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CHAPTER III

Male Identityin An Imaginary Life

3.1 Introduction

An Imaginary Life is a Malouf's most impressive piece of work. It explores the themes of male identity and soul-searching. The novel tells the story of the Roman poet Ovid. When he is in exile in Tomis, he lives with the natives. He does not understand the language of that people because they not cultured. In exile, he developed a relationship with a boy as first protector and protected. When Ovid comes to Tomis he is civilized. He wants to teach a language and manners to the boy. Through this novel Malouf, presents the problems of aboriginality verses settlers. That time the treatment of the indigenous people of Australia is the major issue of Australia. This novel published in seven languages as well as arguably the most widely known and admired. When it is first published and during the intervening years, the novel has attracted a great deal of critical attention. For this novel, Malouf received the New South Wales Premier's Literary Award in 1979. Malouf's writing mainly reflected the theme is male identity. An Imaginary Life is a prime example of the male identity. He is elaborates the accurate description of men's lives through this novel. This chapter presents how Malouf explores male identity through his characters.

3.2 Plot and Setting

Through reading this poetic short novel, we will come to know that it is a good example of male identity. This novel set at Tomis, an outpost of the Roman Empire, between the Danube and the Black Sea.

This novel is based on the exile of the great Roman poet and writer, Ovid, exiled to the northern boundaries of the Roman Empire by the Emperor Nero. There, he was alone and completely out of place among the locals. The village is only 100 huts. They have their own language and culture.

In the village, he struggles because of the language. As time passes, he understands their language and learns about that tribe. Now he becomes part of the tribe and takes their interest in culture while all this things he becomes the friend of Ryzak. Ryzak is a village headman. Ovid now learns about natives and has been ready to go for hunting in the forest with them. When Ovid in Rome he had a dream of a wild child of 8 who lives with the deer in the forest. While hunting he hears of and sees evidence of such a child, who lives in the forest as a wild boy.

At the time of hunting, they found some footmarks of wild boy and saw him in woods. Ovid finds the different bond between them. After 3 years of gradual contact, he is captured and brought into the superstitious village. Ovid cares for him and tries to educate him. As an Ovid teaches language and manners, the child also teaches Ovid more about nature. The villagers are correct to view him with suspicion for he surely was protected by the gods and spirits of the wild. He is surviving 11 years naked in the cold harsh wild world. Ovid convinces the Ryzak about the false belief about the child. After some time, the Child becomes ill and perceptions of this illness by the family where Ovid lives and the other villagers are fascinating.

On the death of Ryzak, there are no one protector of the Ovid and the child. They are escape towards woods from village. In the forest, the child teaches Ovid about nature. He takes care of Ovid. The

child found some eatable roots for him try to teach about nature cycle. He protected Ovid from the wild animals. So here is he becomes the teacher of the Ovid. It is a novel about the separation of mankind from nature. This separation of man from nature because of man's cognitive abilities is considered to be tragic. The passages of nature descriptions and dreams are very beautiful. Malouf writes with a poetic beauty that is enthralling.

3.3 Male Characters

3.3.1 Ovid

Ovid was a central character of the novel. He was a Roman poet, banished to a tribal village, comes to depend on the charity of people he is viewed as barbarians. Ovid had permitted to writing. He not understands the language of the native peoples. First he much reminds his friends, people and culture of Rome. Then as time passes, he was trying to learn their language and culture. He made friendship with the village headman, Ryzak. He was started to going on hunting. He was always dreamed about one wild boy. At the time of hunting, he sees a wild boy and realizes different bond between them though meet at the first time. Ovid befriends a wild child who has grown up among animals but who learns to trust human beings. He was brings the child at the village and try to educate him. While teaching he get some marks of humanity into the child, and he is very much happy. At once, the child becomes ill, and all things are change. Because of some circumstances Ryzak was dead and natives found child responsible for that. Now Ovid was felt alone. Only Ryzak was understood and help Ovid. That is why he and the child are run away from the village to the forest. There the child was very much happy. He was now teacher of Ovid. He was the protector of the Ovid from the wild creatures. Ovid was learning about the nature. First Ovid did not believe in the god, but that time he believes in god and god made nature.

