

Essay 4: *Invictus* and *Ransom* celebrate the human spirit. Discuss the similarities and differences between how the texts explore this.

William Henley's poem *Invictus* is in itself a didactic teaching of what it means to be human. Indeed, no matter "how strait the gate", or "punishments the scroll", the irregular journey of life is full of both adversity and subsequent grief. Yet, such a dark perspective on the innate struggles we face from "pole to pole" is challenged in both Malouf's *Ransom* and Eastwood's film *Invictus* as they, rather, celebrate the "triumph" of overcoming obstacles in life and moving on from such pain. For them, it is the journey of acceptance and forgiveness that is valued and celebrated, rather than the pain and grief as an aspect of the 'human spirit.' And this is nonetheless hard. To do this, both authors resonate in the sense that such an accomplishment requires a connection and a breakdown of divisions. Such a journey requires compassion and empathy, no matter who it comes from or how simple it may seem. But, where *Invictus* also celebrates such attributes of being human and more specifically its influence on a wider society and its long-term effects, *Ransom* rather focuses on personal journeys and triumph. Such a lively celebration of humanity and its impact on a wider-scale is absent in Malouf's rendition of the *Illiad*. Though, side by side, these texts' kaleidoscopic representation of humanity and its up and downs is nonetheless a fulfilling one for both the "body and spirit" – an aspect that we must all value.

At the same time, Eastwood and Malouf celebrate the ability to connect and break down divisions as a pivotal aspect of being human, no matter how "simple" or even surprising such an ability can be. It is this deeper emotional connection on humanistic level that generates the kindred "spirit" both texts value. Initially intimidated and spellbound by Mandela's status as President, we see Pienaar waiting outside Mandela's office, tense in demeanour as Eastwood establish a clear social dichotomy between the two. From a low angle shot, the audience see Francois perched on the edge of his seat almost like a child outside the principal's office – uneasy at the aspect of speaking to someone of higher authority. However, when the doors are opened in a wide angle shot, it is almost as if Eastwood illustrates the two uniting; the social disparity previously established becomes less and less prominent as Pienaar steps further and further into his office. But it is really Mandela's humanity that unites them. At first, the captain is startled at Mandela's first few words: "how is your ankle?" – a very intimate and personal question. Yet the simplest and most human question in fact assuages Pienaar's previous perturbation as he relaxes quite visibly in Eastwood's eye-level frame – giving a sense of equality as well as comfort as opposed to the previous low angle frame. For Pienaar, the question is something a close friend would ask, not the President. And for Mandela, it shows his genuine concern for his people and indeed an attempt to dissipate the tension in the room – so, there is something quite strikingly human about this. And so, we see, then, as the captain gradually realises that Mandela is just like any man, it is here that Eastwood augments Mandela's humanity. His ability to connect on a more human level in order to break down the social dichotomy with something so simple is praised, and then to further question "has it healed?", a rather caring and thoughtful phrase, Eastwood celebrates not only the simplicity of humanity, but also the emotional connection that follows between two people when social class and hierarchy are disregarded.

And the insignificance of societal status is quite similar in Somax and Priam's encounter. Somax's humanity resonates in the stories of his family as he speaks to the Trojan king. Conversely, however, it is the working-class carter that has the capacity to break barriers between the two even though Priam has the upper hand in society – which is distinctly different from *Invictus*, where the President is the catalyst for this unification. Perhaps, then, it is here where Malouf more overtly establishes the ubiquity of humanity and in this way further augments its power to influence, no matter who it comes from. And much like Pienaar's childlike portrayal, Priam, "like an obedient toddler," is rather shown to be attentive and "moved" by Somax's "simple modesty" when he speaks of his family. For Priam, this is utterly new. Here, the 'modesty' Malouf underscores is one of genuine human compassion and vivid emotion, as Priam is so

engrossed in Somax's passionate tales that he "simply" wants to "start" him "up again" – Priam no longer sees Somax as a carter but as a man who has the heart and sincerity that "engages him", just as Pienaar is at ease with Mandela. And so, like the Springbok captain and Mandela, Somax and Priam too share a connection that is on a deeper human level – they are indeed, somewhat unified. *Invictus* and Ransom echo in the way they depict social barriers breaking down when simple 'small talk' is shared between two people. Both authors therefore resonate in this sense, as they value and commend the significance of sincere, chaste and even simple humanity.

However, this does not mean the journey of being human is easy. There is a distinct moment where Somax highlights that it is "in our nature" to experience grief and feel the pain, stressing that "we're tied that way, all of us" – implicative of the intrinsic ache we all feel in the face of hardship. And as he closes his fist and brings it "to his chest to indicate the heart," we are positioned to share the remorse and anguish he has for the death of his children, and also recognize the pervasiveness of such anguish in all of mankind. So, we see then, Malouf through this suggests that humanity is indeed painful at times. Yet, as the novel continues it is the "triumph" of overcoming hardship that makes being human painful yet fulfilling – a value that both texts appreciate and explore. As we follow the journeys of Jason the security guard and Priam the king, the struggle to overcome adversity is indeed shown to be difficult, although both authors agree that it is what makes humanity worthwhile to celebrate. Jason, who in the beginning is vindictive about the subjugation his people have faced, finds it difficult to accept Mandela's the letter to work together with the white security guards. This idea does indeed aggravate Jason, who prefers to remain in spite. The close-up frame encapsulating his exasperation is further augmented as he stomps out, with petulance, of Mandela's office in frustration and disapproval. Eastwood here communicates the innate desire to dwell on the pain of the past, but also the struggle and resilience it takes to move on even when Jason is left with no choice but to concur with his President's proposal. So, despite the history of racism, he acquiescently accepts it anyway. Jason has, in essence, put aside his previous revulsion and moved on – however difficult it may be. And because of this, in the final scenes we see Jason's handshake with Etienne – his fellow white security guard – as a symbol of unity and acceptance. This scene is coupled with the vibrant atmosphere bolstered by the rich, deep audio insinuating a feeling of triumph – not only of winning the Rugby cup, but also the humanistic value of moving on from the past. It was a difficult journey for Jason, and Eastwood in this way celebrates it.

