



## The Fall of Troy

*Peter Ackroyd*

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## **The Fall of Troy** Peter Ackroyd

Fakes, forgeries and plagiarism abound in Ackroyd's brilliant historical novel, set in the 19th century during the excavation of the Bronze Age site of Troy.

"I cannot wait to bring you to the plain of Troy. To show you the place where Hector and Achilles fought. To show you the palace of Priam. And the walls where the Trojan women watched their warriors in battle with the invader. It will stir your blood, Sophia."

Sophia Chrysanthis is only 16 when the German archaeologist, Herr Obermann, comes wooing: he wants a Greek bride who knows her Homer. Sophia passes his test, and soon she is tying canvas sacking to her legs so that she can kneel on the hard ground in the trench, removing the earth methodically, identifying salient points, lifting out amphorae and bronze vessels without damaging them.

"Archaeology is not a science," Obermann says. "It is an art."

Obermann is very good at the art of archaeology — perhaps too good at it. The atmosphere at Troy is tense and mysterious. Sophia finds herself increasingly baffled by the past . . . not only the remote past that Obermann is so keen to share with her in the form of his beloved epics of the Trojan wars, but also his own, recent past — a past that he has chosen to hide from her.

But she, too, is very good at the art of archaeology . . .

## **The Fall of Troy Details**

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Author : Peter Ackroyd

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## From Reader Review The Fall of Troy for online ebook

### Jack Bates says

I love Peter Ackroyd. This is great, and there are extra bonuses for anyone interested in the history of archaeology, Troy, Homer, etc.

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### Stephen says

**Archaeology** in support of **poetry**...

**Truth** informed solely by **belief**...

**Mythology** as foundation for **worldview**...

**DAMN**...this is **crazy**, unique, and **beautiful** story.

19th century archaeology may **frame** this novel, and the **ruins** of the **ancient city** of Troy may **color** it, but those elements don't begin to describe this book. This work is a sonnet honoring headstrong, unrestrained human passion and the seductive obsession of personal truth over objective facts. That, plus a lush, lyrical stroll through the pages of the Iliad, where Homer's epic, and all of its gods and heroes, comes to life through the unfettered, unshakeable will of its main character...Heinrich Obermann.

This is my first Peter Ackroyd novel, and don't believe I would ever have read this if not for Shovelmonkey1's wonderful review. I loved it. I think J. Oppenheimer best paraphrased my feelings upon finishing the story when he said, "I am become fan...gusher of praise."

For me, my affection for this book begins and ends with Herr Heinrich Obermann, a character who makes larger-than-life feel mundane and pedestrian by comparison. An adventurer obsessed, and I mean **OBSESSED**, with Homer and his ancient epic of the city of Troy, who believes he has discovered the location of the ancient city in Turkey. His mission, undertaken with the zeal and single-mindedness of a Captain Ahab, is to bring this discovery to the world, and no contrary fact nor conflicting evidence, no matter how "in his face," will dissuade him from his quest.

He is the personification of bombastic, self-assured determination. From a literary standpoint, he is...in a word...**UNFORGETTABLE**.

But wait...there's more. In addition to a memorable main character, Ackroyd gifts the reader with a display of his vast knowledge of both history and mythology, by seamlessly weaving fascinating details into the narrative. Not only entertaining, compelling storytelling, but very impressive as well.

### **PLOT SUMMARY:**

Obermann, a celebrated amateur archaeologist, has discovered what he is convinced are the ruins of Troy in Turkey. Obermann intends to prove that the Iliad, which he knows verbatim and has be infatuated with all his life, is historical fact, and all of the gods and heroes populating its pages existed...for real. Any other interpretation is nonsense to him...his quest is right, ordained by the gods, and he will succeed.

Wait until you meet him.

The other piece of this Greek tragedy is Obermann's new, much younger wife, Sophia, who falls enamored with Obermann's infectious optimism and personal charisma. She throws herself into Obermann's expedition, and the two of them travel to the excavation site to continue Heinrich's work.

Enter...drama.

