novel (as opposed to hokku) are being addressed: subjectivities, identities and the ‘nature’ of existence. What Georg Lukács ([1920]1971) famously asserted as the creative tension between the ‘internal’ experience of subjectivity and the ‘outer’ world is arguably represented in this novel through the bodies of the prisoners of war who embody subjectivities at odds with the world in which identity is emphasised as shamed. What happens is a reversal of the privilege of (white settler) Australian identity through a shift in identification that supplants that identity and places another central, that of prisoner of war: ‘Being prisoner great shame. Great! Redeem honour building railway for Emperor. Great honour. Great!’ (Flanagan 2013: 43). Bodily degradation seems to reify that shame as something imposed by the Japanese – that is, through the men’s bodily experiences on the Line. Their status as prisoners is figured as the generative tension resulting in the degradations of the body that are to follow – and which are played out most clearly in the beating that leads to the death of Darcy Gardiner (Flanagan 2013: 295–9).

The revelation that Gardiner, whose death by beating Evans witnesses in the camp, was Evans’ nephew offers a host of material for analysis on the role of identity in this novel which, when understood in terms of the racist nickname that Gardiner bears, obscures subjectivity as a formative experience flowing from bodily engagement with the world, including intimate bodily relations such as those involved in the familial connection between Gardiner and Evans. This reasoning is consistent with the attribution of shame being out of step with the portrayal of the men’s subjectivities, which instead of shame emphasises, through the men’s recollections of their lives before the War, the significance of the quotidian in the formative experiences of subjectivity as it is experienced through relation with others. That is, subjectivity depends upon interrelation with other subjectivities, with experience providing the aesthetic marker of that interrelation as demonstrated in the men’s wistful memories of the meals they had enjoyed and the foodstuffs they now long for.

Subjectivity and literary character

Of course, it is not possible to see subjectivity. You can only empathetically identify with it – or, in Bashō's terms, place yourself in the intuited experience of being another entity like a tree, or a leaf (Visenor 1993: 58). Selves that are seen, according to my reading of Flanagan's novel, are identities. These are character selves, personas, Skin-egos (Anzieu in Segal 2006: 5) whose existence and presence must be displayed in order to exist. These are selves, or aspects of selves, that must be seen. As literary constructions, subjectivities in contrast feel through their existence. If they see, it is a seeing that is deeply connected to feeling. In literary terms, as I have argued elsewhere, affect, as external signs of internal responses, is the armoury of character. Emotion, when externalised for visible effect, is characteristic of an internal action; that this becomes reified in character as character, is a key feature of literary character (Reeve 2013). Breaking down the distinction between external and internal, between character and subjectivity is a matter of being alert to the events of seeing and being seen. Gazes that are taken to contribute to the reification of character or identity are gazes locked into a self-sustaining rhetoric of characterisation: the desire to be seen in a certain light requires distinctions along gradations of character in terms of what is seen, so that the desiring subject can position himself in a superior position; that is, hierarchically. In Flanagan's novel, subjectivities that eschew readings of selfhood in terms of gaze and hierarchical positioning do not rely upon bodily integrity, since bodily form, as a surface, is not immediately intuited as the basis for subjective existence. Instead, the body is experienced as subjectivity. Only subsequently, in relation to others, is bodily awareness and integrity significant.

On this analogy, we might say that: Bashō's concern with traversing space correlates to traversing the depths and extents of subjectivity; (re)cognition of places corresponds to recognisable identities; and coming to an understanding nature is translated in this novel as coming to an understanding of the nature of (bodily) existence. Despite the importance of time in identifying distinctions between subjectivity and identity – with subjectivity being durable and durational, and identity configured sequentially and comparatively – space is relevant to all three aesthetic objects of the novel form (subjectivity, identity and existence). Subjectivity is, in this particular novel, represented as the promise of transcendence; identity is represented as something attributed to a given bodily form which is located in metaphorical space in terms, for example, of social position and existence is articulated as something experienced through embodiment. Indeed, the narrative structure and the novel's focus on these three aesthetic objects seems to suggest that coming to know the nature of existence is an iterative process of self-awareness and identification; it is a process that supports a formative experience – that of coming to know the nature of existence through the experience of self as embodied subjectivity and self as one appears to, or is characterised by, others.

When Dorrigo Evans' nephew, Darky Gardiner, is beaten in the camp, the men of the Line experience obscure sensations triggered by the sights, sounds and smells of the beating during which, 'a fruity, wet fragrance momentarily swept in from the jungle, ... remind[ing] some of sherry and ... of Christmas with the family and the trifle their

mothers used to make' (Flanagan 2013: 296). Just as the patient, Jack Rainbow (upon whom Evans had been operating immediately before the beating), becomes at moments of intense concentration a body consisting of, 'fleshy tube[s]' and 'rotting meat' (Flanagan 2013: 287), Darcy Gardiner becomes a name without a body to Evans when he is in the midst of that futile surgery. The narrative at this point foregrounds what I argue is the novel's position on the matter of transcendence: that empathy is the only means by which we might transcend personal experience. In this case, a lack of empathy also reveals a shocking separation of body from man and of subjectivity from identity. Though he is charged with the responsibility that, 'only you can stop them' from beating him unjustly (Flanagan 2013: 286), Dorrigo Evans is driven to complete the amputation and thus arrives too late to save Gardiner.

