

## **Article by Dr Kim Edwards**

### ***Ransom***

**By David Malouf**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Why do some stories endure? What is it about some tales that fires our imaginations, haunts our dreams, and colours our own lives so much we can't stop thinking, talking and writing about them? For Australian novelist David Malouf, it was the way in which an ancient myth of battle and fallen heroes connected with his own personal experience of growing up during wartime – this inspired him to respond to and retrace the legendary story of Troy with his own visions and revisions.

Stories always beget stories, changing over time to reach out to new audiences. Malouf's novel *Ransom* takes up and shakes up an old epic tale of the clashing battles we fight both in the world and inside our own heads. It reminds us why story-telling (and retelling) is so important in preserving our histories, explaining and enriching our own lives and experiences, foretelling our futures.

#### **BRIEF SYNOPSIS**

Achilles is inconsolable over the death of his companion Patroclus in battle. Even killing the killer was not vengeance enough: he now desecrates the corpse of Trojan prince Hector daily, dragging it behind his chariot in a shameful fit of rage and pain.

King Priam determines to approach his enemy Achilles as an ordinary man and father, to offer him a ransom of gold in return for his son's body. The royal court, including his wife Hecuba, are horrified, but he will not be swayed.

Bewildered local carter Somax is subsequently commissioned to drive Priam to the Greek camp. On the journey he casually shares stories of common life and simple pleasures, causing Priam to rethink his own philosophies about family, death and the art of living.

A mysterious young man who escorts them safely to their destination is revealed to be the god Hermes. Achilles momentarily mistakes Priam for his own father and is surprisingly respectful, while Priam himself has gained humility over the course of the journey. Consequently the ransom is accepted, and the two men negotiate a brief period of peace for mourning and funeral rites.

Hector's death heralds the fall of Troy, the murder of Priam at the hands of Achilles' son Neoptolemus, and the impending fate of the great warrior himself. For a brief period, however, the extraordinary experience has made both king and soldier into new men, while Somax is left to resume his simple life, armed only with an amazing story his listeners cannot believe.

## **BACKGROUND & CONTEXT**

*Ransom* is a re-imagining of events and characters from the ancient Trojan War in Greek mythology, as told in Homer's *The Iliad*. This epic poem and its sequel *The Odyssey* are the ur-texts of ancient literature: the first (and some scholars argue, the best) works to survive intact for posterity. They were the original blockbuster action stories: they have influenced virtually all adventure tales, war narratives and heroic journey myths since, and helped shape our own modern ideas of heroism and gallantry.

The identity of their creator 'Homer' is a two-thousand year-old mystery. He was certainly not a writer – these poems were composed earlier than the sixth century BC, and are part of an oral tradition of story-telling. Yet he must have been a sophisticated and experienced raconteur, for these are not primitive or emergent tales but mature and profound works of art, as evidenced by the fact

that they still make for exciting and energised reading, even centuries later and in translation.

The unifying factor in the art and literature of classical Greece is the focus on humanity, and discovering man's place in the world. *The Iliad* considers this in the context of war and religion, as its characters attempt to understand themselves and their gods. *Ransom* explores this further in a close and emotive examination of some of the key players.

The original myth of the Trojan War began with the prince, Paris. He fell in love with Helen, the wife of a Greek king Menelaus, and carried her back with him to Troy. Menelaus responded by raising a huge armada to force her return. (Over a century and a half later, Christopher Marlowe famously called Helen of Troy 'the face that launch'd a thousand ships' in his play *Doctor Faustus*). Led by Menelaus and his brother Agamemnon, the Greek army laid siege to Troy for nine years, but were unable to take the city. *The Iliad* takes up the story in the tenth year, when Agamemnon insulted Achilles by taking from him a slave-girl awarded as a war prize (we begin to notice the position of women being revealed here, and the recurring theme of stealing loved ones and being forced to return them). Achilles withdraws from battle, and the Greeks begin to lose until Patroclus takes his place to boost morale, but is cut down in his stead. Incensed with grief, Achilles returns to the fray, finally killing his great rival the Trojan champion Hector and turning the tide against Troy.