Almost immediately, Sophia starts to see chinks in Obermann's Homeric armor, as she learns fragments of his mysterious past, sees him overlook or ignore unsupportive finds, and even manipulates relics to fit his theories.

The rest...is for you to excavate on your own, but you will find: danger...deceit...discoveries...cover ups...conspiracies...betrayals...murder...Iliad reenactments...mad women...and more

### **THOUGHTS:**

I don't know if Ackroyd's other books are like this, but this was a unique reading experience for me. Fresh, original, and captivating, it was unlike anything I had encountered before.

Me liked it...lots.

And it all comes back to Obermann, and his singularly passionate and nutso view of the world. Part Indiana Jones, part P.T. Barnum, part borderline mental patient, he is a force of nature. Every observation or comment appears derived from some aspect of the Homer's epic poem, as filtered through his senses and then applied to current events.

For example, Early on in the story, as Heinrich and his wife are approaching the coast of Turkey:

*Do you see there, Sophia, that bay? That is where the princess Hesione was exposed to the attacks of the sea-monster sent by Neptune. Do you see that promontory of black rock? That is where Hercules saved her.*

No qualification, or caveat regarding the veracity of the story...for Obermann, it happened exactly the way Homer said it did. It is truth and it colors everything about him.

Here another one...later, when a visiting professor questions one of Obermann's claims, the exchange goes as follows:

*'In your latest report to **The Times**, Mr. Obermann, you mentioned a tower.'*  
*'Of course. It is there? Do you not see it rising out of the earth?'*  
*'I see a piece of wall. Nothing more.'*  
*'Look again, Professor. It is the tower that Andromache ascended because she had heard that the Trojans were hard pressed and that the power of the Achaeans was great.'*  
*'I know the passage, Mr. Obermann. But I'll be darned if I can see the tower.'*  
*'No matter. We have a different vision.'*

"No Matter. We have a different vision." That sentence sums up Obermann perfectly.

Finally, an example of an attitude you see throughout the book; namely, Obermann's unapologetic willingness to dissemble in support of his cause. Here, the Professor once again speaking to Herr Obermann about one of his claims:

*'But one thing does puzzle me.'*

'Yes?'

*'In your report to **The Times** you say that the palace was built on the summit. But it is here, on the north-west ridge.'*

*'It is necessary to inspire the readers of your newspapers. To give them dreams. That is my, idealism, Professor. In my imagination I witnessed the gleaming palace surmounting all.'*

I don't think you will have ever come across a character quite like Herr Obermann. Deeply moving, deeply flawed, even dangerous, but so engaging you will not be able to look away and he will almost make you wish you could see the world through his eyes.

In conclusion, this was a terrific first experience with Peter Ackroyd's work, and it has made me anxious to read more of his novels. I both admired and deeply enjoyed this one.

4.0 stars. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

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## **Kalliope says**

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this novel. It felt like flying, may be because I practically read it in the course of two medium-length flights.

As there are many good reviews of this book, I will not extend myself too much.

Ackroyd is a master teller. He polishes the fascination that his amateur archeologist Heinrich Obermann (a.k.a. Henrich Schliemann) feels for anything Homeric to a degree of brilliance that it naturally reflects back from Obermann himself. Those people living around him, or visiting him or spying on him are drawn by his visions and enthusiasm. This fascination proves contagious to the readers too.

The plot is also ingeniously handled. The development of Obermann's personality simultaneously spins its own threads of destiny that will lead, necessarily, to his tragic fate. But I think the final brooch to Ackroyd's abilities goes to his skill in giving different voices to different characters. Their speech portrays their personality. Not many writers have this chameleonic ability with their pen. Julian Barnes is one of them. Simone de Beauvoir, however, failed.

The novel renewed my interest in the Troy and Schliemann excavations. I already have sitting on top of my piano a framed postcard of the so called "Agamemnon mask", but as soon as I arrived back home after my flights/reading, I switched on my computer and browsed through the internet checking fiction with fact and looked for further readings.

This is the Agamemnon that, poor thing, has to listen to my piano practice.

