

Imaginary life-themes

Sociology, Communication



Malouf's novel is one of deep philosophical themes. The first major theme in an imaginary life is humans' relationship with the natural world. This theme is a central aspect of the novel as it shows the reader how Ovid and the Child's relationship with nature changes their outlooks on life. The closer Ovid becomes with nature the closer he is to achieving inner peace. The same inner peace achieved at the end of the novel when Ovid surrenders himself and becomes one with the world. This is seen through the fact that Ovid becomes immeasurably happy at being the past, present and the future " It is summer. It is spring. I am immeasurably, unbearably happy. I am three years old. I am sixty. I am six."

This theme is also seen in how inseparable the child is from the natural world and in fact also " is the natural world". This is shown in the section of the novel when Ovid is teaching the child how to speak his language. During this time the child also attempts to teach Ovid his language. Ovid finds this as difficult as the child finds learning Ovid's language. Ovid believes that by him " knowing that it is the sky, that the stars have names and a history" prevents him " being the sky". This is due to the fact that Ovid's relationship with the natural world is not yet strong like the child's is.

We are shown how crucial the child's relationship with the natural world is through the fact that the child becomes vulnerable and fragile when taken into the settlement in Tomis " Whatever his secret was I have taken it from him. He is as vulnerable now as anyone of us.... He shows himself human at last".

Despite having no dialogue throughout the novel, the function of language is still a central theme of the novel.

The relationship between language and perception is highlighted through Ovid's personal descriptions as he believes one cannot view concepts in the same way with different language knowledge.

He uses the example of colours to show this on page 25: "Scarlet. Magic word on the tongue to flash again on the eye. Scarlet". This describes Ovid's amazement at the feeling evoked from the words.

This is also portrayed through Ovid's different perspectives that he describes between the connotations allocated with the abilities of the different languages that he learns.

His silent language with the child shows how language can enable one to relate more closely to others and learn from them.

Another theme in this novel that helps to describe who the child is is the 'destiny of the individual.'

Throughout the novel Malouf emphasizes that one always has an idea of their destiny.

This is illustrated by Ovid's realization that his destiny is lost with the child. Several times Ovid's dreams do in fact unravel themselves in the real world. An example is how he dreams of catching the boy and then later persuades Ryzak the chief to capture him.

Another instance where this theory takes effect is in Ovid's dream of going travelling past all "boundaries" of this world. He later achieves this feat when he is taken across the river Ister by the child. On page 151 Ovid describes the river Ister as his destiny awaiting: "It remained, shifting its tides, freezing each season, cracking up, flowing again, whispering to me: I am the border beyond which you must go if you are to find your true life, your true death at last."