3.3.2 The Child

The child was also central character of the novel. The child was a wild boy who lives with the animal, and his language was like an animal. He knows the language of nature because he lives with the nature. He was eight year old when he first saw the Ovid and made a bond between them. After three, years, he caught by Ovid and brought him village there no one likes him. Everyone think that he was an evil spirit. He was not happy with this act because he likes the freedom. This was an exile for him. Ovid tries to civilize him, thought some manners for living with human beings. He knows that and understands Ovid though they did not communicate. He likes the nature and lives with the nature. When he becomes ill that time he gets an opportunity to go back in the fcrest. This time Ovid leads him and that is why, he was very happy. Both Ovid and he came back to forest, and the child becomes a protector. Now he was taught Ovid about nature. The child was had been many masculine traits. Tough he lives with animals, he was a real man.

3.3.3 Ryzak

Ryzak was a headman of the village. He was ar old man though he was the leader of that society. He was a strong and brave man, who having real masculine power that is why he was a leader. Everyone obeys him. He was a kind person also who understands the Ovid and supports him always. In the child's case, whole village was against to keep the child in the village, but only Ryzak supports Ovid. He was going to hunting though he was an old person. On hunting, he did distribution of

works, lives happily there, and inspires other peoples for hunting which shows the real characteristics of the leader.

3.3.4 Lullo

Lullo was a grandson of Ryzak and child of a young woman. This boy plays an important role when the child becomes ill that time Lullo also become ill, and the old woman says that evil spirit goes into the Lullo's body that is why his fever not recover. Lullo was a same age of the child, but the difference between them is so far. Lullo was enjoyed his childhood in the human beings, and the child lived with animals.

3.3.5 Brother and Father of Ovid

There was no name mention in this novel of Ovid's brother and father but played an important role in Ovid's memory. Thirty years ago his brother died, who would have saved the last of their lands, won important public office, and done all a good son can be expected to do in the way of piety towards his family gods. He was serious minded and filled with a deep sense of loyalty to things to his father.

3.4 Concept of Hegemonic masculinity

In this novel, Malouf uses a different male identity which is Hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is a standard form of masculinity which is emerged in 1930s.

As Connell (1990) defined it, hegemonic masculinity is "the culturally idealized form of masculine character" (P83) which emphasizes "the connecting of masculinity to toughness and competitiveness" as well as "the subordination of women" (P94). ¹

Connell was arguing that such an idealized form of masculinity becomes hegemonic. It is when widely accepted in a society and culture.

According to Hanke (1990), "hegemonic masculinity is referred to the social ascendancy of a particular version or model of masculinity that, operating on the terrain of 'common sense' and conventional morality, defines 'What it means to be a real man' (P232).²

Hegemonic masculinity is emphases on violence and aggression, emotional restraint, power and dominance, competition, athleticism, risk-taking, toughness, and achievement and success. These themes effectively defined what it means to be a man in professional wrestling as well as in society outside the context of the squared circle. Moreover, heterosexuality was emphasized as the ideal, contributing to a hegemonic version of masculinity.

3.5 Hegemonic male identity in An Imaginary Life

David Malouf through *An Imaginary Life* presents a hegemonic male identity. The character Ovid and The Child explore the standard form of masculinity or male identity, hegemonic male identity. Philip Butterss said in his book, *What it Means to be a man: Reading the Masculine*:

Although David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life* is set about 2000 years ago, it can be read as fictional examination of several issues that are relevant to contemporary masculinity. Perhaps the most important underpinning of hegemonic masculinity in recent Western cultures has been the way that physical power and rationally have both been coded as masculine. Connell identifies a tension within contemporary hegemonic masculinity that may have its ultimate roots in these two supposedly gendered features. He

suggests that 'historically there has been an important division between forms of masculinity organized around direct domination (e.g., professions, science)' (165). *An Imaginary Life* examines and rejects two cultures whose dominant masculinities give different prominences to rationality and physical power, before going on to propose its own utopian model of masculinity.³

The novel begins with the description of the village; Tomis consist of hundred huts, which made of wooden branches and mud. Ovid had a room of his own, with a low table for writing. He lives with the headman Ryzak, his mother, an old woman of nearly eighty and his daughter- in-law and her child. They are rough and kindly people. This is patriarchy society. The whole village was an armed camp. They feed him provide a corner where he can sleep. No one speaks his tongue. Ovid nearly one year, communicates like a child with grunts and signs.

