

Relationships in ransom



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The love of a father for a son is the strongest human bond in Ransom. Do you agree?

In Ransom, David Malouf explores the nature of relationships, suggesting that it is the bond between humans that underpins quintessential events and transformations in the text. It is the paternal instincts of Somax which prompts Priam into introspection, and their commonality in fatherhood allows them to overcome their vast differences and become companions. Similarly, in appealing to paternity, the king is able to appease Achilles by arousing the ardent love the latter feels for his father and son, and thus, the amity of the two protagonists takes precedence over their previous enmity, resulting in the temporary truce between the Greeks and Trojans. Despite the obvious strength of the father-son bond, the love between Hecuba and her husband, which has outlasted the test of time, gives sanctuary to a flinching king who regardless of his diffidence in the royal sphere, is able to divulge his 'secrets' freely to his wife, highlighting the comfort he is able to seek in this secure relationship. Moreover, the companionship between Achilles and Patroclus extends beyond brotherhood, and thus the death of his 'soul mate' causes the formidable warrior to expel his grief in ways that are beyond human, suggesting that Patroclus' demise has caused Achilles to lose a part of his soul, underscoring the fixity of their relationship. Thus, Malouf suggests that a father's love for a son is not the strongest human bond, but that various types of relationships have distinct strengths.

The humble carter's amity for his sons and the genuine grief he expresses upon their demise highlights the strength of the father-son bond; moreover, it triggers the self-examination of the king, and their fatherhood seals their

unification. The anecdotes of Somax's sons are told in a "lively manner" and are "so full of emotion", implying the tender love which underpins the relationship between the carter and his children. His reflection on one child as he "broods" on the "song [his son] used to sing" and even "his cursing", highlights Somax's keen recollections are a testament to the depth of his love as he is able to identify each child as an individual with distinct mannerisms. Whilst reflecting on his grief, Somax asserts his sons are "tied [to him] this way", symbolically pointing to his heart, and it is in this way that Malouf suggests his sons are the crux of his being, underscoring the sheer strength of the father-son bond. Moreover, Somax's positive insights into his family life impels the king's introspection into his dealings with fatherhood. The fondness of Somax's memories prompts a "curiosity" in Priam which he has never encountered in the overly formal "royal sphere". Upon discussing "blessed... sons" and the profound grief that causes the carter to "break into a sweat... at the memory of it", an appeal to fatherhood establishes a connection between the two protagonists, and forces Priam to consider the adequacy of his grief for Hector's death, and by extension, his role as a father. The self-reflection reveals the king's relationship with his children as merely "formal and symbolic" prompting a feeling of regret that he did not "twine his sons" into his "affections". It is thus through Somax's appeal to paternity that the king has a newfound responsibility as a father which spurs him to restore his son's body in its rightful place.

Consequently, Priam's epiphany on the importance of filial relationships allows him to appeal to Achilles as a father and thus, despite their hostility,

they are able to declare a ceasefire to mourn for their losses. An appeal is made from “ man to man” and “ as a father” by the king to assert that the two foes share common interests. Priam’s evocation of Achilles’ son which “ touched a sore spot” enables the king to challenge the notion that adversaries must always respond to each other in terms of winning and losing, as he declares that they “ should have pity for one another’s losses”. Despite the nine year separation, Achilles is still able to clearly remember Neoptolemus’ characteristics, fondly recalling his “ flamy” hair and the “ saddle of freckles” that crosses his nose, highlighting the warriors’ fervent love for his own. It is thus the reminder of his son which catalyses the transformation of the warrior, allowing “ something in him to be freed” and thus the two protagonists’ connection as fathers, at least temporarily, takes precedence over their enmity. The text suggests that Achilles, who has been “ half-blind with rage”, is assuaged by Priam’s appeal, and thus, that “ a father’s soft affections” has the power to overcome a previously unrelenting thirst for revenge. The king is therefore Achilles’ “ something new”, and their unification through their mutual roles as fathers allows the Greek to step outside of his role as a warrior and grieve appropriately.

Conversely, Achilles’ relationship with his comrade, Patroclus, is so profound that the latter’s passing causes the former to act in such a way that is inhumane, thus highlighting that his extreme remorse is testament to their deep connection. The instant connect between the two and the fact that “ the world...[reassembles] itself around a new centre” when the two first meet highlights that they have a spiritual connection, as though one has completed the other. In the presence of Patroclus, Achilles’ true self “[leaps]

forth and [declares] itself”, and in this way, their intense pairing both strengthens and leaves Achilles vulnerable as his happiness and identity are intimately intertwined with that of his adoptive brother. Thus, upon the demise of Patroclus, Achilles is possessed by manic behaviour as he as he “[rocks] back and forth in anguish” and “[pours]... dust over his head” when in mourning for his “soul mate”. Their connection proves dangerously strong as Achilles’ sense of grief has not diminished and thus provokes him to kill Hector and inhumanely mangle his body.

The various relationships that are present in Ransom and the fact that each of them have distinct strengths suggests that no one bond takes precedence over others. Perhaps the text challenges readers to accept that each relationship is different, but despite their varying natures, all bonds have the power to influence the sequence of events that take place.