

‘ONLY WE HUMANS CAN KNOW’: DAVID MALOUF AND WAR

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‘I read the *Iliad* every couple of years,’ David Malouf remarked in a 2010 interview (Kanowski 81). He considers the *Iliad* ‘the very first story we have,’ one which has ‘never been surpassed’ (Kanowski 80).

To those who identify Malouf as the preeminent practitioner of ‘a characteristic lyricism which blurs the boundaries between established literary genres’ (Nettelbeck, *Provisional Maps* i), his reverence for the West’s most famous war narrative may be surprising. To other readers, who regard Homer’s classic as the standard for all European literature which follows it, his fascination is understandable. While recent decades have seen a lowered appreciation, in literary criticism, of texts which deal with such fundamental human concerns as adventure and conflict, the forays into this territory by a gifted writer such as Malouf have prompted some serious reconsideration. Some reviewers, faced with *Ransom*, have been given occasion to revisit the epic genre and to explore its relationship to the modern novel (see for example Mendelsohn).

Ransom is not the first time that Malouf has explored war. As a novelist and poet of insight and delicacy, with remarkable observational powers, he is almost bound to address war in his considerations of human lives and histories, even when ‘war material . . . is not [his] primary concern’ (Malouf, ‘Australian Literature and War’ 266). He continues to write texts which interrogate human nature in order to foster understanding, rather than to pontificate on life’s meaning. Indeed, Malouf’s contribution to the literary consideration of war is unique; no other author has turned their attention so thoughtfully to the question of war in so many settings, or provided such rich material.

This paper considers how Malouf expresses the nexus between the normal and the extraordinary in times of war through an investigation of three important works, spanning almost thirty years: *Fly Away Peter* (1982), *The Great World* (1990) and *Ransom* (2009),¹ which demonstrate the development of this theme. In looking at the place of war in human experience, Malouf goes beyond the concept of life’s continuity after such catastrophes to accept them as consistent with, and part of, the fabric of human life. Although his evocations of war’s terrible extremes are convincing, he never bludgeons us with gore, to the extent that some consider his war stories are ‘told from the sidelines’ (see Speller). Malouf concentrates on the individual, eschewing the wider-scale actions and effects of battle to bring us to the heart of war as a human experience: we share both his lament for the losses inherent in conflict, and his recognition of conflict’s unsurprising existence.

The genre of war writing spans thousands of years and utilises a range of styles, such as jingoistic patriotism; self-aggrandising heroics (see Gerster, *Big-Noting*, for an overview of Australian war writing in this vein); pathetic tragedies; the disillusioned protest of victim-soldiers (Paul Fussell’s work is the best investigation of this style); dramatised adventure; sweeping epic; and incisive sarcasm and irony. War may even be presented as a comedy (especially on television: see Badsey). Two basic perspectives prevail, however: the

perspective of disillusionment, where war is depicted as outside the ordinary range of human experience, drawing forth extremes of courage and/or brutality; and the heroic perspective, where war is an integral part of the tragicomedy of life. Currently the most popular literary representations of war proceed from the perspective of disillusionment, where a blind, corrupt, or self-serving society sacrifices an idealistic, morally pure younger generation.

The assertion that war is *both* extreme and quotidian—that it has an intriguing duality—invests Malouf's works with a complexity that is comparatively rare in recent war stories. Many works since the 1960s simply characterise war as the worst situation that humans can encounter: the end of civilisation and the failure of normal rules of human engagement. This is a late-twentieth-century perspective which would surprise earlier generations for whom war was, among other things, a sensible way to expand empire, maintain safe territory, and win trophies. 'War as the end of civilisation' is seen particularly in the disillusionment works arising from the Great War, such as *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, *Goodbye to All That*, *Farewell to Arms* and *Generals Die in Bed*. These works were conceived as initiating a new, realist way of writing about war, one which effectively killed off the hero (who was now understood not to be 'real') and installed the victim-soldier in his place. While the extremes of disillusionment have since been viewed as at least as exaggerated and non-realist as many traditional tropes of heroic writing, they have been very influential on the way we read texts about war (see for example Winter and Todman for a discussion of the validity, functions and excesses of disillusionment).

