



# Writing on the Edge: Richard Flanagan’s “Australian-ness” and the National Imagination

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**Abstract.** As a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural settler society separated from the British Empire, in the evolution of mainstream national imagination and cultural identity in Australia, there has always been a monocultural identity with “Britishness” as the core. Its essence is a colonial white identity that does not create a sense of belonging for all Australians. As a writer who grew up in Tasmania, Richard Flanagan used Tasmania as the starting point for the cultural fusion in Australia. He wrote three novels, *Death of a River Guide*, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* and *Gould’s Book of Fish*, which highlight the identity struggles faced by marginalized groups such as Aboriginal and non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants that have been previously overlooked. Flanagan questioned the legitimacy of the white identity with British imperialism, criticized the self-colonization within Australia, and criticized the single cultural identity of Australian society. Flanagan wanted to use literature to reshape the Australian national imagination and build a sense of belonging for Australians. The writer pointed out that Australia was “generated” from a multi-ethnic mixed culture, and its fundamental future lies in integration. Flanagan’s “integration” concept is based on the premise of “love and generosity”, which enables different ethnic groups to coexist equally in Australia, “Love, generosity, integration” together form the core of Flanagan’s “Australian-ness”.

**Keywords:** Richard Flanagan; marginal writing; Australian-ness; integration.

## 1 Introduction

This article explores Australia’s transition from a colonial territory to an independent nation, analyzing the country’s inevitable encounter with identity anxiety. The question of Australian identity has usually been seen as a tug-of-war between Australianness and Britishness, between the impulse to be distinctively Australian and the lingering sense of a British heritage. (White 47)<sup>[7]</sup>. By the late 19th century, Australians assimilated British culture to define their nation and self-identity, Australians saw themselves, and were seen by others, as part of a group of new, transplanted, predominantly Anglo-Saxon emigrant societies. (White 47)<sup>[7]</sup>. The notion of becoming “Australian British” became integral to the vision of Australian identity, serving as an ideological force in the nation’s construction. This ethnocentric approach centered around maintaining a

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national identity rooted in "Britishness". The Australian official discourse exhibited an arrogant attitude towards non-British cultural groups, selectively rewriting colonial history, marginalizing Indigenous and non-British immigrant populations, and utilizing literature to reinforce the conquest narrative of white settlers over the Australian continent, thus safeguarding their identity's legitimacy. However, the construction of a singular cultural identity in Australia overlooked the country's essential multi-ethnic, multicultural post-colonial immigrant nature, failing to generate a sense of belonging for all Australians. Yet the end of the 1980s saw a widespread awareness that public history had denied important truths about the ruthless nature of white settlement, and many novelists took on the task of confronting darker probabilities. (Lever 513)<sup>[5]</sup>.

Richard Flanagan (1961-) has been awarded the prestigious international Booker Prize (Elizabeth Malcolm 212)<sup>[16]</sup>. He emphasizes his origins on "an island at the edge of the world", using literature to challenge and rectify Australia's official national imagination. His sense of marginalization is deeply rooted in personal experiences. Growing up on Tasmania, an island often overlooked by Australian authorities, Flanagan witnessed its status as a cross-cultural region, symbolizing the confluence of Australian cultures and serving as the foundation for his creative work. Historically known as Van Diemen's Land, Tasmania was inhabited mainly by convict descendants and Indigenous people. Following World War II, the island experienced an influx of immigrants, resulting in a region known for its diverse cultural traits. However, Tasmania and its cultural diversity were vehemently rejected by the mainstream Australian discourse, rendering them "invisible". This exclusion was so profound that "during the 1970s and 1980s, many Tasmanians grew up in ignorance, on the fringe, and with self-loathing" (Flanagan 2011:254)<sup>[4]</sup>.