Navigating through the web of the *American School of Classical Studies* in Athens, it is immediately apparent what an extraordinary person Heinrich Schliemann was. Amongst other documents, some of his diaries are preserved. These are written in several languages, depending on where he was writing them. We have his texts in German, French, English, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Arabic, Russian, Dutch, Polish and Turkish. These multifaceted written records can be seen as a proxy to his multifaceted life, abilities and personality.

But if one wants to check whether Ackroyd's eccentric Obermann and his idiosyncratic understanding of Archaeological practices is an appropriate impersonation of Schliemann, the best is to look at the picture of Sophia (could she have had a better name?), wearing the beautiful and becoming treasures found by her husband in his excavations.

Can one have any doubts?

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## **Roger Brunyate says**

### **A Glorious Rogue**

Heinrich Schliemann discovered Troy, that much I knew. I had always assumed him to be some dusty nineteenth-century German professor, treading in the footsteps of the illustrious Goethe. But no. As I now see from Wikipedia, he was a wealthy amateur, opportunist, and rogue. He was German born, yes, but worked mostly in Russia and America, where he became an American citizen; he was a polylinguist, speaking fourteen languages at the time of his death. He made his first million, possibly fraudulently, in the California Gold Rush, and multiplied it several times over by cornering parts of the armaments market in the Crimean War. He retired from business in his later forties and moved to Athens to pursue his passion: to rediscover the ancient sites described by Homer. Divorcing his Russian wife, he married a Greek girl thirty years his junior named Sophia Engastromenos. His excavations at the hill of Hissarlik, on the Turkish side of the Hellespont, revealed a history of ancient cities, built on top of one another over the course of several millennia. As skilled in self-promotion as he was lucky in archaeology, Schliemann made himself a world-famous figure, while further enhancing his private wealth with treasures smuggled from the site.

*Sophia Engastromenos Schliemann, wearing jewels excavated from Troy by her husband Heinrich Schliemann*

Most of this finds its way into Ackroyd's compact novel, at least as background. At first, only the surnames are changed: meet Heinrich Obermann and Sophia Chrysanthis, beautifully apt monikers for the megalomaniac archaeologist and his golden bride. It is an arranged marriage, but Sophia is swept away by the energy and enthusiasm of her husband, by the sheer scale of his excavations, and by his pagan conviction that they have been chosen by the gods to walk again in their ancient footsteps; there is a beautiful chapter in which they ride up the slopes of Mount Ida to visit the glade where Paris chose between the goddesses Hera, Athene, and Aphrodite. Heinrich, who knows much of Homer by memory, works largely by instinct, feeling the presence of ancient civilizations in the air around him and the ground under his feet, and apparently being mostly right. When visiting experts from Harvard or the British Museum raise some tentative questions about proof, Heinrich merely puts his hand to his heart, saying that he has all the proof he needs right there.

*Hissarlik Hill, Turkey, during Schliemann's excavation*

As the novel proceeds, it becomes clear why Ackroyd has changed the names. He needs to develop the

larger-than-life Heinrich in his own way, bringing events to conclusions that have no basis in history, but are nonetheless deeply rooted in character. Sophia proves remarkably competent in helping with the excavations, offering insights of her own, and serving as a charming mediator between her husband and those irritating visitors. But she also becomes aware that her husband is keeping secrets from her: not merely the valuable finds he conceals from their Turkish overseer, but also facts about his own history that she discovers only by accident. And when a young English paleontologist comes to the site to work on what appear to be tablets inscribed with writing, and his conclusions threaten to disprove everything that Heinrich had so fervently believed, events move to a climax that is both understated and devastating. Not for nothing is this novel called the Fall of Troy. It is hard not to weep for the loss to science that Heinrich's bull-in-a-china-shop attitudes incur; similar charges were raised against Schliemann. Yet what we end with is the radiance of Heinrich's vision, and of Homer's epic blazing through him. Heinrich—whether Obermann or Schliemann—may have been a rogue, but he certainly was a glorious one.

