



Harland's Half Acre

David Malouf

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Born on a poor dairy farm in Queensland, Frank Harland's life is centered on his great artistic gift, his passionate love for his father and four brothers and his need to repossess, through a patch of land, his family's past. The story spans Frank's life; from before the First World War, through years as a swaggie in the Great Depression and Brisbane in the forties, to his retirement to a patch of Australian scrub where he at last takes possession of his dream.

Harland's Half Acre tells how a man sets out to recover the land his ancestors discovered and then lost and how, in fulfilment, this vision becomes a new reality.

Harland's Half Acre Details

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Author : David Malouf

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From Reader Review Harland's Half Acre for online ebook

Kimbofo says

There's no doubt that David Malouf is one of Australia's finest writers — and *Harland's Half Acre*, first published in 1984, is testament to that. I read it, wholly absorbed by the story within, but mostly enamoured of the lush, beautifully evoked prose that marks Malouf as a true literary giant.

This novel is one of those “great epics” that charts one man's life from cradle to grave and in doing so tells the story of Australia's history in microcosm from before the Great War to the late 20th century. At its heart is a moral certainty about the ways in which people can rise above their circumstances to follow their dreams, and the challenges associated with leading an artistic and unconventional life, especially at a time when Australian art was viewed as second-class compared with almost anything coming out of Europe.

To read the rest of my review, please visit my blog.

Susan Steggall says

My reading of Harland's Half Acre, was made all the more enriching by having attended a talk its author, David Malouf, gave at the Stanton Library in February 2013. Always very generous with his ideas, he provided emerging writers like myself with invaluable insights into his writing process. Most significant, was his idea of trusting readers' intelligence by not spelling out everything about a scene or incident. One way of doing this, he said, was to remove paragraph-ending sentences that recapitulated what had gone before.

The main character, Frank, is difficult; the world he inhabits is difficult. The book is a poignant story of tragedies large and small, of lives unfulfilled, warped by the monstrous narcissism of the father, Clem. There is a sense of unease, too, when the reader meets the other main character, Phil. Malouf turns Proust's Madeleine cake, that quintessential marker for memory, through 90 degrees to make the remembered smell of pink musk sweets a betrayal of a much loved grandfather.

Although Phil's grandparents' place is largely a household of women, I feel Malouf does not 'write women' well. There is always a hint of criticism as if they are lacking something men possess to make them fully functioning human beings. Malouf is on firmer ground in his descriptions of Brisbane's houses – 'Queenslanders' – with their dark spaces and uneven floorboards and what happens when things, and people, fall through the cracks. As in Malouf's memoir, 12 Edmonstone Street, 'each house, like each place, has its own topography, its own lore'.

It is only after the tragedies (the shooting murder-suicide of Knack and Edna; the suicide of Gerald by hanging), that the book comes alive for me. When he goes to live on the island, Frank finds artistic fulfillment, in spite of his harsh living conditions. The reclusive artist Ian Fairweather is often cited as the model for Frank but for me, Malouf's descriptions evoke the shapes and colours of the strange and beautiful landscapes of Fred Williams.

Reading the book was not easy. It is not the page-turning type of book one takes to the beach or onto a plane to lose oneself in the narrative. It requires, demands, concentration and commitment. In short, Malouf requires readers to respect his judgment – as he respects theirs.

James says

Malouf is an amazingly gifted writer, most assuredly... though i will admit to not enjoying the story of this book as much as 'Ransom', 'The Conversations at Curlow Creek', 'An Imaginary Life', or 'Remembering Babylon'... maybe the stories in those books were more evident to a reader such as myself, who misses representations of symbolism rather easily... so yes, i wallowed in Malouf's prodigious talent with words, phrases, and descriptions... his characters are full-bodied and well-fleshed and complete, beautifully so... i simply found the telling of the tale to be a bit random, and with too many shifts in scene/character/place/time... still, if words are for enjoyment then you will love this book, probably more than me, albeit for different reasons...

Sharon says

I had three books I really wanted to read and this was one of them and unfortunately I know I read it too fast. The subtlety's were many and it deserves a slower more thoughtful read than I gave it. What a wonderful writer Malouf is that can punch out something as good as this so quickly. His thoughts must just be worth writing down unedited.

I paint so I can really see how Harland managed to be were he was. Without the tag of Artist he would have been deemed nuts and with the obsession of his Art it most likely made him worse than he may have been, doomed one way or the other. I enjoyed the whole book, not all the characters were particularly endearing but the plot and the way we as readers are taken through the family drama's almost was and it personal so you got involved. There were so many uplifting and generous parts of the book that it created a balance.