Tasmania is more than just Flanagan's homeland, its turbulent and often violent past is the impetus for his writing (Flanagan 2015)<sup>[10]</sup>. In his early works, Flanagan embarked on the "Tasmania Trilogy", commencing with *Death of a River Guide*, followed by *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*, and culminating in *Gould's Book of Fish*. This trilogy engages with the identity struggles of marginalized groups, revisits Tasmania's history, questions the legitimacy of British imperialism, critiques both cultural and internal colonization, and reshapes Australia's identity and national imagination as a culturally hybrid entity. As Flanagan asserts, "Australia needs new stories. It is not enough to describe and report who and what we are, necessary as this is. We also need to re-imagine and reinvent ourselves, knowing that reality is our invention, not our destiny." (Flanagan 2011:96)<sup>[4]</sup>.

## 2 Ghosts in the World: Cultural Marginalization in Flanagan's Narratives

At the end of the 19th century, Australians utilized the concepts of "Britishness" and the "White Australia" policy to define their national identity. Thus, the aspiration to establish a racially homogenous Australia became a crucial aspect of the national identity vision. The "White Australia" consciousness, focused on creating an exclusively white Australian society, served as a driving force behind national formation and

development (Wang Yubo 2000:56)<sup>[9]</sup>. Guided by the “White Australia” vision, from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, Australian society’s mainstream standard of cultural identity was rooted in “Britishness”. This homogenous Australia and its culture deliberately overlooked internal cultural diversity. Under the umbrella of the “White Australia” national imagination, key Australian cultural groups such as Indigenous peoples and non-British immigrants, as depicted in Flanagan’s novels, gradually found themselves marginalized and relegated to the fringes, wandering the world like ghosts.

Flanagan’s debut work, *Death of a River Guide*, is permeated with an air of despair and colors all characters with an inescapable sense of fate. The protagonist, Aljaz Cosini, a river guide on the Franklin River, becomes trapped between rocks in the river after attempting to save a drowning tourist. As Aljaz faces imminent death, he acquires the ability to dream like an Indigenous person, reliving his childhood, upbringing, and his family’s history. The author disrupts the traditional Western linear narrative in the novel, employing fragmented storytelling to illustrate Aljaz’s identity predicament. The narrative unfolds through Aljaz’s perspective as a “wandering soul” after becoming one, merging reality and illusion. Aljaz’s memories shed light on the tragic destinies of marginalized groups on the fringes of life on the Tasmanian island.

Aljaz is born in Trieste, Italy. As he is about to leave his mother’s womb and enter the world, he senses something: “The walls pulsed and pushed solely with the purpose of expelling me from a world about which I felt nothing but good, and against which I had done nothing bad, unless my continued and vital growth from a few cells to a complete person can be construed as some aggressive action.” (Flanagan 1994:1-2)<sup>[1]</sup>. With a lineage encompassing convict ancestry, Indigenous heritage, and European migration, Aljaz’s father, Harry Lewis, descends from Tasmanian Indigenous people and convicts, while his mother, Sonja Cosini, is a Slovenian who fled to Italy to escape war. In 1957, the family of three returns to Harry’s homeland, Tasmania’s Hobart, as European immigrants. In the 1950s, an era of the “White Australia Policy”, Aljaz, with features characteristic of Tasmanian Indigenous people, such as “red haired, dark skinned, blue eyed, big nosed” (Flanagan 1994:18)<sup>[1]</sup>, is automatically placed in the societal margins, labelled as “wop” or “dago”.

With her Aboriginal Tasmanian features, Aljaz felt isolated at school. Adie Haynes, a boy similarly subject to discrimination, informs Aljaz that they are excluded because of their Indigenous identity. When Aljaz’s father passes away, he asks Mrs. Svevo what a “real Aboriginal” is, and she lifts a cracked mirror towards him, saying, “This is an Abo” (Flanagan 1994:250)<sup>[1]</sup>. The fragmented image in the broken mirror represents Aljaz’s hybrid and fragmented identity, contributing to the fracture and intersection of his identity. This intensifies his psychological sense of detachment from the world. Consequently, Aljaz feels that “I am nothing” (Flanagan 1994:254)<sup>[1]</sup>, leading to a state of aimless wandering. In truth, most people living on the Tasmanian island are descendants of Indigenous people or convicts, much like Aljaz, equally marginalized and “invisible” on the fringes of society.

