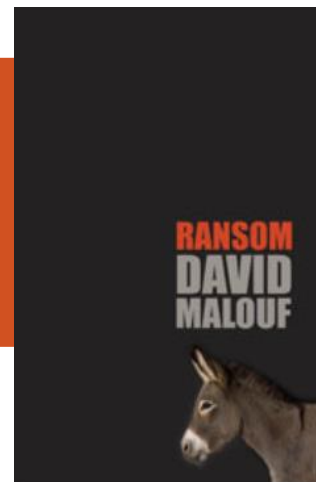




# Ransom

David Malouf



## Author Background

David Malouf is a novelist, short story writer, poet, and playwright. He was born in Queensland in 1934 to a Lebanese-Christian father and English-Jewish mother. He graduated from the University of Queensland in 1955, and moved to London, where he taught at Holland Park Comprehensive School before relocating to Birkenhead in 1962. He returned to Australia in 1968 and lectured at the University of Sydney.

After publishing collections of short stories, he became a full-time writer in 1978.

His 1993 novel *Remembering Babylon* won the International Dublin Literary Award in 1996 and was also shortlisted for the Booker Prize. He was awarded the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 2000, and he won the inaugural Australia-Asia Literary Award in 2008. In 2016, he received the Australia Council Award for Lifetime Achievement in Literature.

## Book Summary

*Ransom* is a reimagination of one of the most famous stories in all literature – Homer's *The Iliad*.

A novel of suffering, sorrow, and redemption, *Ransom* tells the story of the relationship between two grieving men at war: fierce Achilles, who has lost his dearest friend Patroclus in the siege of Troy at the hands of Hector, and King Priam, whose son Hector was in turn killed and savaged by a revenge-enraged Achilles. Each day, from the walls of Troy, King Priam watches Hector's body being dragged through dirt and stone behind Achilles' chariot. Racked with grief, King Priam travels with Beauty, the mule, and her handler, Somax, to offer Achilles a ransom for his son's body.

Each man's grief demands a confrontation with the other's if it is to be resolved: a resolution more compelling to both than the demands of war. And when the aged father and the murderer of his son meet, "the past and present blend, enemies exchange places, hatred turns to understanding, youth pities age mourning youth."

## Discussion Questions

- ❖ How is family important in this novel?
- ❖ What are the signs of Achilles' grief? Why does it overcome him?
- ❖ How does death haunt Achilles and Priam, respectively?
- ❖ *Ransom* demonstrates that it is a man's actions that define him. What does this mean in the context of the book?
- ❖ How are Achilles and Priam both changed by their encounter? What role does Somax play in their transformation?
- ❖ What is won by the act of ransom? Is anything lost?
- ❖ How is Beauty, the mule, portrayed in the book? What does she teach Priam about life?
- ❖ What is the effect of the focus on Somax and Beauty at the end of the novel?
- ❖ Malouf says of his book, "I think *Ransom's* popularity is based on the fact that the book presents itself as a simple story, and story-telling fulfills a primitive human need - to occupy someone else's life which temporarily relieves us of our own," he said. Does this ring true for you?

## References

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