Tracey says

This is my reading of David Malouf's work and it is so easy to see what all the fuss is about. Malouf is a writer of exceptional talent. It was all too easy to be swept into the novel and carried away into the lives of these two men.

I have to admit my favourite sections where Malouf captures through words the complexities and richness of the Australian bush.

Others have written far more eloquent reviews on Goodreads which do greater justice to the book than my gushing over this really engaging read by a master story teller.

PattyMacDotComma says

4.5 to 5★

“The power he had, as he more and more felt it, was a practical thing. His pictures were a reminder and inventory. They were also a first act of repossession, which made them charms of a sort and their creating an act of magic. The idea scared him a little but he was stubborn. He had chosen a course and would stick to it. For life - if that is what it came to.

As a boy, Frank Harland discovers a passion for drawing and tries to capture everything he can on scraps of

paper and cardboard. He draws the family, the land, and almost every person he comes across, in everyday poses with instantly recognisable slumps of the shoulders or tilts of the head.

His father, Clem, has always painted word pictures of his dreams and of the family's wonderful farm at Killarney, Queensland. His father is mostly full of . . . blarney, to put it politely.

“Killarney was the realest place he knew. It had been created for him entirely out of his father's mouth.”

Many of the characters in this book skate through life with boyish good looks and charm, like Clem, or with girlish fluttering and dreaminess. They contrast strongly with Frank, who has a painful sense of responsibility to work and to try to look after his siblings.

Frank is the pivotal character, but Clem is the one who set the course of Frank's life. Clem had sweet-talked Frank's mother into marriage with his dreams to reclaim the farm, but after having Jim and Frank, she dies suddenly, leaving Clem a widower at 23.

Ever the charmer, Clem soon attracts female sympathy and a new wife. They send toddler Frank to live for a few years with Clem's sister, who lost her own son in WWI. This auntie warns him his father is a lazy, charming user of people, but Frank won't listen and doesn't remember his mother and

“. . . the more it seemed to him that he had had no mother at all but had been born out of some aspect of his father that was itself feminine; not in being soft or yielding, but in being, quite simply, powerful, and so full of animal warmth that it must inevitably give birth to something other than itself. . .

his father's talk, the endless flow of words on that caressing breath that must itself, Frank decided, be the creative medium. He could only have been breathed forth in a great bubble or spat bodily from his father's mouth.”

Where his father enchants with words, Frank captures the imagination with pictures.

When Frank finally returns home, he's now one of five brothers. As his family falls apart again through the Depression, Frank wanders like a swaggie, lives in extreme poverty in Brisbane, and is befriended by an unusual couple, Knack, who is a Polish refugee, and his friend Edna, who have a junk shop selling all manner of old wares.

Malouf writes slow, meandering, poetic passages, and then, just as I get comfortable, there is a sudden, unexpected, tragedy. But nothing stops Frank's work.

As it begins to sell a bit, Frank adopts his sister's son, Gerald, to give him a decent start in life. Frank hasn't lost sight of his dream to restore the Harland family somehow, but Gerald finds his uncle strict and unreasonable.

The story is told both by the author and another narrator, Phil. Phil's well-to-do father was intrigued by this peculiar artist and took Phil to meet him when he was a boy. Phil, who also enjoyed junk shops, was startled to recognise Edna in one of the paintings.

At his Aunt Roo's party, Phil meets Gerald. Gerald is another with boyish good looks and easy charm and they become friends and rivals for a girl.

So we have three families and their various generations interacting, loving, feuding, caring, abandoning.

This has something of Steinbeck's Depression as well as Fitzgerald's Gatsby society. Phil reminds me a little of Nick, who told the Gatsby story.

Another wonderful Malouf. Just a little of his descriptive work. The next time you're sitting in silence in the bush, consider this, about the island Frank finally retreats to.

“The silence was deep but never absolute. There was always the slight hushing sound of a breeze high up in the leaves, even when all below was still, the clatter of banksia cones, a low ground-bass of tickings and fumblings and brittle rustling, as straws or small bones were lifted, egg-shells cracked, twigs tapped and fretted, tiny wings flapped, and a grasshopper's saw-foot rasped across bark. Each sound was infinitesimal, but multiplied they made a continuous burring note, so low and unchanging that the ear could ignore it and the mind might take its ceaseless buzz for silence.”

The white noise people pay money for.

I think I read recently that this is being reissued.