During his decade of wandering, Aljaz takes on various jobs, operating harvesting machinery on a farm, selling alcohol at a bar, working at construction sites, and becoming a guide in Tasmania. During a conversation with another guide, Jason, he admits feeling entirely disconnected from the world, going with the flow and never

staying in one place for long, considering rootlessness a virtue. He perceives himself as an insignificant figure, an invisible nothingness. Before his impending death, Aljaz reflects on others' judgments of his life: "All that they say about me being lazy, about being a drifter, about having no future, about not knowing what I want out of life, maybe it is all true." (Flanagan 1994:13)<sup>[1]</sup>. Aljaz's struggle for survival mirrors the tragedy of Indigenous individuals under the predominance of the "White Australia" ideology in society.

In *The Sound Of One Hand Clapping*, Flanagan continues his exploration of non-British immigrants' experiences, highlighting the marginalization they face in Australia. Once again, he employs a non-linear narrative style, fragmenting and interweaving two main plotlines. One depicts the struggles of the Buloh family in Tasmania, while the other recalls their past in Slovenia. These two geographical spaces echo each other, creating a cross-temporal and cross-cultural dialogue.

The Buloh family, including Bojan Buloh, immigrates from war-torn Slovenia to Hobart, Tasmania. "The society they migrate to has various other cultures like American, Italian, Australian, etc. Thus, people from various cultures come and interact with each other." (Anisha Sindhu & Balkar Singh 6622)<sup>[15]</sup> In the mid-20th century, even though Australia had opened its immigration policy, the government preferred to receive immigrants of "pure white" Anglo-Celtic descent rather than "mixed white" individuals of Italian, Polish, Yugoslav, etc., origin. Under the influence of the "White Australia" policy and societal attitudes, these Southern European immigrants were confined to low-status jobs, denied equal social standing, and struggled to integrate into Australian society. "Australia does not allow any individuals of low character and qualities to be added to its population... No other races' individuals can join our society" (Wang Yubo 2011:97)<sup>[13]</sup>. Consequently, Bojan becomes a dam builder, living in a corrugated iron shack with only one bed, assigned by the government to prevent these European refugees (known derogatorily as "reffos") from stealing. For Bojan, it is a cell he could never think of as home.

The condescension and assimilation of non-British immigrants by Australian authorities is also evident in the citizenship ceremony: "For the Australian officials the naturalisation ceremony was a joyous, celebratory moment when the new Australians renounced their previous citizenship—their country, their past—to become Australians." (Flanagan 1997:42)<sup>[2]</sup>.

The phrase "becoming Australians" reflects the pursuit of a culturally British identity and an arrogant attitude towards people of color. This process aims to assimilate immigrants of diverse backgrounds into the customs and values of the host country (MacIntyre 2022:229)<sup>[8]</sup>. Bojan's plight epitomizes the struggles of Southern European immigrants living in Tasmania. In the novel, Flanagan uses the term "ghosts" to symbolize these marginalized groups excluded by Australia, unable to establish a sense of belonging or create a home. The novel portrays the survival predicament of non-British immigrants in a racial context, showing how they are perpetually unable to establish a close connection with Australia, failing to gain their own world and home. Thus, they become ghosts in the world.

Australia's implementation of the "White Australia" policy denies the influence of "non-Anglo-Saxon" cultural elements, spreading racial discrimination throughout the

country. The social orientation of a “pure white Australia” places Indigenous people and non-British immigrants under the shadow of racial discrimination, pushing them towards the fringes and preventing them from achieving a sense of belonging. This reflects the construction of Australia's early national imagination on the premise of exclusive racism, ensuring the legitimacy of white settler colonization and settlement on the continent. During the colonization of the Australian continent by white settlers, Indigenous people and non-British immigrants were perceived as threats to the settlers’ legitimacy. The novel’s characters like Aljaz and the Buloh family are seen as “outsiders”, illustrating the internal exclusivity and complexity characteristic of Australia's early national imagination construction.