Of the three books considered here, Malouf's Great War story, *Fly Away Peter*, is the one most closely aligned with disillusionment, and represents an early attempt to explore and understand war. In its poetic restraint, *Fly Away Peter* offers a text comparatively bare of the complicating relationships and events which are common in other disillusionment texts, moving lightly across life-shaping themes such as Jim's absent mother, violent father, and the horrific death of his younger brother, as it poses a contrast between the natural world and the crude activities of man.

Jim Saddler is arguably the most victimised of Malouf's major protagonists, and becomes one of the Lost Generation. He suffers manifold distressing events on the Western Front: for example, a corpse falls on him (*Fly Away* 80), he witnesses the death of his friend by a shell explosion, ironically when they are 'safely' behind the lines (*Fly Away* 82-84), his shovel slices through a skull as he digs a trench (*Fly Away* 100), and he shivers in despair while hiding in a shell hole (*Fly Away* 89), instead of going forward into battle. In addition, Jim is never seen to kill anyone. Like many disillusionment protagonists, he is there to suffer, rather than to fight, even though, superficially, the soldier's chief business is to kill the enemy, rather than to act as a target for enemy aggression. Jim, instead of being an active fighter, is among those who 'dug in and defended themselves . . . and were bombed and machine-gunned and lived in the stench of German dead' (*Fly Away* 100). This elision of the soldier's most essential function is a popular disillusionment trope: Fussell, based on the evidence of the disillusionment texts, avers that in the Great War, 'the main business of the soldier was to exercise self-control while being shelled' (46), disregarding the fact that it was also a major business of soldiers to deliver the shells. Portraying the soldier as victim rather than killer deflects blame from him as an agent of war's destruction and strengthens the reader's pity for his plight. The emphasis, in the disillusionment model, is to present the reader with a protagonist whose victim-status and dire adventures propose a salutary lesson about the evils of war.

The strength of this perspective rests on its indictment of war as a method of resolving disputes. Resorting to violence is shown to produce only victims: both aggressors and defenders suffer equally, and the war in which they are engaged becomes an entity with its own life force, one which controls and destroys independently of the will of ordinary fighters, one which acts as the antithesis of the natural world. The soldiers of both sides become indistinguishable as either attackers or defenders, for all are merely victims. Higher authorities—such as self-serving politicians, civilian profiteers and the military hierarchy—are culpable, at least for unleashing the horror, while the individual common soldier remains passive, an exploited, expendable pawn. War becomes an agent that ushers in a dark age while it tramples into the dust any remnants of the previous golden era, eradicating not only humans and buildings but also the very notions of civilised behaviour.

Fly Away Peter has the fortune, or perhaps misfortune, to be almost too well-known to Australian readers. For decades, it has functioned as one of the few representatives of Australian literature on secondary and tertiary level reading lists and it is the only widely recognised novel of the Great War written by an Australian.² As a popular set text, *Fly Away Peter* has spawned an industry of study guides, study notes, essay samples and exam questions. An internet search will return a legion of cramming sites, with stock answers dictating what students *should* see in the work.

As a text for school use, *Fly Away Peter* offers many advantages: it is of novella rather than novel length; its topic may attract those whose interest in reading is considered to need piquing (teenage boys, for example); its evocation of natural beauty is so exquisite that it can satisfy those who are repulsed by the war sections; and its major protagonist is sufficiently victimised both by an agonisingly embarrassing father and an uncaring society to attract the sympathy of younger readers. The book has also been used as a plank in a popular pacifist platform, one which has gained momentum since the peace movements of the 1960s. This has the potential to reduce layered readings of the work and consign it to a limiting literary subset of protest. *Fly Away Peter* resists this confinement, however, proffering a wider vision of life, which includes a view to the future and a trope of acceptance. Rather than simply affirming continuity, the novel's conclusion recognises both the uplifting dazzle of life and its pain:

That is what life meant, a unique presence, and it was essential in every creature . . . A life wasn't *for* anything. It simply was . . . Everything changed. The past would not hold and could not be held . . . This eager turning, for a moment, to the future, surprised and hurt her . . . But . . . while the ocean was still in view, she turned and looked again. (*Fly Away* 132-34)

In 1985, Malouf stated that he wrote *Fly Away Peter* about 'the Australian experience,' in the full realisation that the Australian experience is 'not easily separable' from the experience of war, as 'two foreign wars [have] been crucial to the making of Australians in [the twentieth] century' (Malouf, 'Australian Literature' 265). The place of war in the development of Australian culture was a theme he went on to explore more fully in *The Great World*, which deals with World War II.