We may then draw parallels with Priam, who, much like Jason does from Mandela, learns from Somax that "we go on, for all our losses." Priam's struggle to accept the death of his son Hector is voiced through Somax's recollection of seeing his own son's body "all hot and tossing from side to side." Here, it is a vivid and emotive allusion to Priam's own battle, as he himself is "sleepless on his couch" after witnessing Achilles dragging Hector's body in the sand around the walls of Troy. For Priam, it is so painful to think about the death of Hector that he cannot sleep – and in the instances that he can, it is only "so fitfully." Indeed, it is the grief that "racks" him – like the history of racism does to Jason, but Malouf, through Somax, celebrates the importance of moving on. What Priam learns is very similar to what Jason realises: both now know not to be "enfolded" in the "web" of grief or anger, but it is to rather untangle themselves from such a painful and restrictive past and indeed "go on." So, in the end, the jubilation that occupies Jason's facial expressions is mirrored also in Priam, who is "smiling" and feels "lighter" on the "journey out" –almost relieved after having taken the next step towards turning their mental anguish into fulfilment and "triumph." In essence, they have both overcome the hard yards of adversity and now, as a result, are in a less burdensome state of mind. Thus, Eastwood and Malouf here portray both the hardships that any human faces and the tough yet gratifying feeling of overcoming such adversity, which both authors agree is something to be celebrated.

Yet, where *Invictus* is a celebration of humanity and its wider ranging influence on society in the long run, *Ransom* focuses more on the individual journey of what it means to be human. It is true that Priam's triumph is only "provisional," and it is laudable that Priam personally feels triumphant in the journey he takes. But, we see that as Priam is ridden outside the Greek camps, the "barrows of the dead", which paint a disturbing image in the readers mind, is far from a celebration in that way – no celebration includes "piles" of dead bodies from an aftermath of a war. In *Ransom*, this disturbing cycle of warfare continues to exist. Even when Achilles foresees his son Neoptolemus inevitably kill Priam, consisting of vivid and lifelike illustrations of his son "enraged... body a furnace pouring out heat" of anger and rage, it is, in comparison, far from Eastwood's more positive and upbeat depiction of unity between two sides. This is not to say that Eastwood does not commend the difficult journey of developing humanity like that of Jason and Pienaar, but in *Invictus*, their journeys are more of a synecdoche of the wider development of unity and racial equality in South-Africa. And this is encapsulated through the waving of the South-African flag in the football stadium – a symbol of patriotism - and the quick cuts from different parts of the country which suggest ubiquitous accord, all immersed in the victory of the Springbok team rather than Malouf's individual triumph. Here, Eastwood is underlining the strong harmony of the country, ending the film with the idea of South-Africa being "one team, one country" - implicative of the racial barriers disintegrating as a result of Mandela steering the country in the right direction through the power of his human "spirit" and "soul." Yet, in *Ransom*, the such vibrant ending of communal unity is absent. As well as the sombre piles of dead bodies that Priam drives through, we witness individuals rather than a whole country "visited by a lightness that is both new and in return" – symbolising the personal triumph of being unbuckled from grief and the darker burdens of humanity. In fact, even in their celebration, Achilles and Priam are in separation – Achilles back in his hut, and Priam feeling triumphant on the road back to Troy. It is far from an outright celebration of the wider benefits that ensue from Mandela's humanity. Malouf, instead, focuses on praising the journey of two changed men who were able to reconcile and make personal amends. This harmony and unison that exists in *Invictus* is therefore absent in *Ransom*. Thus *Ransom*, on the one hand focusing yet rejoicing a man's journey of understanding what it means to be human, and *Invictus*, more overtly celebrating the unity and harmony of a wider society that has ensued from such powers of humanity.

Despite such a contrast, both texts applaud, although in different ways, the 'human spirit' as a symbol of one's 'unconquerable soul' and accomplishment. As Priam realises that Somax's human spirit is what will "satisfy" the "emptiness" of his grief, Malouf here illustrates the refreshing and calming aspects of humanity. And much like Eastwood, who also celebrates the ability of people to move on from the 'menace of the years,' when Pienaar emphasizes that "times change, and we need to change as well" to his Springbok team, it is a physical acknowledgment of what it means to overcome the past and embrace the joy of doing such a thing – much like Priam realises his "desire to fill out" his anguish. Malouf and Eastwood thus echo in this way, and at the same time accentuate the importance of breaking down divisions in order to achieve this. Humanity becomes the key that allows the doors to open for the connection and "fellow-feeling" in the cases of Priam and Somax, Pienaar and Mandela, and Jason and Etienne. So, whether it is the merriment of personal triumph in *Ransom*, or the wider-scale celebration of unity and humanity in *Invictus*, both authors argue that the human spirit is one to be valued.