### 3 Simulation and Reconstruction: Constructing a Sense of Belonging for Marginalized Individuals

Within the context of a cultural identity rooted in “Britishness”, protagonists in Flanagan's works embody a hybrid identity, caught in a dilemma and resembling isolated islands. By depicting their experiences of being lost, wandering, and taking root in Australia, Flanagan reshapes Australia’s cultural identity and national imagination characterized by “integration”. In his creations, the displacement of marginalized groups interacts with the ideal of a multicultural nation, disrupting Australia's mainstream and re-configuring reality.

In the mid-20th century, under the vision of “New Australians”, Australia promoted cultural assimilation, seeking to preserve a special ‘culture’—the unique ‘Australian way of life’—and exclude all other ‘cultures’ deemed incompatible and unassimilable” (Jon Stratton & Ien Ang 152)<sup>[6]</sup>. This cultural assimilation “entailed that all Australians with Indigenous and mixed descent would live like white Australians for a period of time” (MacIntyre 230)<sup>[8]</sup>.

As a result, the original cultures of Indigenous and non-British immigrant populations were negated. In order to gain acceptance, they had to mimic the lifestyles of white Australians, continuously conforming to mainstream standards. In *Death of a River Guide*, Aljaz’s grandmother Rose and her family go to great lengths to hide their convict and Indigenous heritage. They drink tea in the living room and imitate an Australian accent. Aunty Allie applies powder to her face to maintain a “white appearance” and takes pride in her fair skin. When Aljaz’s father Harry is puzzled about his identity and asks Aunty Allie if they have Indigenous blood, she vehemently rebuts, ““Don’t you go talking about decent people in that sort of way. It does no good, you hear?” (Flanagan 1994:201)<sup>[1]</sup>. Whether claiming to be a respected, elegant white woman (or insisting “We’re proper people”, they are constructing an illusion of “being pure white”, hoping to “whiten” themselves physically and mentally, thereby securing the legitimacy of their survival.

Not only Indigenous people but also non-British immigrants utilize the strategy of “simulation” to construct their identity. They aim to become Australian citizens by conforming to and aligning with mainstream discourse. In “The Sound of One Hand Clapping”, Maria, upon setting foot in Tasmania, starts teaching Sonia how to live like

an Australian. When young Sonia asks her mother why they drink tea, Maria replies, "Because to have a future you must forget the past" (Flanagan 1997:31)<sup>[2]</sup>. The phrase "You have to forget the past to have a future" metaphorically encapsulates Australia's official identity construction, based on forgetting the past and stripping heterogeneous cultural groups of their identities.

Australia's long-standing construction of a single ethnic cultural identity forces Indigenous people and non-British immigrants to conform to mainstream discourse. They simulate the lives of white Australians, attempting to mimic their language and way of life to gain societal acceptance. However, the relationship between "simulator" and "simulated" is not one of equality and freedom; rather, it reflects an imperial colonial ideology. Its essence is the collusion between the continent's internal elements and colonizers, a form of self-colonization. Despite their efforts to align with mainstream white culture, these marginalized groups still fail to attain national identity and a sense of belonging. In fact, the lives of Aljaz, Bojan, Sonia, and others can be summarized in one word: "drift". The perpetual state of "drift" for marginalized groups signifies the failure of their attempts to construct a homeland, requiring people from diverse cultural backgrounds to forget their original cultures and move towards cultural homogenization to attain a sense of belonging and identity. In Flanagan's perspective, this represents the failure of Australia's cultural identity and national imagination.