It is here in book twenty-four (the final chapter) of Homer's epic that Malouf intervenes with a new perspective on the story. Like its source, this version intermingles the real and the mythological (Troy was a real place and the site of great war, but even in Homer's time the pantheon of Greek gods had become symbolic and a narrative device), yet in considering this cultural context, *Ransom* begins to delicately explore the nexus of the prosaic and the divine, and of history and fiction.

## **STRUCTURE, LANGUAGE & STYLE**

### **Shifting Perspectives**

‘The sea has many voices.’ (p.3)

Chapter divisions in Malouf’s novel correspond with different character perspectives and changes in time, location and scene:

- I. Dawn on the bare, desolate seashore and war-torn plains, from the perspective of Achilles.
- II. Priam’s bustling, urban day inside private and enclosed spaces of bedchambers and inner courts.
- III. Somax’s voice as storyteller dominates his realm: the fertile natural world between encampment and city.
- IV. The evening introspection of Achilles contrasts with loud military camp life and the new perspectives of Priam and Somax.
- V. A new day dawns as the three protagonists return to their normal roles, contemplating the impact the experience has had upon their lives.

Consider how these places and their inhabitants are being characterised. They exist in close geographical proximity, but they are worlds apart: what unites and separates them? Moreover, this is the passing of a single day in a ten-year war – think about the metaphors of time at play. Malouf presents the life-cycle of man, contrasting traditional male roles through age, class and status which are evoked by the changing perspectives of young warrior, elderly king and common man.

### **Embedded narratives**

Many stories are told within the story to unveil the past or foreshadow the future, including:

- Achilles and Patroclus’ first meeting (p.10–13)

- Priam's childhood (p.63–79)
- Somax's home life (p.118–121, 130–135)
- Priam's impending death (p.212–214).

This interweaving of narratives highlights the significance of causality in the fall of Troy: how one event can create a terrible chain of conflict and how a single life or death can mark an end to an entire family, city or history.

## **Style**

### ***Present Tense***

Interestingly this novel set in ancient times is written predominantly in present tense: 'The sun is already up and has begun to burn off the crisp white groundfrost as they leave the stockade wall behind them.' (p.205) This gives a sense of immediacy and urgency to the plot, emphasising the question of free choice – whether a decision made in that moment can actually rewrite the characters' futures.

### ***Imagery***

Malouf's style is lyrical and elegant. From the outset his poetic language, careful metaphor and complex imagery evokes the natural world, the changing seasons and the elemental forces: 'The sea surface bellies and glistens, a lustrous silver-blue – a membrane stretched to a fine transparency...' (p.3) He shows us a constant tension between the domestic, hierarchical and civilised in society and the violent, animalistic, emotional side of human nature, and juxtaposes the ethereal and divine with the earthy and mortal.

## **CHARACTERS & RELATIONSHIPS**

*Ransom* captures three men considering their fractured sense of self, the limitations of their social roles and their transitory place in the world and the annals of history. They are each standing on the brink of extraordinary self-revelations: 'Look, he wants to shout, I am here, but the *I* is different.' (p.209) It is their moment of 'iconoclasm' – of image-breaking, where everything you

thought you knew must be destroyed and recreated anew: 'Whatever it was is over. Or, mysteriously, has just begun.' (p.107)

## **Achilles**

'(T)his boldest, most ferocious, more unpredictable of the Greeks.' (p.197)

Achilles is a man divided. As the legendary son of the Greek hero Peleus and the Nereid (sea nymph)Thetis, he exists on the border between the mortal world of his father and the divine realm of his goddess mother. He is the greatest warrior the Greeks have ever seen, yet he is still a man with flaws and weaknesses.

