

Fly away peter by david malouf essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



This is as much a novel about the continuity of nature as it is about the obscenity of war.

Introduction:

Fly Away Peter by David Malouf is a novel about both the cycle of life as well as the damage war has done. At the beginning of the story, Malouf sets up the narrative in South of Brisbane where Jim, Ashley and Imogen are linked by a similar interest in birds. The sanctuary with its vast population of waterbirds is the perfect world for Jim to observe and gain his full identity, shielded from the brutality of war. However, the pressure from town folks and his own curiosity lead him into his journey into World War One and his vulnerable innocence is in danger. Through Jim's experience, Malouf explores the terrible destruction of lives and landscape but at the same time balances this by signs of renewal and natural regrowth.

The continuity of nature in the sanctuary:

Jim's memorable experiences in the sanctuary suggest to him that the migration of birds as well as humans is continuous in nature not apart from it. The depiction of the sandpiper from Norfolk travelling to Brisbane showcases the constant migration of birds which in spite of any chaos fly overhead to continue their life cycle. This also represents that change is inevitable and parallels to humans who also migrate – to go to war. Jim and Imogen from different perspectives recognise the importance of each individual bird's place in the landscape. Whilst Imogen 'captures' birds with photographs, Jim records them in the Book. The preciseness of the names of birds denotes uniqueness and this encourages Jim to develop his own

identity. Another example is Jim's rediscovery of the Dunlin that migrates from Sweden to Australia. To Jim, the Dunlin is like a unicorn which possesses otherworldly quality. Jim's excitement about the Dunlin foreshadows his fascination with the mythical great adventure-war, but he is unaware of the danger. Through his interactions with people and the natural world, he is able to deepen his understanding and recognise his own talents and strength.

Destruction of war to natural landscape, destruction to soldiers:

After Jim enlists, he finds himself in France, ready for his first taste of war. A newly developed landscape is prepared, ' emergency roads everywhere, cutting across ...vineyards'. (69) The allusion to pyramid-building vividly conveys the idea that soldiers resemble slaves which ' all roped together' (p69) for the monstrous project, war that can be seen as an endless nightmare. However, Jim, ' with the eyes of another century' (p70) only focuses on the heroic size of the trenches but ignores the killing field that he is soon ' about to become part'. (p70)

As they approach the front, Jim's first experience of the destruction of war is the terrible conditions in the trenches. The malodorous smell of rot, decaying corpses together with the striking imagery of dead soldiers are completely the inversion of the natural cycle. In this world of hell, Malouf personifies water as a quiet destroyer of the soldiers' trenches rather than life-giving back in the sanctuary. In the trenches where the rats roam and feed on corpses, soldiers are waiting for their turn to go over the top. Through this visual imagery, Malouf expresses the fear and horror that men feel. In

addition, the occasional hand or booted foot of a dead soldier alarms the living soldiers constantly about their own irresistible death.

Examples of damage done to Jim, Wizzer... yet moments reminded him of life cycle

War, the most extreme form of savagery affects soldiers in a cruel and ruinous way. The war has first touched Jim is at the moment of Clancy's death, his guardian and close friend. He realises that despite enduring the horror of the blood which he cannot wash off, he is also shocked by the fact that individual lives can end so brutally and suddenly. The example of Jim fighting with Wizzer in the shell hole suggests that Jim is confronted with his own deepest and darkest fears of an 'unknown assailant'. Malouf in this incident not only depicts the idea of war connecting everyone to the terror of death but also the destructive psychological effect war has on soldiers. On the other hand, in spite of the all-consuming nature of conflict, the discovery of the bones of a mammoth is evidence of the ancient life cycle that continues even in all the chaos of war. It has lived, been killed and rediscovered by scientists which gives it a new life in the form of knowledge to pass down over generations. Malouf uses this example to point out death is one of the crucial parts of the life cycle that all living things experience.

Darkness vs sense of hope:

When Jim is packed into the cattle truck, Malouf evokes the feeling that war is a slaughter house which the soldiers are sucked into. The soldiers will have 'fallen... into a dark pocket of time' (p107) and that violence becomes normalised on an industrial scale. The damage that war has done to the

vulnerable soldiers is clearly revealed as they are transformed into 'murderous machines' losing emotions and fighting blindly. When Jim witnesses an old man digging, he instantly thinks 'A grave it must be' indicating his death-oriented mindset. However, he finds out that the old man is planting a crop in the blasted field. The regrowth of plants symbolises the hope that remained in the civilians and the persistence of nature. It is this incident which renews Jim's interest in the birds. Malouf hints at a glimmer of hope in Jim as he continues the work he did in the sanctuary. Through the contrasting death and rebirth imagery, Malouf suggests Individuals may be lost forever but the life cycle continues, leaving readers with a mix of feelings of sadness along with the hope in the future.

Jim's death, digging with his brothers:

The description of Jim's death is surreal but it seems to create a calm and peaceful mood. He imagines his meeting with Ashley who had 'The mark of Cain' (p132) in the middle of his forehead which is a biblical reference to Cain killing his brother Abel. This symbolises the responsibility of officers for the death of the soldiers in their charge. They shout orders that expose their brothers to the 'deadly' danger of being killed by machine guns. Hence, Malouf gives Jim this insightful moment to reveal a dreadful truth that officers would bear the guilt for their lifetime. After meeting with Ashley, Jim is invited by Clancy to dig. As readers, we feel the warmth seeing Clancy whole again which cancels out the terrible way that he died. Jim's final vision of himself as one of hundreds of men digging their way home suggests that the natural cycle is once again restored; a sort of inversion of the birds'

seasonal migration. The olfactory and tactile imagery of the earth as 'rich and warm' and 'it smelled of all that was good' creates a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere which reinforces the idea that death is natural. The moment of death is not only about the loss of pain but also the relief that new life will be emerging.

Imogen's sorrow, grief as well as hope:

'A life wasn't for anything. It simply was.' Malouf's vision does finally achieve balance: there is as much to celebrate about rebirth as to regret about the brutality of war. Imogen sees the importance of uniqueness and to her, Jim's death 'had been the waste of it' (p140) the waste of his presence and his talent. The beach with its waves represents the regular eternal rhythm within nature. The young surfer riding the waves is a metaphor for a new, emerging generation that is a part of the continuous cycle of life. In the end, Malouf aims to provide us with a vision that 'so many things were new.' (p142) that there will always be new creatures flourishing, falling and returning to the earth. It is not the bitterness of war which stands out most strongly in *Fly Away Peter*, it is the consolation that while individuals perish and disintegrate, the whole fertile process goes on eternally.

References:

- Fly Away Peter – Wikipedia
- Fly Away Peter: David Malouf: Amazon. com: Books
- Fly Away Peter by David Malouf, Paperback | Barnes & Noble®