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In 2016, the Australia Council awarded David Malouf AO the Australia Council Award for Lifetime Achievement in Literature.

<http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/ne...>

T says

What a great book. Some reviewers have said they couldn't follow or engage with the plot and have blamed the author. I disagree. The brilliance of Malouf's writing here is that it mirrors Frank Harland's painting style. He gives an impression of the story and the essence of the characters - just enough to spark instant recognition of something or someone familiar in those with a creative mind or vivid imagination. In places, he describes places and people in great detail. In others, he sketches out the crucial points and lets the reader do the rest. The writing is like an ink and wash picture. It's genius. One of the best books I've ever read.

Ian Laird says

Curious book because it is remarkably remote, yet it carries considerable emotional weight.

It takes a long time for the two principals to meet and we then learn much about their association in retrospect.

Frank Harland is a remarkably original artist who ultimately achieves considerable fame. His friend (a loose term) is Phil Vernon, a lawyer who represents him and looks after his affairs, such as they are. Their families are vastly different in background and socio-economic status yet curiously similar, with their disappointments amidst the crowded hubbub of their respective households. Frank's father is a shallow, charming, lazy dairy farmer who continues to dissipate what little is left of the family fortune- the family

lives in a hut. Some of Frank's siblings cause him worry and grief over the years. Frank becomes the strength of the family, although not in any conventional home-making sense, but rather in his dedication to his calling, to restoring what he can of the family land and support for his brothers and sisters.

Phil Vernon comes from a well-to-do Brisbane family with a powerful grandmother who is a stiff and cold matriarch with a dying husband, Phil's grandfather, a man who has failed to live up to his even his own modest aspirations.

The fulcrum of the story is Phil's father, Bob, a man who has devoted his working life (more out of duty than passion) to the fruit and vegetable wholesaling business established nominally by his father, but in reality by his frightening mother. But he comes alive when out walking with his boy, greeting the locals. Phil's father supports various people round the place and is enthusiastic about a young artist, which is how young Phil first meets Frank Harland.

The story traverses the years of Frank's life and there are clever and well observed references to contemporary events and mores of the time, from world war two to the mining boom of the 1970s (my favourite moment is when one of Phil's relatives profits mightily through the rapidly rising value of Poseidon shares).

Frank Harland appears to be based, at least in part, on the recluse of Bribie Island (off the Queensland coast), the painter Ian Fairweather, who lived the bulk of his life in a lean to – fortunately the climate was pretty benign, except for, as Frank Harland experienced, the occasional cyclone.

Suraj Alva says

Like everything Malouf writes, it's simply more than what you think it's going to be about.

Gay Harding says

David Malouf has become one of my favourite writers. In Harland's Half Acre he describes Australian landscapes to a tee and takes me back to what seems like another life, a simple one, when visiting aunts and uncles as a child and the various personalities not understood at the time but, on reflection revealed as a product of our culture and unique location.

Greg says

David Malouf has created an artist and got him right, true and real. For advice on the life of an artist and technical working methods Malouf consulted Jeffrey Smart.

The novel is set in Australia, covering the life of artist Frank Harland from his birth to his death, through the twentieth century. The depression years, WWII and into the 1960's in Frank's final years as a famous artist living as a recluse in a makeshift camp on Stradbroke Island.

The story is of two very different Australian families. Every character is flawed in some way. All richly

described, with many strong women characters. There are some beautiful passages throughout the book. Describing the orchard trees as individual was an ingenious way of establishing the individual uniqueness of the characters in the story. Even the approaching storm, a metaphor of change in thinking or perception. During WWII in Brisbane, Frank is living in an abandoned picture theatre. He has a close friendship with two people, Knack and Edna, (Walter Nestorius and Edna Byrne), a couple from very different pasts. They grew up in very different worlds. There is a wonderful description of what Frank is trying to capture as he paints a portrait of Edna.

Malouf is a master - he has woven around the people the manners and morals of the times. A few times in the book two people are known as 'a fascinator', a personality that has a charisma that charms anybody.

By chapter 6 - The Island, I am right into the book and know all the characters. Frank is now a famous artist, a recluse living on Stradbroke island on the Queensland coast. A clear image of the island comes into focus as the elements, vegetation, water, birdlife and animals appear incidentally around Frank and the people who are concerned for his welfare. A massive storm hits the island, wrecks Frank's camp and makeshift tent. The storm at the beginning of the book when Frank was a child had a different effect on him than the storm on the island when he's an old man, calm and philosophical at losing everything.

There is a lovely description of Stradbroke Island from the helicopter.

