

Invictus and Ransom

Introductions

Invictus

Clint Eastwood's 2009 film 'Invictus' centers on the events following the election of Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first black President in the post-apartheid era. The film follows President Mandela's attempt to infuse a deeply divided country with new energy, by supporting the South African rugby team's victorious 1995 World Cup Campaign. The unlikely bond formed between President Mandela and Francois Pienarr, the captain of the rugby team, illustrates themes of unity and reconciliation in a divided nation. The film begins with the image of a deeply divided society in 1990, as Mandela is released from 27 years of incarceration. A poignant opening scene sees Mandela drive along a long dirt road that runs between two playing fields, on one side, young black children shout excitedly as Mandela passes. On the other side, immaculately dressed white boys stare vacantly, as their coach proclaims, "This is the day our country went to the dogs." This tumultuous period in South African history is of central concern to 'Invictus', as Eastwood portrays the lingering racial prejudices imbedded in this society. The film portrays the tension between the bitter resentment of black South Africans towards their former oppressors, with the fear and uncertainty of white Afrikaners under Mandela's political leadership. Eastwood masterfully depicts the true story of the moment when Nelson Mandela harnessed the power of sports to unite a deeply divided South Africa.

Ransom

Set during the Trojan War, one of the most famous events in Greek mythology, David Malouf's historical fiction 'Ransom' seeks to explore the overwhelming destruction caused by war, and the immense power of reconciliation. Drawing on the Iliad, the epic poem by Homer, Malouf focuses on the events of one day and night, in which King Priam of Troy travels to the enemy Greek encampment to plead with the warrior Achilles to release the body of his son, Hector. Maddened by grief at the murder of his friend Patroclus, Achilles desecrates the body of Hector as revenge. Despite Achilles refusal to give up Hector's body, Priam is convinced there must be a way of reclaiming the body – of pitting new ways against the old, and forcing the hand of fate. Malouf's fable reflects the epic themes of the Trojan war, as fatherhood, love, grief and pride are expertly recast for our times.

Malouf and Eastwood both depict societies on the brink: Troy faces annihilation by the Greeks, while South Africa faces an uncertain future as it emerges from the injustices of the apartheid era, both worlds are in dire need of true heroes to bridge the great divide. Together, these two texts echo the significance of hope in the enactment of change.

Themes

The power of shared human experiences

Both texts are centrally concerned with the significance of the universal experiences of love, loss, grief and hope to unite a divided people. Both *Invictus* and *Ransom* explore how societal forces

divide people into different, often conflicting groups – whether this be race, history, culture, or war. Each text appeals to the universal experiences that define the human condition, and emphasise the significance of opportunities to cross-cultural divides.

In 'Ransom', Malouf is centrally concerned with the theme of fatherhood. This concept links the mortal and godly realms, which King Priam straddles over the course of his journey. The relationship between Priam and Somax illustrates this complex theme most clearly. The two men, despite being deeply separated by their class, education and power, share their common familial experiences. Priam confronts the poignancy of their shared experience of losing sons, questioning whether it "meant the same for him as it did for the driver". Malouf thus presents Priam as initially lacking in terms of his understanding, Somax's friendship and stories are the catalyst for Priam to engage in deeper, empathetic understanding. Somax's trivial yet symbolically significant story about the griddle-cakes represents a moment of anagnorisis for Priam, wherein the shared bond of humanity in fatherhood allows Priam to obtain insight, and progressively grow as a human and as a leader. This incident fuels the journey to appeal to Achilles "man to man", Priam's insight into the power of empathy allows him to appeal to their shared bond as suffering fathers.

Just as Priam goes to Achilles "as a father", using their common quality, fatherhood, to further understand each other, Mandela, too, emphasises the point that you must "know [your] enemy before [you] c[an] prevail against him" and thus he "learned their language, read their books, their poetry". Mandela attempts to unite Black and white South Africans, despite the mutual animosity and distrust fostered by decades of apartheid. Black and White South Africans share almost nothing in common, with significant cultural and societal barriers to their reconciliation, including different dialects. Rugby emerges as the most poignant manifestation of this divide as the White South Africans support their national team, but the black south Africans barrack for the opposing side. The scene wherein Pienarr and Mandela meet over tea is symbolic of this sentiment of fostering unity amongst deep divisions. President Mandela literally hunches over to pour the tea for Pienaar, this inversion of status demonstrates his willingness to reduce his dignity as a superior and speak with Pienarr, and by extension, white south Africans, on an equal level, modelling an example of how race relations in his nation should be carried out. This equality is also symbolised by the passing of the tea to Pienaar, the close up shot where both arms of the individuals are depicted on an equal level reinforces this sense of mutual equality and respect, extolling the virtues of empathy and integrity as a uniting force.

