

The Memory Seeker

by **Ronald Niezen**

Black Rose Writing

(327pp)

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The historical novel The Memory Seeker is graphic in detailing the lasting, damaging effects of wars and falsehoods.

An investigator contends with his sense of self after discovering that the reality his parents sold him might be fabricated in Ronald Niezen's historical novel *The Memory Seeker*.

As a new hire in the International Criminal Court at The Hague, Peter Dekker is assigned to compile crucial evidence to build a case to convict war criminals in war-ravaged Mali. He is thrust into the heart of things when his investigation takes him to Timbuktu, where he is met with a mix of hospitality and hostility.

While Peter is away, his partner, Nora, helps him investigate his family's history. She interviews family members he didn't even know existed, discovering shocking and disturbing secrets that help him fill in the gaps left by the limited, watered-down stories his parents told him. For Nora, they foster a deeper understanding of Peter and his odd relationship with his father; for Peter, the possibility that his ancestry is marred by Nazi collaboration and war crimes makes him feel like an imposter but also causes him to become possessed by the need to uncover the truth.

The book's opening quote from Epicurus about the truth eventually coming out no matter how long it takes serves as a harbinger for its later events. Evocative, detailed, and sensory descriptions flesh the story out further, covering people's mannerisms, facial expressions, observations, and habits in the manner of witnessing. And Peter's work for the ICC sheds some light on its role and how it functions. The book also weaves factual events into its balanced narrative, such as Charles Taylor's attempt at a hunger strike as a form of protest.

The narration alternates well between Peter, investigating war crimes in Mali, and his aunt, recounting their family history and her personal experiences during WWII to Nora. Gruesome and diabolical activities, from both WWII and the Mali War, are revealed in the process. Indeed, the book explores several sensitive but crucial topics, including modern-day slavery, rape, domestic abuse, and mental health. Its useful chapter headings facilitate its orderly progression through this material, as does the engaging nature of Peter's quests. And Nora's interactions with people reveal social inconsideration for people with visual impairment: she is treated with impatience by the staff of a library she visits, for example. She is a sweet and concerned partner who balances Peter's bluntness and intensity by being a source of sympathy and putting emotions into words.

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GABRIELLA HARRISON (January 3, 2023)

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