At the Harland retrospective exhibition, one of the story's central characters, Phil Vernon, walks around looking at the many works. Here is a wonderful explanation of how Phil recognises a faculty in Frank that can't be described or even revealed. Fifty years work, and how the body of work on the walls collectively seem out of the context of seeing them individually being created in their environment over the years.

The novel has numerous references to the difference of Australia to Europe. I think that the author is saying Australia is a blank canvas of unlimited possibilities for its characters to paint their lives.

This book is a classic, an important addition to Australian literature.

Kirsten says

While this was compulsory reading for my Post colonial Literature class, I thought this was quite a good novel. Despite the fact it's not something I would usually choose to read, and the style was unfamiliar, I really appreciated the detail that David Malouf put into every single aspect of this book. It showed a real knowledge of human experience and character as I was able to understand the personality of each character before they uttered a word of dialogue. Frank was a highly motivated character but he remained a mystery, a little distant, however as the reader we understand that this natural evasiveness is in itself an aspect of his character, and it is only through the lens of Phil that we understand this.

4triplezed says

The story is about one of the strange quirks of life that makes the least likely figure, in this case Frank Harland, noted as an artist of extraordinary talent beyond what he could have been considering his circumstances. Born to a dirt poor widower before the Great War we follow Harland's outsider life and that of his outsider family as he becomes closely associated with the flawed middle class Vernon's.

I rapidly got sucked in hard by this brilliant book. Malouf's writing is a pleasure. Descriptive without being

overwrought. He has written such wonderful prose that I found myself rereading his powerful descriptions of Harland's art as well as the accidental life and fate that he was immersed by. The writing was so good that it could seamlessly convey the changes in narration from the third person to the first, never making me the reader lose track of the intense power of the words written. Their power made it easy to read of a changing Brisbane, and with that Australia in general, from one being a begotten colonial outpost to a nation becoming part of a changing wider world. All this mirrored through the life of the strange but gifted Harland and his family through to, the sometime narrator, Phil Vernon who in his own way was aware of being an observer to that change.

I was recommended this book by Greg. His fantastic review [here](#).

An Australian literary classic!

James Murphy says

I've been a long time between Malouf novels and had forgotten how well he can write. But he's breathtaking. He kinda reminds me of Michael Ondaatje in that he has a trick of starting in one direction but then shifting plot and focus so that what you read is something other than what you expected. Like shifting sand. You don't end up where you thought you were headed. With prose this supple and pleasing to the mind, though, you always wind up in a good place. You find your headed toward a reading of very good fiction. I think this is an accomplished novel, polished, and impressive because I think it's a first novel. I don't know why I'd never read it. I'm glad I finally got to it.

Lisa says

It's been too long since David Malouf's last novel *Ransom* (see my review) and readers who love his work will be delighted by the reissue of Harland's *Half Acre* by Vintage Books Australia.

First published in 1984 when Malouf (b.1934) was fifty, Harland's *Half Acre* brings us a world long gone even when he wrote it. A world where motherless children were split up and farmed out to relations bereaved in The Great War, while the remaining children lived in grubby chaos in a single-roomed shack. A world where bread pudding was a celebratory luxury and finishing school was an ambition reserved only for the brightest one, and then only if someone in the family did well enough to fund it. A world where one wife dies from an infected wound caused by a rose thorn and her successor Sally - having produced three more little children in quick succession - dies from the Spanish Flu. Malouf introduces his story with the childhood and adolescence of Frank Harland growing up on the remnants of his family's former prosperity, where he is sustained by the garrulous fantasies of his feckless father, a man himself chained to the drudgery of an unprofitable dairy farm and five motherless boys.

No doubt childhoods like these have been the subject matter of many sorrowful or bitter memoirs, but Frank Harland's life has its compensations and this first chapter is a testament to the human spirit. In the subdued house of his Aunt Else and Uncle Fred where the shirts of their only son Ned still hang in the cupboard, Frank learns to draw and so discovers the art that sustains him throughout his long life. And when reunited with his family after Sally's death, he visits the ruins of the family's fortunes lost to drink, gambling and mismanagement, and invests his father's nostalgic stories with an imaginative reconstruction of their lives,

creating a 'memory' of grand people in a grand house not much like what it really was. These ideas of former glory couple with a profound sense of responsibility to his family and form his ambition to somehow restore their fortunes. For all their faults he loves them dearly, and this love of his family is the making of the man.

To read the rest of my review please visit <http://anzlitlovers.com/2013/03/11/ha...>