Leadership and Sacrifice

Mandela and Priam symbolise how leadership must inevitably entail familial sacrifices. Both leaders self-identify with their nation and people. Priam embodies Troy itself, his body is the 'living map' of the kingdom. The 'royal sphere' he embodies is constrained by customs and tradition, full of symbolic acts that separate him from the mortal world. To an extent, these royal obligations and ritual suffocate Priam's individuality and he is unable to show his true nature, or connect with his family in the way he would desire to. He regards intimate relationships with his children as "women's talk" that "unnerves him" as it is not "his sphere". This articulation of the disassociation of the "royal sphere" with natural human bonds of family reveals the secondary role that family and love must take when one's role as a leader is paramount. Similarly, Mandela claims "I have a very big family. Forty-two million people". Unlike Priam, Mandela seeks human connection, predicating his leadership on democratic ideals. This takes a physical and emotional toll, as shown by Mandela's collapse in his driveway. The cost of leadership here is evident, as Mandela has effectively sacrificed his family for the good of his nation. His strained relationship with his daughter Zindzi further reinforces this, as she disapproves of Mandela reaching out to Pienarr, likening him to one of the

white “policeman who forced (her) out of her home”, showing the disconnect between father and daughter due to the sacrifices necessitated by Mandela’s life of leadership, including his 27 year imprisonment.

Fatherhood and Masculinity

In ‘Ransom’ Malouf presents an enclosed, limited and unemotional masculine world, with particularly stringent expectations for men’s behaviour. This is a world characterised by war, wherein the expectations of violent masculinity are paramount. In presenting Achilles inside of “a membrane stretched to a fine transparency”, Malouf reveals the constant tension between the emotional, domestic human nature inside Achilles and the hierarchical violent external society that he is expected to abide by, revealing the constricting nature that the society has on defining men’s actions. Malouf uses words like “knotted” and “rope-like” when describing Achilles’ muscles, implying that his conventional great strength, the source of his fearsome reputation, represents a confinement that the society enforces on him and other men. Further, through a degree of compassion, Priam is able to touch the “sore spot whose ache he has long repressed” in Achilles, a symbol of the emotions that have been suppressed by the dominant patriarchal nature of this society.

Whilst the world of ‘Invictus’ is less overtly masculine and patriarchal, the narrative of the film is primarily focused on the male experiences, with female characters assuming a largely secondary role. Zindzi’s strained relationship with her father exemplifies the sacrifices involved in leadership. Whilst Mandela is seen to have sacrificed a close connection with his daughter, this is suggested to be in service of the nation, “I have a big family. Forty two million people”.

Character analysis and comparison

Priam	Mandela	Comparisons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> aging king of troy individuality has been subsumed by the ceremonial functions of his high position self-identifies with nation life of obligation foregoes convention and embraces chance with his proposal to offer ransom for his son’s body becomes more attuned to the natural world gains a greater appreciation of his true self as a man, rather than a symbolic figurehead 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> historic figure, symbol of peace spent 27 years in prison for sabotage and conspiracy to overthrow the government while he was trying to gain civil rights for all south Africans tackled institutionalised racism, poverty and inequality suffered under apartheid pursues reconciliation, prepared to face down calls for retribution in his speech to the sports council, he defends the traditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embody essential role that leadership plays in achieving just resolutions to conflict sacrifice family for leadership illustrate that effective leadership takes a toll on the individual exemplify that reconciliation requires unexpected and difficult acts. Such as Mandela’s embrace of the Springboks and Priam’s appeal to Achilles “man to man” both show effective leadership involves expressing empathy and understanding the humanity of your enemies

	<p>of the people who persecuted him</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interacts easily with people of all social standings • charismatic, in touch with the people 	
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Literary and cinematic techniques

Invictus

- In one of the first scenes in Mandela's office after he is elected President, Eastwood strategically frames the racial segregation and tension between the two groups via the mise-en-scene; they stand on separate sides of the room, wearing distinctly different clothing and calling Mandela either "Mr President" or "Madiba", representative of their own identity. The lingering tension between the two groups permeates the entirety of the film, and the microcosm of the bodyguards acts as a symbol of the chasm within the wider nation.
- The deeply symbolic scene wherein Mandela and Pienaar have tea, Eastwood strategically uses a close up shot to frame the passing of the tea cup so that both arms of the individuals are depicted on the same level, reinforcing this sense of mutual equality and respect. It is this sharing of hope that ignites Pienaar to reciprocate Mandela's egalitarian actions. As Pienaar brings a ticket for Eunice, recognising that "there's a fourth" family member, he mimics Mandela's value that "no one is invisible". Consequently, it is demonstrated that regardless of skin colour, characters reciprocate Mandela's empathy and compassion, revealing the limitless power such human qualities to reach across the boundaries of division.



- The wide shot of the passing of the trophy from Mandela to Pienaar is framed against the large crowd, metaphorically representing South Africa's support with the unity of the black and whites, reflecting Mandela's desire to "meet black aspirations and quell white fears". Their diegetic cheers work to create the idyllic depiction of the lasting power of this change, implying the true limitless nature of hope in their society.



Ransom

- Priam's moment of anagnorisis in which he discovers the concept of "chance", marks the beginning of his enactment of change through the power of hope. Despite his family who wishes that he would "spare [himself of] this ordeal", Priam's vision guides him to overcome familial and societal obstacles in pursuit of reconciliation.
- Symbol: Griddlecakes – represent pleasure in common things, but also the growing realisation within Priam of his distance from such pleasures. The love and care with which Somax's daughter cooked the cakes has a value that surpasses the conventional riches associated with the ruling elite. This is a catalyst for a moment of realisation for Priam.