Both the ordinariness and the strangeness of war are addressed in *The Great World*. There is a nod to the Australian myth of an active, heroic experience in the Great War. It was then that Digger's father Billy Keen 'ran the risk of extinction' in the trenches, but also where he had felt 'alive. He had felt the full power of his own presence . . . It had spoiled him, that glimpse of what a man might be' (*Great World* 22). However, the war focus of *The Great World* is on

that ultimate passivity, the prisoner of war experience, a story which Australians had become more ready to accept in the 1980s, ‘perhaps . . . [as] the result of a more assured cultural identity’ (Gerster, ‘Prisoner-of-War Writers’ 272).

The focus on the captive allows Malouf to explore beyond the generalised notions of brutality and futility that characterise many texts about war. Protagonists Digger and Vic represent widely different versions of masculinity, a masculinity which is challenged by imprisonment. The prisoner of war (POW) is by definition removed from the fighting; despite his soldierly status, he is no longer—if he ever was—a killer. The POW of the Japanese, who is the epitome of soldier-become-victim, continued to affront traditional ideals of heroic soldiering long after readers had accepted the Great War’s victim-infantryman, though that perspective also had numerous critics at its first presentation (Gerster, ‘Prisoner-of-War Writers’ 271). By the 1990s, POW stories had become as well accepted as the disillusionment narratives; the barbarities of World War II, exposed by concentration camp memoirs, had forever reshaped western notions of heroic endurance and suffering, as opposed to heroic risk and active killing.

Rendered powerless in every traditional trope of war, Digger and Vic suffer and survive within this new theme of heroic fortitude, each bringing to the experience a fundamentally different world view, and taking away very different lessons. Though it is possible to recognise ‘the limitations of humanist universals’ (Jones 82), such as those Malouf presents in *The Great World*, his exploration of difference encourages in the reader a wider vision, although admittedly exploration of difference in this text does not extend far in gender or race. While Malouf’s ‘belief in essential human connectedness’ has been critiqued as likely to ‘undermine the type of social progress that relies on the recognition of difference’ (Jones 82), *The Great World* does at least question other worlds outside the daily Australian experience. In bringing these to our attention, the writer acknowledges that most Australians live in a society where privilege unknown in many other locations is taken for granted, and its origins never questioned. The experiences and expectations of the coolies, for example, offer a stark contrast with the Australians, who, by their acceptance of the coolies’ inferior status and their shock that they have entered the same state, assert their primacy in the story.

The Great World—pointed out as the ironic name of the abandoned amusement park in which the captives live for a time—interrogates war as a traditional foundation of Western concepts of masculinity and civilisation, exposing the gaps between public and private history (Nettelbeck, *Reading Malouf* 44-45). For example, modern war is unmasked in this text as a sordid commercial enterprise at heart, like the bartering and dealing which goes on in the camp, often over quite trivial items, items which sooner or later are recognised as worthless:

Transactions. Deals. They took up so much energy, engendered so much feeling, you might have thought they were the one true essential of a fighting man’s life, of tenacious, disorderly civilian life inside the official military one, exposing in pocket form the real motives of all this international activity, compared with which all talk of freedom and honour and patriotic pride and the saving of civilisation was the merest mind-fogging gibberish. (*Great World* 43)

Eventually, stripped of all possessions, dignity, self-determination and bodily strength by their ordeals, each man fulfils his own view of life. Vic continues to live in the moment, staying alive, always with a better, bigger future in view, embodying a sense of confused and frustrated entitlement that speaks tellingly of Australian attitudes, post-World War II. Vic is

always certain that, in different circumstances, he would have shown himself more heroically—he resents the captivity that removes him from the fighting in which he would certainly have performed well (*Great World* 120). Instead, ‘the whole of his energy had been engaged in pushing [death] off; in clinging to his own body and dragging the little bit of life in it from one day to the next. It was huge, that, but also simple. Pure, too. The effort was so pure’ (*Great World* 279).