Flanagan reimagines the process of "whitening" experienced by non-English ethnic groups on the Australian continent. However, even after undergoing "whitening", the ethnic backgrounds and diverse skin colors of non-white immigrant individuals still keep them on the margins of mainstream society. They are neither completely Australian nor entirely separate from it; they are the "whitened" others (Wang Labao & Wang Lixia 25)<sup>[17]</sup>.

The protagonists ultimately return to their own ethnic history and culture, illustrating Flanagan's rejection of Australia's attempt to shape a national imagination of a "pure white Australia" through assimilation policies that erase cultural diversity. The cultural assimilation imposed on marginalized groups in Australia reflects the overwhelming dominance of British culture within Australian culture. It also reveals an ideological form of imperialism and the colonization of Australia's collective identity. Characters like Aljaz and Sonia in the novel, with their mixed and confused identities, symbolize the state of cultural amalgamation within Australian national culture.

As mentioned earlier, the fragmented and missing identities of these marginalized groups metaphorically represent the incompleteness of Australian identity. Simultaneously, their attempts to mimic mainstream Australian culture metaphorically mirror Australia's mimicry of British culture, revealing the imperial colonial ideology that still lingers in Australia due to its British colonial history. Flanagan uses the experiences of these marginalized groups to explore answers to the question of "who am I" in the context of national identity, challenging the rigid and mimicry-based construction of national identity by the upper echelons of Australian authorities. This challenge is Flanagan's way of scrutinizing Australia's relationship with its former colonial power.

Flanagan opposes Australia's adherence to British culture, rejecting the dominant role that "Britishness" occupies within Australian culture. In his view, just as the characters in his stories eventually return to their roots, Australia also needs to look

back and establish connections with its past to create a future. Australia's past points to the fact of cultural collision and amalgamation resulting from an unacknowledged colonial history. Unlike Britain, Australia's essence cannot be entirely found within its own borders. It is a hybrid product of Indigenous, immigrant, and Western civilizations. Therefore, Australia's cultural values should ideally embody the concept of "integration."

#### 4 Tasmania: The Origin of Australian National Culture

In addition to questioning the legitimacy of white identity from the perspective of marginalized groups, Flanagan also focuses on the island of Tasmania, which carries the "past" of Australia. He critiques the cultural colonization by the British Empire and the collaborative narrative shaped by Australian authorities and colonizers in constructing the "White Australia" national narrative. In his works, Flanagan often uses the remote island of Tasmania to reflect upon Australia itself, achieving a decentralizing shift in perspective. Through Tasmania, he addresses the legacy of British imperial culture and constructs an alternative Australian national imagination.

In *Gould's Book of Fish*, Flanagan employs magical realism to intertwine history and illusion, depicting the absurdity of colonizers' attempt to replicate England on Sarah Island, a place known for its harsh conditions and used for the exile of British convicts. This novel scrutinizes the ongoing existence and transformation of this issue in contemporary Australian society, revealing Australia's cultural mimicry, compromise, and collusion with the British Empire. The narrator of the novel, Sid Hammet, a former furniture dealer living in Tasmania, discovers "The Book of Fish" left behind by William Buelow Gould. This book, created by Gould during the 19th century while he was a convict in Australia, is a visual record of fish species and also includes historical facts, interspersed with Gould's peculiar fantasies. Gould was exiled to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) in 1825 for committing forgery in Bristol. He documented his experiences during his time on Sarah Island, including the massacre of Tasmanian Indigenous people by colonizers, the enslavement of convicts, and the modernization of Sarah Island.

After the massacre of Tasmania's Indigenous people, colonial officials attempted to impose Western modernization reforms on the island, aspiring to replicate England on this island. The island's ruler is a British convict impersonating the deceased Lieutenant Horace, who is amazed by the progress achieved through the European Industrial Revolution. He decides to create a progressive kingdom on Sarah Island, inspired by the advancements in Europe. However, his efforts lead to financial crises when the railway station and the casino he established fail. These initiatives highlight the impact of industrialization on this primitive island and indirectly allude to the impact of British civilization on Australia's Indigenous cultures.