He may be a fearless fighter and mighty military leader with his 'whole terrible machinery' (p.199), but Achilles is also proud, vindictive, jealous and petulant. His troops think he has gone mad when he defies his role as warrior and hero and 'breaks daily every rule they have been taught to live by' (p.29) – first over the insult of the stolen slave girl and then over the death of his companion. As a child he learnt to never 'betray to others what he felt' (p.5), but this left him no coping mechanisms for dealing with grief. He thus indulges his baser passions and ignoble wrath like a 'wolf, a violator of every law of gods and men' (p.58).

However, Achilles is also a father; his love for his absent son is 'a sore spot whose ache he has long repressed'. (p.183) The offer of the ransom instigates the realisation of his mortal place in an immortal male lineage: 'Now, in the aftermath of Priam's words, he sees beyond Priam... his father Peleus, and beyond him another, himself, the old man he will never be.' (p.185) He feels himself cleansed of the corrupting, dangerous emotions that had perverted his love for Patroclus, and discovers a calming sense of order and fulfillment in the way his life has unfolded. In his epiphany, he has revealed 'the true Achilles, the one he has come all this way to find' (p.190), and learnt he is an honorable, empathetic and whole man.

## **Priam**

'He is obliged... to think of the king's sacred body... as at once a body like any other and an abstract of the lands he represents, their living map.' (p.43)

Priam is a metonym: his name and body have come to represent his role and his country. The city of Troy is called Priam interchangeably in *The Iliad*, and for Malouf's character, the division between the personal and political spheres and the public and the private self has collapsed almost entirely. His resulting civic function is 'to stand still at the centre, both actual and symbolic in the same breath, and to experience those dual states quite naturally as one.' (p.44)

However, Priam acknowledges that, like Achilles, he has been unable to reconcile this duality, and repressed the one in order to fulfill the other: 'Ordinary desires and needs and feelings are not unknown to you... (but) you have, you can have, in your kingly role, no part in them...' (p.84) His life has been one of physical and emotional abstinence ('this lack in me...' p.77), but also like Achilles, he has an intense spirituality and connection to the gods that is 'both a blessing and an awful responsibility' (p.43). It is this gift of foresight that sparks off unprecedented thought and action with his outrageous plan to plead for Hector's body: '(T)he 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.' (p.58)

This is not a 'classical' idea. Desperate times demand a new kind of heroism: Priam's plan foreshadows modern, humanist thought that is rooted in peaceable notions of empathy, philanthropy and ethics. In an era of violence and ceremony and legends-in-the-making, he wonders, 'Mightn't it be time for me to expose myself at last to what is merely human? To learn a little of what that might be, and what it is to bear it as others do?' (p.85) His name itself means 'ransom'; the story of his sister rescuing him from slavery and ignominy has tainted his life ever since. He hopes daring to perform a new innovative act will 'stand forever as proof of what I was' (p.90). Having 'stepped into a space that

till now was uninhabited and found a way to fill it' (p.208), he discovers curiosity, humility, and a sense of his own humanity.

## **Somax**

'We're children of nature, my lord. Of the earth, as well as of the gods.' (p.121)

It takes the humble carter Somax 'to know a little about what is good for the body as well as the spirit' (p.120), and thus have balance and purpose in his life while his new acquaintances struggle for meaning and equilibrium. Somax rejoices in the quotidian, the everyday life. He takes pride and pleasure in the little things, like good food and a yarn, playing with children or stopping to cool your feet after a long drive. Consequently he has developed simple, honest, enduring philosophies about life, death, the world, and his place in it. He knows his name and his role in society and it 'fits him, he has always thought, rather well.' (p.98). He is a devoted family man whose relationships have been warm, human and affectionate, as opposed to the cool distance Priam keeps, or the overwrought passion Achilles feels.