The embodied subjectivity of the two men, Rainbow and Gardiner, effectively dissolve or disappear to Evans' subjective experience: in Rainbow's case, because he becomes, momentarily, the stump upon which Evans operates, 'neatly fillet[ing] the living leg muscles back from the bone' (Flanagan 2013: 287); whereas Gardiner's subjectivity – in terms of the physical pain he will experience from the beating – disappears from Evans' and his men's consciousness as they witness the long, drawn-out act of brutality whereby Gardiner's, 'wet, swelling face wore a strange look of astonishment each time the guards hit him with their fists or bamboo poles' (Flanagan 2013: 297). In the collective consciousness of the prisoners of war, as this focalised thought reveals, an expression of pain and physical stupefaction goes unrecognised for what it is and is read, instead, as astonishment by men who, 'saw, but ... did not see; ... heard, but did not hear; and ... knew, they knew it all, but still they tried not to know' (Flanagan 2013: 297). We are left wondering, like Evans, whose central thought on the matter remains unremarked, whether his awareness of the relation to Gardiner would have roused him to act in time to save his nephew from the beating. Evans' thoughts on the last day of his life about 'that day's most important detail' of which 'he had written nothing' in the foreword to a collection of sketches made by a soldier who had died on the day of Gardiner's beating, turn upon the central issue of an identity that remained obscured until awareness of its relevance arrives too late.

Intersectional time

For Levenson, 'novelistic events do not merely unfold in succession but are perpetually engaged in a pattern of intersections, overlappings, and embeddings' (2009: 514). Yet, to see the eventfulness of narrative as richly entangled in this way is to invoke the metaphor of the circuitous route. There may be layers, levels of complexity and degrees of intensity, but nonetheless, the description invites the possibility of tracing a route even if this involves a few side journeys. Clearly Levenson means something richer than this. It is indeed difficult to step outside the conventional language and perspective on narrative and narrative time in particular, for it becomes necessary to imagine time in spatial terms, hence the imagery of the circuitous route. For Mikhail Bakhtin, this imaginative process can be understood as that eventfulness he terms the *chronotope* whereby 'space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history' ([1975]1981: 84). Placing time in the central position – for the *chronotope* is

not a tableau, static and capable of being taken in all at once, but a generic pattern of eventfulness understood in terms of its rhythms and its forms – the chronotope of wandering supplies a recognisable pace, replete with disjunctions and lost moments reaching across the temporality of the wanderer in space: the chronotope of wandering entails these intensities of experience as sudden epiphanies, of extended sensations that reach out to seemingly *before* and *after* moments of wandering, and the durability of space in time as something that moves according to its own tempo in conjunction with the movement introduced by the wanderer's wandering in space. Space itself becomes the figuration by which time is measured.

The very changeability of space is that which introduces tempo and rhythm. These alterations go beyond the movement of a figure against the slower transformations of landscape (as it measures elements such as wind, growth and decay). Change extends to the whole event of wandering as a rendering of space in time. Change becomes the work of the novel, with the durable moments of intensity or breadth in terms of duration supplying markers by which to read and understand these transformations. Thus, it becomes possible to track Levenson's punctuating desires across longer time frames, without lessening the intensity of feeling so much as extending that motivation to encompass a broader framework of activity. Aesthetic longing provides an example of such. Bashō, for whom, 'the days and months are travellers of eternity' and 'journeying is home', is 'aroused' by 'ceaseless dreams of wandering' ([c1691]2004: 3) to travel along back roads to distant towns from Edo to Ōgaki (Chilcott 2004: xi). The ensuing text, *Oku no Hosomichi*, is formed out of the durable temporal elements of his writing, which forms the narrative of his wanderings, ordered by the complex layering of those durable moments as brief intensities that have the capacity to extend their influence across time to *before* and *after* the moment itself.

The novel offers a glimmer of something consistent with Bashō's aesthetics in the form of symbolically transcendent empathy. Here, empathy is figured in a pivotal moment that smashes through the surface immanence that identity represents and offers the possibility of existence beyond subjective embodiment. This is performed in the novel through the men's encounter with the nature of existence as experienced by sentient beings they ordinarily regarded as food. For Darky Gardiner, the experience of imprisonment and the memory of fish and chips on a Friday night, prompts the desire to return to his local fish shop, Nikitaris', after the War and free the fish that swim in the aquarium. With Darky Gardiner dead, his comrades – drunk after a night of reminiscing – take it upon themselves to release the captive fish. Gardiner, 'a man who pitied wet monkeys' (Flanagan 2013: 295) exemplifies 'haiku thought [which is] intuitive, a concise concentration of motion, memories, and the sensations of the season without closure or silence' (Visenor 1993: 58) in that he eschews the social construction of 'fish' as foodstuff and intuitively enters into the subjective experience of the fish. His comrades, after the War, are not immediately aware of this when they first encounter the fish shop: 'Well, Sheephead Morton said. You can't say they look *exactly* unhappy'; but they move toward the realisation when Jimmy Bigelow replies, 'Maybe in the camps we didn't either at any given moment' (Flanagan 2013: 345-346).

