

ENGLISH: *RANSOM*

'Are there any true heroes in Ransom?'

David Malouf's modern exploration of the Homeric Epic, the Iliad, challenges the true notion of heroism in even the toughest of times. The novella, set into five distinct parts provides voices of key characters who each naturally fit the role of a war hero. Yet as Ransom adds human emotions to the otherwise deeply masculine and often 'hollow' representations of 'warriors', Malouf encourages readers to emphasise with those who suffer the consequences of the acts of so-called 'heroes'. As a 'symbolic' leader, who remains 'a kingly distance from the human', Priam provides a contrasting ideal of heroism to his rival, 'Achilles the warrior'. Both have been successful symbols of prosperity, yet upon the deaths of Patroclus and Hector, their flaws become paramount to their being. Thus as Priam 'journey[s]' to bring closure to both himself and his kingdom, the role of the previously overlooked 'people' becomes apparent as the key 'ingredients' to the success of leaders. Malouf therefore uses Ransom to project a sense of heroism in the least expected of characters; those who are 'merely human'.

From the epilogue of the text, 'Achilles the great' is depicted as an ideologue for the typical qualities of a 'hero'. Achilles is a 'warrior', and as he pines at the 'sea' for the deeper calling of his mother, readers learn that he too has elements of the immortal in his blood. Indeed, Malouf's choice here to begin with such a recognizable character, known globally for his strength and lightness of 'foot', creates an expectation for greatness from a pre-determined hero. Yet something is amiss – this great 'fighter' refuses to fight in a stubborn defiance against the removal of his 'slave-girl', Briseis. Although heroes are often depicted as having a slight ego, Achilles' abandonment of his people for his own pride challenges the extent to which he is truly a hero. Thus from the beginning of his novel, Malouf intimates that, given 'human' qualities, 'heroes' are perhaps not at all what they seem.

It takes the death of Patroclus, Achilles' 'soul-mate' to break through his 'hollow-shield' of feigned bravery, and force him to, though unsuccessfully, attempt to present himself as a 'man'. Patroclus and Achilles have a deeply strong connection, as symbolized through Malouf's assertion that every day of their fighting 'was torture to him [Achilles]'. Despite this Patroclus works against Achilles, risking his own life to offer some hope for their 'people'. This selfless act portrays Patroclus as the true unlikely hero of this situation. Though his first appearance involved his killing of a peer, he has clearly learnt from his past, and ransomed his self-centrism for a 'human' compassion. Malouf therefore, through the character of Patroclus, suggests that it doesn't take a fame and fearlessness to be a true 'hero', it 'merely' takes a caring that lies beyond one's self.

Once readers are encouraged to look beyond the obvious 'heroes' of the text, it becomes clear that there are truly many 'heroes' of Ransom, their sufferings and victories just go unnoticed. Priam, the '[in]dispensable' leader of Troy, was formerly named Podarces. His change to Priam – 'the price paid' came from the sacrifice of his sister Hesione. Though her captor Heracles expects her to choose a 'trinket' of her own, a 'mirror' to look at herself with, she instead chooses Priam's 'freedom' in place of her own. Though Hesione only earns this brief mention in the novel, as a memory heavily suppressed, her silent actions are mirrored throughout the entirety of the novel. 'The Carter' Somax is one example, as he leaves his 'sick' daughter-in-law at home to help the supposed 'hero' Priam, complete his journey. A man with no divine heritage nor even of nobility, his selfless protection of the king defines Somax too as a hero. Malouf's use of subtlety therefore ironically speaks volumes, presenting the silent 'warriors' as the truest 'heroes' of all.

The epic Iliad of Homer is a quintessential representation of societal expectations and conceptions of a 'hero', and Malouf's Ransom is no exception. However in contrast, the 'human' element of Malouf's meditation challenges the truth in these notions. In the background of the heroic constructs of leaders lay those who provide the sacrificial element of the ransom, to provide the redemption for all around them. Thus through his revolutionary exploration of heroism, Malouf fills Ransom with many heroes, who are merely unspoken in their 'nature'.