Somax is also attuned to the natural and animal world, and his inherent pragmatism allows him a degree of insight and resilience denied to other characters: he recognises an aggrandising augury (supposedly from Zeus) is ridiculous because the bird is simply a chickenhawk (p.101). He is wonderfully tactful in caring for his king, and is unintimidated by the presence of Hermes '(a)s if the arrival of a god on the scene was in his life quite an ordinary occurrence.' (p.160) His gentle assumption, '(T)here's many things we don't know, sir. The worst happens, and there, it's done. The fleas go on biting. The sun comes up again' (p.135), is validated by the final section of the novel as day dawns and the characters are temporarily at peace with themselves and their mortality.



## **Patroclus**

'(H)is soulmate and companion since childhood' (p.10).

Brought to Peleus' court as a child seeking asylum for murder, Patroclus becomes an adoptive brother to Achilles and the 'new centre' (p.14) of his life. Unequal in age, status and fame, they nevertheless mirror each other right until the fatal moment when Patroclus begs to wear Achilles' armour and, 'dressed like him and moving as he did' (p.19), is hewn down in his place.

Despite (or perhaps because of) being tainted a killer in his childhood, Patroclus transcends from murderer to moraliser as an adult. His 'pure heart' (p.16) is torn between his love for Achilles and disappointment at the unheroic sulking of his brother-in-arms. Unlike Achilles, Patroclus is able to put the greater good before petty personal issues. His sense of humility and love for his fellow man is ultimately what kills him; Achilles' exorbitant grief at his death is thus infused with a sense of guilt.

## **Hecuba**

'This kind of women's talk unnerves him. It is not in his sphere.' (p.52)

Hecuba is Priam's wise, proud wife, and they share a profound and tender love that has survived age and other women. His instant need to tell her his plan reminds us that even in this patriarchal society there are powerful women who influence the decisions of men (indeed, the Trojan War is fought for the sake of a woman, as is Achilles' refusal to fight). However, the female world and women's work remains mysterious and mystical to the protagonists. Priam is disturbed by the fury of a mother's grief as Hecuba rages at being a woman who can only sit and weep when, if she caught Achilles, she'd 'tear his heart out and eat it raw' (p.51). Achilles is intrigued but 'awkward and out of place' (p.193) in the women's tent where Hector's body is washed, and Somax can only marvel at the talents and charms of his daughter-in-law, granddaughter and favourite mule Beauty. For all their power and posturing, the novel concludes that all men both begin and end up 'in the hands of women' (p.192).

## **Hermes**

'If he really was the celestial joker – messenger, thief, trickster, escort of souls to the underworld – where were they heading?' (p.159)

Hermes is an unexpected arrival in the narrative. Unlike Achilles' goddess mother and Isis in Priam's dream, this god is neither ethereal nor spiritual. He is arrogant and impudent: '(H)is bluster was that of a youth who liked to hear his own voice and strike poses' (p.145). His disguise provokes the question of appearance versus true nature (Priam's simple robe for example, and Patroclus and then Hector wore borrowed armour), and his attitude aligns him with other rash young men like Achilles, who hold the fates of others and the balance of power in their hands. His appearance suggests the gods have a vested interest in this event, but his departure at the gates of the Greek camp implies the mortal characters are taking back the reins of their destinies.

## **Hector**

'(T)his moment was sacred; a meeting that from the beginning had been the clear goal of their lives and the final achievement of what they were.' (p.23)

Achilles sees his own fate in Hector, his 'blood' brother and shadow-self. Killing him to avenge Patroclus meant 'aiming beyond Hector at himself' (p.22), so that the death becomes a metaphoric suicide – 'watching for a second time the dreamlike enactment of his own' (p.22) – as it marks his period of impotence as a hero and loss of emotional control. However, Achilles finally realises Hector's noble death, sanctioned by the gods, fulfilled his chosen role as a warrior, helping to ease his own fears and sooth his soul-searching.

## **THEMES, IDEAS & VALUES**

### **Power of language and story-telling**

'...(L)ost, as they all are, in a story he might be hearing for the first time and which has not yet found its end.' (p.12)

Think of a story, a 'tale every child knows' (p.63). Priam is speaking of his origins, but Malouf is also reminding us of our own reading experience here in revisiting a famous legend with him.