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### **Lady Knight says**

First off, I'm going to admit that there were several times I was ready to give up on this one and only restrained myself as I had no other audiobooks to listen to as I worked.

This really should have been a good read for me as, superficially at least, the book ticked a lot of boxes for me:

Archaeology? Check.

Fictional retelling of real historical figures? Check.

Interesting premise? Check.

Historical setting? Check.

My problem(s)? I hated the characters (and yes I know Obermann is supposed to be a fictional representation of Schliemann), I disliked the writing style, and was generally bored with the whole story (I didn't really care for the narrator either which certainly did help improve my opinion). I wanted Sophia to have more backbone earlier on, I wanted someone to punch Obermann, I wanted Sophia's parents to wake up and see what a creep their son-in-law was, and just in general I wanted the story to not feel quite as slimy.... Definitely not a read I enjoyed, nor one I'd recommend.

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### **Darkpool says**

I listened to the Audiobook version, rather than reading this book. There is something of a theatrical quality to this book, and I feel it would make a wonderful film. There is the real sense of inevitability to the story - once the characters have made their decisions the plot thunders inexorably to its conclusion like a Greek tragedy. Michael Maloney, who reads the book, does a wonderful job, and enhances the author's characterisations with his reading. I'm left wondering the extent to which the book's central character Obermann, resembles the real life Schliemann on whom he was based.

I'll certainly be hunting down more by this author in future.

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### **Teresa says**

Heinrich Schliemann (1822-1890) foi um arqueólogo alemão que, fascinado pelas obras de Homero, acreditava que os acontecimentos narrados na *Ilíada* eram reais. Em 1873, realizou o seu sonho ao descobrir,

na Turquia, ruínas que acreditou serem as de Tróia, e jóias a que ele chamou "tesouro de Príamo". Posteriormente, arqueólogos analisaram o lugar e verificaram vários erros no trabalho de Schliemann; quer no seus métodos selvagens de escavação - sarcasticamente, um historiador disse que Schliemann conseguiu fazer uma maior destruição em Tróia do que os gregos -; quer na datação dos achados - as jóias eram de um período de mil anos antes do referido na Ilíada.

(Estação Arqueológica de Hisarlik)

[Sophia Schliemann, a segunda mulher de Heinrich Schliemann, com as "jóias de Helena de Tróia" (o "tesouro de Príamo" está, actualmente, no Museu Pushkin, em Moscovo)]

O romance de Peter Ackroyd é inspirado na vida de Heinrich Schlieman e inicia-se no noivado de Heinrich e Sophia - que foi seleccionada pelo noivo de uma lista de mulheres bonitas, novas, gregas, com nomes gregos e interessadas nos clássicos gregos. Após o casamento, partem da Grécia e vão para Hisarlik onde ocorrem várias peripécias durante as escavações.

Este romance não é uma biografia - o desenvolvimento final revela-o claramente -, no entanto é uma leitura muito interessante e divertida sobre a paixão de um homem por uma época, que lhe é revelada por uma obra literária.

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### **Nikki says**

This was a lot better than I expected it to be, given it was a random find in a charity shop. The central character, Herr Obermann, is an odd one: unlikeable in his fanaticism, and yet attractive in his dedication to his ideas. The supporting characters are not so vivid, but Sophia has a quiet strength which is very appealing.

The story itself is more suspense and quiet threat than action, really. The dialogue is odd, rather stiff, because Peter Ackroyd seems to make a pretty good attempt at representing how people speak English as a second language. The writing itself is functional rather than beautiful, rather matter of fact, but not a chore to read. It does make the potential romances that could be built here rather prosaic and flat, and the whole thing feels reserved, but it works, here.

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### **Suz Thackston says**

I really wanted to like this book. I love everything about the Trojan cycle, mythic and historical, and I love the story of that odd brilliant scoundrel, Schliemann. But this book, this writing style, is not grooving with me. Since it's clearly based on Schliemann and Sophia, I don't know why the author coyly renames the main character into something almost the same. I dunno, maybe there are legal reasons, but it comes off as 'Since I'm not using Schliemann's name I can make this seem like a fiction.'