Like Billy Keen (whose ‘glimpse of what a man might be’ during wartime had ‘spoiled him’), Vic believes that he has discovered life in its most authentic, most vital essence through his war experiences; also like Billy, he struggles to accept his post-war life as real. Despite his business and personal successes, Vic continues to seek the life he feels he missed through the circumstances of his impoverished childhood and the unfairness of his imprisonment. Vic is an archetypal character, not only always journeying/living in search of something better, but always unfulfilled and ambiguous: he has a good side and a bad side. He remains, to a great extent, impenetrable to his family and friends (and possibly to himself). As Digger reflects, ‘you could trust him with your life. On the other hand, you couldn’t trust him with tuppence’ (*Great World* 35). Vic is at times guilty/innocent, animal/child, candid/sly (*Great World* 133)—as unpredictable yet as unsurprising as life itself. We do not expect some of his acts or attitudes, but once they occur or are revealed, they are perfectly comprehensible.

The POW experience also affects Digger, but he is a very different character. He has ‘an internal consistency through and through’ (Taylor 46), an integrity of identity which is, fundamentally, not altered by traumatic experience. Though Nettelbeck considers that war in both *The Great World* and *Fly Away Peter* ‘functions . . . as a catalyst for change’ (*Reading Malouf* 49), this is not entirely true for *The Great World*. While undoubtedly the course of their lives is changed by the circumstance of war, both Vic and Digger respond according to their particular natures, and ‘what is essential in character and in identity remains ultimately unchanged’ (Taylor 48). As Taylor notes, Malouf in this text ‘points to something essential and eternal’ (50): that is, to the fundamentals of human nature and human interactions in their variety as well as their recognisable similarities.

Digger’s extraordinary memory, understated powers of empathic observation, and natural fastidiousness mark him apart from his fellows. To him, the ‘idleness and neglect . . . the daily hanging about in irregular groups, the looseness, the disorder’ of their early captivity ‘was terrible’ (*Great World* 111); perhaps worse than the ordeals of the later days, when the men are treated as beasts of burden, starved and worked literally into the ground. Whereas Vic, a multi-millionaire businessman in later life, harbours a bitter resentment about his years in captivity, the more intellectually and emotionally aware Digger—satisfied to remain a manual worker all his days—accepts his own horrific experience as ‘one time of his life among others; a time, simply, that had laid hard responsibilities on him, but ones that were too deeply ingrained in his nature now for regret. He accepted them. He made no complaint’ (*Great World* 297).

Superficially, Vic has everything: marriage, family, position, money, power; yet he continues to grieve for what he might have been, for ‘that other possibility, the one that had been starved and beaten out of him, [that] seemed especially precious’ (*Great World* 298).

The Great World, despite its sweeping time span and its grand title, is not an epic in the classic sense of the word: it is not a tale of noble persons whose actions shape society. As Indyk (92) points out, the novel is best remembered for its attention to the fine detail of

everyday life. Malouf reiterates the importance of the quotidian, even though he acknowledges that it is possible, perhaps, to make too much of trivial facts (*Great World* 181). Slaving on the Burma railway, Digger envisages the suburban Australian household waiting in vain for the return of Mac. He has the strength to rehearse every detail of daily life as nourishment for his soul, which craves the lost domesticity of home:

Regularly, three times a day, the plates were taken down, set on the cloth, used and washed again. That was the beauty of it. Order, repetition.

But how boring! The same thing, day in and day out, over and over! For him that was just the beauty of it. (*Great World* 147)

If *The Great World* speaks in epic terms, it speaks of ‘all those unique and repeatable events, the little sacraments of daily existence’ which are ‘deeply felt and might otherwise go unrecorded’ (*Great World* 283). War’s major function in *The Great World* is to provide a contrast with the undervalued blessings of the everyday. In this case, war does not provide contrast by supplying the heightened drama of battle, but instead the soul-killing, future-destroying deprivation of captivity and slavery. The war experience affects both men, but their underlying characters respond to it with an inherent consistency, as they do to the general run of life’s trials.

While narrative on an epic scale can heighten the importance of events, it can also reduce their impact, because characters tend to become normalised with the passage of their [real or fictional] time, as the edges are knocked off the sharpness of their experiences. The drama of wartime captivity arguably becomes less noticeable as Digger and Vic proceed; it is all but invisible to those around them, particularly the younger generations. In some ways, this observation reminds us that war and war-literature are long-standing aspects of Western civilisation, and also that we choose on the whole to ignore the salutary lessons of the past.

In his most recent evocation of war, Malouf has returned to the origin of Western war literature, a classic narrative of epic proportions. As is usual for Malouf when writing of war, his focus is not on the fanfare and drama of the famous battles and arguments, but on bringing the reader to the heart of war: its elemental closeness to everyday life. The siege of Troy provides the perfect setting to continue his exploration of the domestic and the violent, the quotidian and the cataclysmic, extending the proposition that these are related or indeed inseparably intertwined.