The actions taken by the commander on the island represent a clash with the island's primal nature and point towards the cultural impact of British colonialism on Australia's Indigenous people. The Anglo-Saxon colonists aimed to transform Australia into a new England, implementing policies that aimed at cultural genocide and transplanting

European civilization onto Australian land. This is similar to the fictitious hymn composed by the recording officer Jorgensen: "Here we are destined by nature. To cut a window into Europe; And to gain a foothold by the sea." (Flanagan 2001:215)<sup>[3]</sup>. The commander employs the linguistic norms and scientific technologies of the British Empire to modernize Sarah Island, effectively attempting to turn it into another "England".

In reality, Australian settlers can be seen as part of colonial power, inheriting the imperial dominance of the British Empire from afar. Australians are both the bearers of civilized democracy and rebels against imperial culture, as well as disruptors of another colonized society—the Indigenous community. The colonists, represented by the commander, urgently aimed to transform the "backward" culture of Sarah Island using the concept of "progress", reflecting their identity anxiety stemming from their connection with the colony. In the process of imperial colonization, conquest, and transformation of Australia, the legitimacy of white identity for Western settlers is once again reinforced and solidified.

Tasmania symbolizes the concealed colonial history and cultural memory of Australia that the official narrative strives to hide. Flanagan believes that the entire Australian continent is attempting to forget its past, as he states, "Australia's ambition is to leave their own individual past behind" (Flanagan 1997:22)<sup>[2]</sup>. The reason Aljaz's grandmother and her family hide their Aboriginal and convict ancestry is because they consider it a "stain", and similarly, Australia seeks to cover this "stain" by means of forgetting. Why not? Look, the whole country does it. We pretend we're gentry and we're not. And you think it's bad. But do you ever wonder why they renamed Van Diemen's Land Tasmania? They wanted everyone to forget, that's why. (Flanagan 1994:67)<sup>[1]</sup>. Flanagan points out, The old name of Van Diemen's Land was to be erased, and along with it an idea of not only what was worst about us as human beings but also the possibility of what might be better; the manifold rebellion, not just political, but social and cultural, that had ensued in coming to understand how to live in this strange new world. (Flanagan 2011:223)<sup>[4]</sup>.

Tasmania's Indigenous culture, convict history, and colonized history collectively form the cultural DNA of Australia. This runs counter to the monocultural identity sculpted by the Australian mainland, and indeed, it is the origin of Australia's attribute of "integration". Flanagan's rewriting of Tasmania serves as a tracing back to Australia. In Flanagan's narrative, Tasmania represents the most authentic origins and history of Australia. It encapsulates the collision and fusion of indigenous and colonized cultures, representing the essence of Australian cultural diversity. It should be integrated into Australia's national imagination rather than forgotten or discarded. By returning to Australia's past and acknowledging Tasmania's history, we can see that it suggests that we are not dispossessed Europeans, but a muddy wash of peoples who were made anew in the merge of an old pre-industrial, pre-modern European culture with an extraordinary natural world and a remarkable black culture." (Flanagan 2011:221)<sup>[4]</sup>. It can be said that "integration" is the guiding principle and key to Flanagan's vision of the Australian spirit.



## 5 Love, Generosity, and Integration: Keywords of Flanagan's "Australian-ness"

Traditional "Australian-ness" in literature refers to the process in which the creative subject employs specific Australian elements and resources during the creative process to present a comprehensive Australian quality in their literary works. It is distinct from heterogeneous cultures and signifies a unique Australian cultural character.