Which it is, to a degree. I like fictionalized history. But I don't like this.

I don't like the odd stilted writing style. It would work for dialogue, but not for an entire book. It's abrupt and off-putting. It prevents me from really falling into the characters the way I need to. There's little description of the setting, not enough to make me feel as if I'm there.

I'll give the writer this, he's a master of 'show not tell' which I very much admire. I just don't like his

storytelling style.

When we're talking about the site where so much history and myth strode across the landscape, I need way more pity, terror and grandeur.

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### **Bettie? says**

Obermann is based on Schliemann. Quirky, however I wasn't that keen on any of the characters.

- 3\* Hawksmoor
  - 4\* Shakespeare
  - 1\* The Lambs of London
  - 3\* The Fall of Troy
  - 4\* Chatterton
  - 3\* The House of Dr Dee
  - 5\* Dickens
  - 2\* The Plato Papers
  - 4\* Wilkie Collins
- 

### **Shovelmonkey1 says**

As a practising archaeologist, I'm automatically drawn, like an old moth to an archaic flame when it comes to historical fiction dealing with the pursuit of archaeology. It's like a sickness but I can't stop reading this kind of book. The fixation started with River God by Wilbur Smith and continued with The Seventh Scroll and it has since been born out by Agatha Christie, latterly by Peter Ackroyd and by cinematic greats such as Indiana Jones and the slightly less great "Mummy" series.

The pursuit of "fact, not truth" and the "fortune and glory" (okay, last Indiana Jones quote, I promise) aspects of archaeology have been gently burying (or unearthing?) themselves in the public psyches since the Grand Tours of the 18th century and the Egypto-mania caused by the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in the 1920s and this seems unlikely to cease any time soon.

Peter Ackroyd is a man who knows history. Not only is he a well respected historian with an encyclopaedic knowledge of London cinched tightly under his belt, but he also understands what draws people to scabble about on their hands and knees in the dirt, and even better, what draws further people into reading about it. The Fall of Troy is masterfully written and Ackroyd's evocative descriptions of the plains and villages around Hissarlik and the ruins of Troy itself are excellent and absorbing. Herr Obermann believes the ancient Tell site (or hoyuk as it would be in Turkey), to be the Homeric site of Troy. A dangerous obsession with the Gods and mortals depicted by Homer sends the learned but autodidactic Obermann on a flighty path of imagination and ultimately self destruction as his fixation with the truth of Homer and the greatness of Troy come to interfere with the very fact of his own perceptions of reality. It is well documented that archaeology tends to attract people who might be termed a bit unusual but to be a 19th century archaeologist required a breadth of imagination which most people do not grasp and Ackroyd has captured this perfectly with Obermann. He has the ability to pick up an abraded shard of pottery and not only conjure up the shape of the vessel, but to see into the dirt and conjure the face of the man who once shaped it and the city in which he

lived and this is something else altogether.

Ackroyd pulls threads of historical fact, fiction and mythology into this book and weaves them tighter than a Turkish kilim. Rarely have I read a book which highlights so well one of the core fears which plagues that of the "digger" both modern and antiquarian - the hope to have discovered a famous site so well documented in ancient texts, only to find that not only is the archaeology intent on disproving your theories, so is the rest of the academic community.

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### **Jane says**

This is *not* another novel about the Trojan War and its aftermath. This was a suspenseful novel about the archaeological excavations of the 19th century; Heinrich Obermann was a thinly-disguised Heinrich Schliemann. This was a fascinating book; it begins with the marriage of Herr Obermann with a young Greek girl, Sophia, many years younger than he. They travel to Hissarlik, where Obermann feels the actual Troy has been buried. Sophia helps him in his work: she feels "if she embraced her duties with enthusiasm they ceased to be burdensome. That is why she immersed herself in Homer, and why she took pride in the excavations." She meets some of her husband's friends, none of whom are as obsessive and single-minded as Obermann. The author shows all through the novel his blindness in his twisting what he sees before him to fit 'truths' he believes about Troy; to him Troy is always the Troy of Homer.