As an investigation of mortality and grief, *Ransom* provides riches especially, but not exclusively, in its treatment of the bonds between fathers and sons. The motif of the bereaved father has existed since classical times, and has always contained great emotive power. Arguably, however, our current first-world expectations that our children will outlive us are stronger than they have been throughout history, thus rendering a modern poignancy to Priam’s age-old grief.

War is the agent that brings death into close proximity with life, though in truth—much as we prefer to ignore the fact—the life-force Eros and the death-force Thanatos are indivisible, closely linked partners as well as foes. Man is mortal, and because of that mortality he knows a delight in life of which the gods are jealous,³ as Priam explains: ‘[The gods] gave me life and all that comes with it. All that is sweet. All that is terrible too, since only what we know

we must lose is truly sweet to us. The gods themselves know nothing of this, and in this respect, perhaps, may envy us' (*Ransom* 88).

Achilles, semi-divine but heroically mortal, 'is a fighter, but when he is not fighting, he is a farmer, earth is his element' (*Ransom* 4). In the full knowledge that he will return to the earth—not to work it, but to be buried in it—Achilles fulfils his destiny. The mortal aspect of his being recognises 'a world of pain, loss, dependency, bursts of violence and elation' (*Ransom* 6); Achilles is no fool. Even in the midst of desecrating Hector's body, he knows that his actions are futile. He feels himself already dead, more dead than the slain Hector, unable to credit that he continues living after the cataclysm of Patroclus' death:

He was waiting for the rage to fill him that would be equal at last to the outrage he was committing. That would assuage his grief, and be so convincing to the witnesses of this barbaric spectacle that he too might believe there was a living man at the centre of it, and that man himself. (*Ransom* 27)

In *Ransom*, Malouf uses the present tense in a way which distinguishes the novel from *Fly Away Peter* and *The Great World*. The present tense imparts not only immediacy but also a timelessness that is less noticeable in those books which, for all the universal applicability of their import, are fixed in their respective timeframes. The language of *Ransom*, too, has a freshness and impact that functions like the best poetry: words are used to exquisite effect and every page brings a phrase or sentence worth remembering, worth quoting. The novel continues to speak long after it has been read.

Ransom, like *The Iliad*, exists outside the sequential relation of historical episodes, supplying a mythic universality in place of the familiar touchstones of time and place so evident in *Fly Away Peter* and *The Great World*. While this may confer a certain distance, it also reinforces the permanence of human experience: thus it was and thus it is. Far from being a dismal reflection on the repetitive nature of conflict, *Ransom* provides us with rich material for reflection on the meaning of life and death, the interactions between humans, the fundamental loneliness of the individual and the surprising commonalities between individuals. King Priam is awakened to the lives of those around him, as if he has been 'peering through the crack in a door' into another's 'life, his world' (*Ransom* 127), and matters such as the ingredients for griddle cakes, Somax's daughter-in-law's cooking, the intervention of the gods, the heavenly nature of the mule Beauty, the bottomless depths of grief, and his own impending death, come into sharp focus for him. As in *The Great World*, 'our other history, the one that goes on, in a quiet way, under the noise and chatter of events' (*Great World* 284), is foregrounded in the companionship of carter and king.

Achilles, because we know his death is imminent, partakes of the victim-infantryman as well as the formidable hero: he is present to die as well as to kill. In *Ransom*, the merging of these two aspects of the soldier is complete: Achilles is also a prisoner of his own fate. Although he is a semi-divine, semi-mythical character (if the Trojan war happened at all, it happened some seven centuries before Homer wrote of it), Achilles nevertheless exists fully in our literary heritage. His representation in *Ransom* is masterly, as he is endowed with a humanity that is entirely comprehensible: his mortality is intrinsic to him as a man; it is not just the fatal flaw that brings down the semi-divine hero, as in more typical readings of *The Iliad*. Malouf's Achilles does not relish war for its own sake, but rather aches for 'the clash of arms that settles a quarrel quickly, then sends a man back, refreshed in spirit, to being a good farmer again' (*Ransom* 7). It is grief that defines Achilles here, rather than the classical 'anger of

Achilles'; his attempts to cultivate anger as an antidote to his grief are fruitless. To his mind, 'war should be practised swiftly, decisively' (*Ransom* 7), so that a man can return to more important daily tasks such as farming, debating, lawgiving, and watching children grow (*Ransom* 7). War is important, but quotidian life is where a man should spend most of his time.

