

## David Malouf, *Ransom*: Key Quotations (OLLI-Rutledge-2016)

1. Achilles' childhood as a demigod (Thetis, a sea-nymph, is his mother) and his entry into the world of warriors in early adolescence:

"A gift he had taken as natural to him, the play of a dual self that had allowed him...to slip out of his hard boyish nature and become eel-like, fluid, weightless...had been withdrawn" (5)... "He had entered the rough world of men, where a man's acts follow him wherever he goes in the form of story. A world of pain, loss, dependency, bursts of violence and elation; of fatality and fatal contradiction [ending in] death" (6).

2. Achilles' entry into madness after he defeats Hector:

"...though he continued to stand upright and triumphant in the sun, his spirit set off on its own downward path and approached the borders of an unknown region...How long he passed in that twilight kingdom he would never know. It was another, more obdurate self that found its way back..." (23)

3. Priam explains to Hecuba why he must go in person, as a father, to Achilles :

"I believe...that the thing that is needed to cut this knot we are all tied in is something that has never before been done or thought of. something impossible. Something new." (58)

4. Somax, the peasant carter who has been coopted as Priam's driver to the Greek camp, deciding how to deal with his king, who has no experience outside the rituals of his court:

"He's like a child, he thought, a bit on the slow side. Or a man who's gone wandering in his sleep and doesn't know where he is or how he got there." (115)

5. Priam speaking about Somax's native tactfulness:

"...it was not reverence; it lacked only a knowledge of the forms. And out here, perhaps. ..such forms might not be altogether useful" (117).

6. Priam's memories of a hunt during which he was allowed only the final, ceremonial spear-cast before a warrior made the death-stroke:

"He was symbolically at the center, as form and his own royal dignity demanded, but could have no part in the merely physical business..." and "His whole life was like that,...But out here...everything was just itself. That was what seemed new." (123-124)

7. Priam, taking courage, naming himself, his rank, and making his request:

"I have come to you, Achilles, just as you see me, just as I am, to ask you, man to man, as a father, for the body of my son. To ransom and bring him home." (175)

[Cf: "Honor then the gods, Achilleus, and take pity upon me/remembering your father, yet I am still more pitiful;/I have gone through what no other mortal on earth has gone through;/I put my lips to the hands of the man who has killed my children." (Homer, *The Iliad*, XXIV, 503-506)]

8. Achilles:

"Something in him has freed itself and fallen away. A need, an obligation. Everything around him is subtly changed, the body at his feet, in the rightness of its imperturbable calm, his own body,...Some cleansing emotion that flooded through him--when?--when Priam first appeared to him in the figure of his father?--has cleared his heart of the smoky poison that clogged and thickened in every motion so that whatever he turned his gaze on was clouded and dark (189 - 190)."

9. Achilles:

"He regards Hector's body now, and the clean-limbed perfection of it, the splendour of the warrior who has won an honourable death, is no longer an affront.

"The affection of the gods for a man whose end it was part of his own accomplished life to accomplish he can now take as an honour intended also to himself. And that, he sees, is how it might have been from the start, and this the first, not the twelfth night. (190)."

10. Priam:

"It is only a provisional triumph, of course;...And what sort of triumph is it to be bringing home the body of a son? But he has done something for which he will be remembered for as long as such stories are told. He has stepped into a space that till now was uninhabited and found a way to fill it. Not as he filled his old role as king...

"Look, he wants to shout, I am still here but the *I* is different. I come as a man of sorrow bringing the body of my son for burial, but I come also as the hero of the deed that till now was never attempted (208-209)."