Sophia begins to think her husband is not what he seems; she begins to find deviousness and wants to find out the truth about him. He had a previous wife of whom he had not told her. When Obermann finds a cache of golden ornaments, so that the Turkish government does not find them, he has Sophia spirit them away to a Phrygian Greek couple he knows, to hide them. Sophia hears an odd, anguished scream--not the lady of the house. A visiting American archaeologist mysteriously dies of a fever after exploring a particular cave. After discovery of clay tablets written in an unknown language Thornton, a British archaeologist and expert on ancient languages, enters the picture. He and Sophia try to decipher the tablets. From one pictograph he makes a shocking discovery about what kind of people had probably lived in Troy. The denouement was fitting.

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### **BAM The Bibliomaniac says**

2.5 stars

A very greedy man takes a young lady just discovering life as his wife just to exploit her mind and talents on an archeological dig at Troy

He takes and takes until he breaks everything including himself

A moral tale of what selfishness can destroy

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### **Mark says**

You know how as you read a novel you will often get a picture of one of the characters in your head and after that all evidence to the contrary will have to be subsumed into your image no matter how much mental gymnastics that might involve. Here, for me, was a classic case in point. The main character, a German archaeologist called Obermann, had the misfortune of resembling in my head the author's picture of Peter Ackroyd on the inside cover of my copy. This meant every scene was played through with the squat, slick

backed hair of the chubby Peter playing the lead. This was fine until half way through the book when the character suddenly challenges another of the men to a running race echoing that of Hector and Achilles. As I read this account my poor little imagination nigh on exploded as i had to imagine the squat little bloke careering around the ruins of ancient Troy and winning aforesaid race ( though as a result of some sinister shenanigans ).

I only offer you this glimpse into my imagination because it is a useful pointer to the main thrust of this great little novel. It is the story of one man's obsession, an obsession which brooks no contradiction or alteration. He is one who decides on His Truth (intentionally capitalized) and that truth is maintained and elevated no matter what evidence may be found to the contrary.

The excavation of a site of which he is certain is the grave of Ancient Troy is the setting for all kinds of battles. Battles of will between an ego who refuses to allow questions of any kind unless they be to elucidate his certainties and of those seeking genuine truth, battles of the heart in which questions of loyalty and faithfulness and affection struggle with duty and social expectation or the need for a single-minded search after adventurous discovery, battles of the old gods of warm mystery or is that superstition with the new gods of cold fact or is that impoverishment of the human spirit and then the question that is left hanging is which of these gods actually is in control and is one disguised in another form.

Really clever linking of the struggles of ancient Troy and the actions of the gods with the deliberations and adventures of these 19th century explorers. It is wonderfully open-ended and all sorts of loose threads hang off this unfinished tapestry. A mysterious death left unexplained, an object lost inexplicably during the night in a sacred grove, the natural world of earthquake and owl cries challenging a too simplistic acceptance of a godless world.

One of the characters mournfully observes towards the end of the book that he must now find out what the world is like without vision. It seems to me that Peter Ackroyd makes very clear in the last sentence of his book that he does not want us to share that poverty.

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### **Captain Sir Roddy, R.N. (Ret.) says**

I rather enjoyed this slim novel. If you've read Homer's *Iliad* and have any interest, whatsoever, about the historical aspects of the discovery of Troy on the Asia Minor coastline, then this book is for you. Peter Ackroyd does a wonderful job of telling an enthralling tale about the discovery of the ruins of Troy and its initial excavation. His two primary protagonists are rather tightly based upon the German amateur archaeologists, Heinrich Schliemann, and his young Greek wife, Sofia, who discovered the ruins of what Schliemann believed to be Troy in 1869 near what is now known as Hissarlik, Turkey. Being a dyed-in-the-wool *Iliad* junkie, I have to say that I enjoyed this book very much. The writing is spare and well-crafted, and quite poetic at times. I enjoyed this novel nearly as much I did David Malouf's beautiful little *Iliad*-based novel *Ransom* (2010).

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