The nexus of the disastrous and the ordinary, 'the close but inexpressible grandeur and terror of things' (*Great World* 284) recurs in each of these works. Jim Saddler, the gentle young man of the wetlands, discovers in himself a capacity for rage in which he becomes 'ready enough to fight, even to kill' (*Fly Away* 64), meeting the 'dark side to his own character' (Nettelbeck, *Reading Malouf* 15), which he is not prepared to own. Nevertheless, the two coexist: Jim's gentleness and his aggression, though he never fully realises the latter in the conduct of his soldiering against the enemy. Digger and Vic, who remain 'outside the war' (Nettelbeck, *Reading Malouf* 49), are marked by their POW experiences, though each carries his history differently. God-like Achilles and royal Priam, who (we know) will die more-or-less offstage in both *Ransom* and *The Iliad*, each speak to the other 'as a father and as a man' (*Ransom* 90), acknowledging their common humanity.

For Malouf, war appears inevitable, though it is arguable whether or not he perceives it as 'natural' (see Nettelbeck, *Reading Malouf* 18). While 'war is an important motif' (Hergenhan 253) in Malouf's work, it is not his primary focus: with his eye on life, he is always likely to encounter both conflict and peace as he charts the human experience. Perhaps Malouf's most complete attempt to position war in culture and history is *The Great World*, while his most poetic is undoubtedly *Ransom*. In between, the early work *Fly Away Peter* confronts natural beauty and order with the waste, incomprehensibility, and hollowness of war. Adding to an overarching theme of continuity—expressed in *Fly Away Peter* through Imogen's vision of the surfer, in *The Great World* through Digger's visions of the small moments of life, and in *Ransom* by Priam's recognition of that 'other world' of ordinary men—is Malouf's appreciation of the reassuring familiarity of daily life and the irruptive potential of 'history.'

Alexander of Macedon, another devoted reader of Homer's *Iliad*, is said to have lived by a maxim which affirmed life and acknowledged death: 'One must live as if it would be forever,' he is said to have advised, 'and as if one might die each moment. Always both at once' (Renault 194). Malouf's treatment of war is always 'an affirmation of continuity as well as an affirmation of change' (Nettelbeck, *Reading Malouf* 18)—always both at once. Because 'only we humans . . . endowed as we are with mortality, but also with consciousness' (*Ransom* 88) can be aware of our vulnerability to death, of how closely it resides with life, we do well to attend to the poet's reminders about the sanctity of the everyday. In Malouf's works, war—the quintessential representative of untimely death—serves as a powerful reminder of why we should appreciate and celebrate life.

NOTES

¹ These three books are highly regarded, multi-award winners for Malouf. *Fly Away Peter* (1982) is the winner of The Age Book of the Year Award 1982; The Age Book of the Year Award [imaginative writing] 1982; and joint winner Australian Literature Society Gold Medal 1983. *The Great World* (1990) is the winner of the Miles Franklin Literary Award 1991; the Commonwealth Writers' Prize Overall Best Book Award 1991; the Commonwealth Writers' Prize S-E Asia and South Pacific Region Best Book 1991; the Prix Femina [France] Best Foreign Novel 1991; and the SA Festival Awards for Literature [fiction] 1992. *Ransom* (2009) is the winner of the John D. Criticos Prize 2010; the Australian Literature Society Gold Medal 2010; and the SA Festival Awards for Literature [fiction] 2010.

² Some examples of Great War novels written by Australian veterans include: Ion Idriess, *The Desert Column* (1932); Leonard Mann, *Flesh in Armour* (1932); Frederic Manning, *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (1929); and Jack Phillip McKinney, *Crucible* (1935).

³ Martha Nussbaum's discussion of luck and ethics in *The Fragility of Goodness* (1986) is illuminating in that her reading of classical tragedy shows us heroic protagonists who fail despite their best attempts, their *tych* — fate—being to fail. They fail because they are human, mutable and fallible, operating in a contingent world. They fail because they are fully, indeed 'beautifully,' human. Part of that human beauty exists in the very possibility of failure. In *Ransom*, as in classical Greek tragedy, the life is sweetest which is at risk.

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