Now '(i)magine then, what it was like to be that child. To actually stand as I did at the centre of it, of what was not a story, not yet, but a real happening...' (p.64). *Ransom* is fuelled by Malouf's desire to infuse new life and realism into an epic poem, to reinvent and revitalise ancient literature for a modern audience to imagine themselves into.

Within the context of *Ransom*, stories are told because of the need to understand past experience, to express emotions, and to analyse one's self. As a 'spinner of tales' (p.157), Somax has learnt how to articulate and grow into his life and relationships, while Priam (who has always had an Idaeus to 'find words' (p.53) for him) discovers the power, creativity and delight of speaking for himself, having known '(w)hat it means... to be one of those who have no story that will ever be told.' (p.75) Moreover, stories are not only important on a personal level, but they also ensure immortality, for 'a man's acts follow him wherever he goes in the form of story.' (p.6) The actions of Priam and Achilles will thus be remembered as 'the stuff of legend' (p.216) and the history of Troy preserved for future generations.

However, Somax 'like most storytellers, is a stealer of other men's tales, of other men's lives' (p.218). Like Priam's soothsaying daughter Cassandra, he is fated not to be believed when telling the truth. But even fictional stories can contain truths about the human condition, and how the world works. Malouf thus invites us to use his novel to understand ourselves and our own experiences.

In a novel absorbed with story-telling, '(w)ords... can be the agents of what is new, of what is conceivable and can be thought and let loose upon the world.' (p.61) The power of language is commanding and compelling in *Ransom*, from the formal, grandiose oratory of the court, to Somax's captivating, prattling freedom of speech.

However, silence can also be powerful and expressive in political and social contexts by 'keeping hidden and therefore mysterious, one's true intent' (p.126), and on a personal level when 'there might be no words, as there is no visible form' (p.78) for the depth of feeling. Characters are 'afraid of where silence might take them' (p.168).

### **Death, Grief and Loss**

'(S)elf-consciousness ... at times makes us strange to ourselves and darkly divided...' (p.31)

Achilles claims war is necessary for men to express themselves with violence before returning, 'refreshed in spirit, to being a good farmer again' (p.7). He is therefore lost and troubled when vengeance does not assuage his grief. On facing his son's unwitting murderer, Beauty the mule, Somax explains 'I felt like punching her where she stood. But what could have been the good of that? That wouldn't have brought him back.' (p.141) *Ransom* speculates about what violence can and can't solve, and whether men are defined by violence as a display of masculinity, power and self-knowledge.

Priam knows, 'We are mortals, not gods. We die. Death is in our nature... And for that reason, we should have pity for one another's losses' (p.184). The novel hinges upon death and the character's inability to deal with grief and loss: Achilles has sacrificed animals, slaughtered Trojan prisoners and desecrates Hector's body daily, but his unchannelled pain at the death of Patroclus is still unappeased. Priam, meanwhile, has wept over the fall of Hector as is 'proper to his grief' (p.40), but has been 'saved' (p.138) from real mourning by suppressing his paternal affections and natural emotions. These perverse and disproportionate responses to the fear of dying and the loss of loved ones are

realigned in Somax, who knows the secret to surviving grief. 'It leaves a gap you can't ignore. It's there. Always...' (p.134), but 'truth is, we don't just lie down and die, do we, sir? We go on. For all our losses' (p.131) because life is fleeting and beautiful, and like the temporary truce in place at the end of the novel, in the midst of war and death there is always 'a time for living' (p.198).

### **Fate versus free will**

'Not a mockery my friend, but the way things *are*. Not the way they must be, but the way they have turned out. In a world that is also subject to chance.' (p.46)

Traditionally the Greek gods are ruthless, capricious, play favourites and cheat constantly in the games they make of men's lives: 'A joke of the kind the gods delight in, who joke darkly.' (p.201) Achilles' mother is inscrutable and absent, Hermes is contemptuous and self-important, and while Jove's message is meant to be 'clear for all to see' (p.102), the portent is simply being misread.