Conclusion

Transcendence, Flanagan's narrative seems to suggest, can only be experienced through empathy. Empathy is transcendental because it breaks the unity of meaning that determines fish to be food first and foremost rather than sentient beings. What is even more significant in terms of tracing the connection between these two texts is the construction of narrative time in the novel along lines that correspond to Bashō's aesthetics of wandering, which does not propose a linear temporality despite his book's title. For Evans, who pieces together the flesh-and-blood connection he bears with Darky Gardiner long after the War, wandering through his own subjectivity as a traversable space, brings him 'home' to identifiable relations like that embodied in the identities of uncle and nephew. This connection, which is only indirectly articulated in the text, is identifiable only by a reader who traverses the same 'circuitous path' as Evans, by dwelling on the range of his experiences, preoccupations and memorialising acts of writing. Just as Bashō's aesthetics leaves it 'to the reader to construct or interpret [the meaning of a poem] according to his poetic experience or his spiritual intuitions' (Suzuki in Visenor 1993: 58), Flanagan's novel presents a poetics that 'must be completed by the reader' (Keene in Visenor 1993: 58). As readers, we experience something like the breaking of collective detachment – the unified, focalised perspective on Gardiner's beating – that had prevented the men from seeing, feeling, hearing and knowing his pain.

Endnote

1. For a demonstration of the high mark, see the 1979 advertisement for the Victorian Football League, see *YouTube* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxM8XB61ZvU> Accessed 7 September 2015)

Works cited

- Bakhtin, MM [1975]1981 'Forms of Time and the Chronotope' M Holquist (ed) C Emerson and M Holquist (trans) *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* Austin: U of Texas P, 84–258
- Bashō, M [c1691]2004 Tim Chilcott (trans) *Oku no Hosomichi: The Narrow Road to the Deep North* www.tclt.org.uk (eBook)
- Bourke, J 2014 'Love and Surgery on the Death Railway' *The Lancet* 384: 1738
<http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736%2814%2962061-4/fulltext> Accessed 30 March 2015
- Chilcott, T 2004 'Introduction' T Chilcott (trans) *Oku no Hosomichi: The Narrow Road to the Deep North* www.tclt.org.uk. (eBook), ii-ix
- Counihan, N 1979 'Cazaly, Roy (1893–1963)' *Australian Dictionary of Biography*
<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/cazaly-roy-5541> Accessed 7 September 2015
- Flanagan, R 2013 *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* Sydney: Vintage
- Harrington, L 2016 'The (De)humanisation of Soldier/Terrorist Bodies in Cinema about Conflict' *TEXT: Journal of Writers and Writing Courses* Special Issue 34
- Heyd, T 2003 'Bashō and the Aesthetics of Wandering: Recuperating Space, Recognizing Place, and Following the Ways of the Universe' *Philosophy East and West* 53(3): 291–307
- Levenson, M 2009 'Reading Time' *Novel* 42(3): 511–16

- Lever, C 2016 'Corporeal Curiosities: (Re)Presenting Contemporary South African Embodiment' *TEXT: Journal of Writers and Writing Courses* Special Issue 34
- Lukács, G [1920]1971 A Bostock (trans) *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* London: Merlin P
- Miller, JH 1995 'Narrative' F Lentricchia and T McLaughlin (eds) *Critical Terms for Literary Study* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 66–79
- Reeve, V 2013 'Emotion and Narratives of Heartland: Kim Scott's Benang and Peter Carey's Jack Maggs' *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 12(3): 1–11
- Ricoeur, P 1984 K McLaughlin and D Pellauer (trans) *Time and Narrative* 1 Chicago: U of Chicago P
- Segal, N 2006 'The Other French Freud: Didier Anzieu – The Story of a Skin' [working draft of manuscript, unpublished] School of Advanced Study, London: University of London
<http://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/62/1/SEGAL%20for%20e-repos%20Nov%202006%20Didier%20Anzieu'.pdf>
Accessed 30 June 2015
- Visenor, G 1993 'The Envoy to Haiku' *Chicago Review* 39(3/4): 55–62
- Wood, G 2014 'Booker Prize Winner Richard Flanagan: "My father trusted me not to get his story wrong"' *The Telegraph* 16 October <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booker-prize/11164728/Booker-Prize-winner-Richard-Flanagan-My-father-trusted-me-not-to-get-his-story-wrong.html> Accessed 29 March 2015