Flanagan's concept of "Australian-ness" diverges from this traditional notion. It revolves around themes of love, integration, and generosity. Since Federation, Australian art was seen to have a mission to make a single national culture in the image of either its great coastal cities or its mainland dry outback. Whatever the aesthetic it wore as its motley, that was the goal". (Flanagan 2011:253)<sup>[4]</sup>. Flanagan rejects this narrow form of cultural nationalism. He sees Tasmania as representative of the coexistence and fusion of different cultures and ethnic groups within the Federation's territory. His reimagined national identity carries a cosmopolitan "integration" aspect.

As a public intellectual and social activist who voices his opinions through literature, Flanagan opposes various forms of injustice and condemns power structures that limit regional, racial, and memory diversity under the guise of progress, nationalism, and social advancement (Dawson 173)<sup>[12]</sup>. Flanagan refuses to be ensnared by narrow nationalism. He highlights the juxtaposition and fusion of different cultures and ethnic groups within Australia's territory, forming a world-centric concept of "integration".

Australia should create a space for this kind of "integration" to allow different cultural backgrounds to coexist harmoniously, enabling settlers from diverse cultures to find a sense of belonging. "it exists in tolerance and human decency . . ." (Flanagan, 2019)<sup>[14]</sup>. Flanagan documented an interview with Akif Lutfiu, a Kosovan refugee, symbolizing an open, generous, and beautiful Australian ideal. Akif loves Tasmania and Australia: Here in Tasmania, I am with twelve people, every- one different, different religion, different faith, it doesn't matter. I have Chinese friends, Japanese, Filipino, Italian, Bosnian, Croatian. Everyone I have here. (Flanagan 2011:35)<sup>[4]</sup>. Just as in Nelson Algren's depiction of America's underclass in his novel, the various "broken men" - freaks, prostitutes, queer people, and other marginalized individuals - are all searching for America and ultimately realize that they themselves are America. Similarly, Flanagan's Indigenous people and non-British immigrant characters are also searching for a place in Australia, ultimately representing Australia itself.

Flanagan once stated, Though a nation, Australia is not one country but many, and one of these is the country of Tasmania. (Flanagan 2011:253)<sup>[4]</sup>. In Flanagan's view, Australia's fundamental future lies in integration. All Australians can represent Australia - regardless of race, skin color, or language. They are individuals starting new lives in a foreign land, and equality and integration are the guiding principles of Australia. On a deeper level, behind "integration" lies love and generosity. Love and generosity allow different ethnicities to coexist equally in Australia. "We need to rediscover that as people we need others not to kill, but to love. And for that we need to rediscover that we are communities"(Flanagan 2011:13-14)<sup>[4]</sup>.

Richard Flanagan's works often revolve around stories of hardship, steeped in hues of despair, yet also brimming with love. Flanagan portrays through these narratives a

love that transcends race and class, bringing together people of different races and backgrounds. For Flanagan, the universal law of love surpasses the rise and fall of civilizations; it proclaims the brotherhood of humanity. Through his creative endeavor, Flanagan contemplates what it means to "become Australia" today, reshaping Australia's national imagination to embrace the "Other". Additionally, he employs the concept of "integration" to remind people of Australia's national attributes, using "love and generosity" to construct a new dream about Australia.

## 6 Conclusion

As a writer hailing from Tasmania, Richard Flanagan's unique perspective, rooted in a sense of shared identity and keen observation of Tasmania, informs his portrayal of Australia. His work to some extent dissolves the traditional mainstream discourse of White Australia, prompting a reevaluation and rewriting of ethnic relationships, colonial history, and cultural identity. For a postcolonial immigrant nation like Australia, its national imagination and identity are dynamic and continuously constructed. "Post-national Australian literary studies have been developing in two directions: cross-cultural comparisons and local re-readings"(Mead 551)<sup>[11]</sup>. In his novelistic creation, Flanagan combines cross-cultural narratives with writings about Australia's past, thereby redefining Australia and constructing new national imagery and cultural identity for its future. His works prompt a reacquaintance with the diversity, fusion, and heterogeneity within Australian culture, presenting a more inclusive national imagination to its people.

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