But in Priam's dream vision of the messenger goddess Iris, she dares suggest that the gods do not control men's destiny entirely, which is a 'dangerous' and 'blasphemous' idea. The danger lies not only in offending deities but in being forced to take responsibility for your own actions – for if it is not fate and the will of the gods at fault, then it is *you*. 'Imagine what it would lead to, the violence. Imagine the panic it would spread.' (p.62) However, there is also 'a kind of freedom in that' (p.59), because the notion of chance 'offers a kind of opening. The opportunity to act for ourselves. To try something that might force events into a different course.' (p.61)

To what extent then are the mortal characters controlled by the roles they have been born into, or come to assume? Achilles knows he will die young – 'That is fated and inevitable' (p.9), yet he resists this knowledge fiercely. But in Priam's independent act of rebellion against tradition, 'the end which is so close now, seems to have been miraculously suspended.' (p.211)

Neoptolemus 'knows already that the last days of this story belong to him' (p.212). The question is therefore whether the revelations of the three protagonists are pointless, if the ending is to be the same. Ultimately, Priam sees the freedom to make a choice as a ransom paid: the price of the new is facing the unknown – we pay for our mortal lives with death, and the chance a story can end in a different way is 'the road my other self went down' (p.68).

## **DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS**

### **Doubling**

Achilles identified so strongly with a story that he felt 'mated... darkly, flesh to ghost' (p.15) with the boy young Patroclus killed. For Achilles, Patroclus is 'the man who has half himself' (p.18), whilst fighting Hector was 'like trying to deceive or outguess his shadow' (p.22). The mirroring of these characters reveals both their likenesses and differences – and can be compared with the next generation of 'young men... in love with their own importance' (p.161):

- cautious Automedon and hungry Alcimus in the Greek camp
- Somax's son whose 'strength was the death of him' (p.133), died showing off like Achilles, Patroclus and Hector
- Neoptolemus 'the small mimic hero ... posturing with his miniature sword' (p.184) who will make a bloody ignoble mess of the death of Priam because '(t)o be a son to the great Achilles is a burden.' (p.213)

What is being suggested about masculine culture, growing up and male bonding?

Another male role, fatherhood, is also depicted in various ways: Somax points to his heart and notes '(I)t's in our nature. We're tied that way, all of us. Tied here' (p.131). However, Priam suspects he is a very different kind of parent and wonders if 'what it was to lose a son ... (meant) the same for him as it did for the driver' (p.136), while Achilles has also been an absent father and misses his own father so much he mistakes Priam for him. When these three disparate men converge for the event that will shape the narrative and history of Troy, they are also united in mingled amusement and bemusement at being exposed

to new worlds and new words, catching glimpses into lives and stories so alien to their own experiences.

### **ESSAY TOPICS (10 topics)**

1. In a world ruled by ancient gods, *Ransom* contemplates the notion of free will. How free are the characters to defy their roles and change their destinies?
2. Somax is upset at being renamed Idaeus. What is the power and function of names in *Ransom*?
3. *Ransom* is a novel of fathers and sons. What is being revealed about the pressures of both parenting and growing up?
4. Does violence solve anything in *Ransom*?
5. Achilles feels as if he has found himself by the end of the novel. What does he discover about the 'true Achilles'?
6. *Ransom* depicts a determinedly male world, where the women are only incidental characters. Do you agree?
7. Malouf's novel demonstrates the power of story-telling in keeping history alive for us. Discuss.
8. Are there any true heroes in *Ransom*?
9. Priam's actions are ultimately pointless because Troy is destined to fall. Discuss.
10. Words speak louder than actions in *Ransom*. Do you agree?

## ANALYSING A SAMPLE QUESTION

**'To take on the lighter bond of being simply a man. Perhaps that is the real gift I have to bring him. Perhaps that is the ransom.'** (p.60). **What is the significance of the title of Malouf's novel?**

Fully understanding key topic terms is an important place to begin when responding to an essay question:

- As a noun, 'ransom' means the release of a property or person for a price and is also the name of the price or payment itself.
- As a verb, it can mean to redeem or rescue, or to atone or expiate.

Now think through some of the ways the word is being used in the novel...

- Literally, it is the treasure being offered to reclaim Hector's body – but it is also Priam being humble and vulnerable in offering himself up to Achilles ('I have now to be ransomed a second time...' p.79)
- Priam's name translates as 'ransom' and was given to him as a child when his sister became the 'price paid, the gift given to buy your brother back from the dead' (p.74)
- The Greeks are unintentionally paying a ransom for Helen of Troy in blood and battle, Achilles unconsciously paid for his resentment of a petty slight with Patroclus' life and Priam learns that mortality, 'that fee paid in advance' (p.184) is the price of living
- Priam is redeeming Hector, but he is also saving Achilles from disgrace, while Achilles is relieving him from his grief
- Somax is also able to redeem Priam and then Achilles by innocently showing them new ways to live and think: the 'price of the new' is facing the unknown, but 'what was new could also be pleasurable' (p.122)
- Priam and Achilles both feel the need to atone for their respective choices and roles in life – Priam for the fate of his city and the loss of his son, and Achilles for his unheroic behaviour and his disrespect of death
- The topic quote also suggests there is a price paid in being a great hero or a mighty warrior, and the 'real ransom' is the chance to simply be a man – to be yourself and not your role.



Make sure you draw your ideas and discoveries back to the topic itself. Malouf's title therefore:

- offers a complex array of meanings
- reminds us of the series of key events that initiate the narrative
- illustrates character connections and comparisons
- explores themes of loss and gain, life and death, and self-identity.

## THE TEXT AND FURTHER READING

### The Text

Malouf, David 2009, *Ransom*, Random House Australia, North Sydney.

### Further Reading

*Homer: The Iliad* 1998, trans. Robert Fagles, Penguin Books, New York.

*Homer: The Iliad* 1987, trans. Martin Hammond, Penguin Books, London.

*The Iliad of Homer* 1961, trans. Richmond Lattimore, University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London.

*The Odyssey of Homer* 1967, trans. Richmond Lattimore, Harper Perennial, New York.

[Malouf's source material is well worth reading in a good translation. Lattimore is a favourite for good story-telling and scholarly accuracy, while Fagles focuses on poetic verse and Hammond turns the narrative into a novel form. Like *Ransom*, *The Odyssey* further undermines traditional heroic values and notions of self-identity.]

Graves, Robert 1992, *The Greek Myths: The Complete Edition*, Penguin Books, London.

[There are lots of excellent texts on Greek mythology, but Graves' work is wonderfully catalogued, indexed and readable, where each chapter tells the stories, then follows with corresponding source material and scholarly analysis.]

Malouf, David 2009, Interview with Romana Koval on 'The Book Show', *ABC Radio National*, 1 April,  
<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/bookshow/stories/2009/2527712.htm>

Malouf, David 1983, *Fly Away Peter*, Penguin Books, Melbourne.

Malouf, David 1980, *An Imaginary Life*, Pan Macmillan, Sydney.

Malouf, David 1994, *Remembering Babylon*, Vintage, London.

[Malouf's novels have recurring themes and ideas: for example, these three texts share *Ransom's* concerns with the significance of history and narrative, violence in humanity, masculine cultures, dislocation and loss, and nature and the poetic.]

Smith, Yvonne 2009, 'Beauty's Clear, Round Eye: David Malouf's *Ransom*', *Southerly Long Paddock* 4 (69/1),  
<http://www.brandl.com.au/Southerly/southerly%20longpaddock/1-69/smith.html>

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Dr Kim Edwards has a PhD in popular culture and sensation fiction at Monash University where she teaches English literature and fantasy narratives. She is a freelance writer and reviews books, film and theatre.