Ovid belongs to the Roman society. He was a Roman poet. He speaks Latin language in this novel. Language is a prime thing of conveying every man's thought feeling and emotion. Language is a way in which identity of human being and culture is reflected. Malouf is tried to explore the hegemonic male identity through the using of Roman language and culture in his work. Philip Butterss said in his book, *What it Means to be a man: Reading the Masculine*:

The form of dominant masculinity identified in Roman society closely parallels the form of language used in Rome. In Ovid's words, Latin is 'a language for distinctions. Every ending defines and divides' (98). Its complex grammatical inflexions that mark the different declensions, conjugations, moods and tenses make it the perfect language for expressing abstractions. Latin is the language of reason, and the Augustan

age privilege a form of masculinity at whose centre is rationality, order, clarity, definition, and distinction. Ovid comes to realize, however, that Latin is a language of alienation, a force that alienates the self from the natural world. Malouf's interest in such features of Roman culture is also an interest in a form of hegemonic masculinity that claims to embody the power of reason. ⁴

Living with the village people, Ovid learns the Getean language and rituals of the Tomis. It was an aggressive language.

Ovid finds that Getic, the language he gradually learns during the course of the novel, is better able to represent 'the raw life and unity of things' (59). The scene at the burial ground where Ovid imitates the old man's bloodcurdling cry is a rite of passage for him, allowing him to enter a new masculinity, and a new language. Ovid is not taught to speak words, at this point, but he learns to make sounds that belong to the culture of Tomis. His shout is at

once a signifier of a new, more aggressive masculinity than the one he had exhibited in Rome, and it is his first attempt at communication form within Getic culture. Getic may represent 'the unity of things', but the masculinity of the Getae is also predicated, at least to some extent, on a struggle to survive against the forces of nature. ⁵

3.6 Characteristic Features of Male Identityin An Imaginary Life

3.6.1 Force and control

Masculinity is hegemonic when power is defined in terms of physical force and control. According to Connell (1983),

force and competence are...translations into the language of the body of the social relations which define men as holders of power, women as subordinate [and] this is one of the main ways the superiority of men becomes 'naturalized' (P28)⁶

When Ovid was sent to hunting with village people, he came to know that there are foot prints of a boy, wild boy, who lives with the deer. Village people found the prints first two seasons ago. Ovid had a lot of questions regarding this like; where does the boy come? Who were his parents? How did he get here? How can he have survived? Etc. Besides all that questions, the child's footprints are real. He examines the prints and suddenly he saw the child. Other men follow the direction of his arm is pointing, but they did not found him. After the two three seasons, he tried to found the child but could not found. Next season he was found the child, and he becomes very happy. After found the child, they had taken the rest for two nights in the forest. Suddenly the child was vanished. After seeing the child, Ovid now was trying to convince the Ryzak that if they would find the boy, they would bring him back without harm. Ryzak had been no problem but only one doubt about the child. It is he must first get assurance of the Shaman that they can bring the boy into the village without some spirit of the woods. Finally, Ovid convince the Ryzak that he just a male child,

I argue that he is just a boy, a male child as human as ourselves, and Ryzak believes me, or pretends to, because he has a great desire, in my presence, to appear superior to his superstitious people. (P61)

Here, Ryzak wants to pretend his male power over other people. He wants to hold his power of the headman over to the superstitious people which are the one of the characteristic feature of the male identity. Every man wants to pretend his power on others. When the

boy captured his attitude shows the characteristic features of the real man through the following lines;

he suddenly discovered a new force of energy, lashing out with fists, heels, teeth, till the young man covered his mouth and nostrils with a fierce hand, squeezing the breath out of him, and the others were able to hold and then tie him with thongs. Only the eyes continued to move wildly, and I thought from the spasms that shook his body that he might be in a fit. I put my hand on him, and a savage hissing came from the nostrils, the spasm increased. (P63)

This force shows the male power and confidence to fight a new difficulty. Every man is always ready for that thing in his life that is why they are very strong and protective. This quality holds power over others. Here are also the child shows his power while he was opposing the young men. His force was full of energy, and because of that though they young men are physically strong than the child, they are freighted by the child.

3.6.2 Mankind's Fear of the Unknown

The barbarians, who are very strong by physically and mentally, frighten by the unknown when the child in front of them in the forest. All they are frozen,

The others, I know, are afraid. Their stillness is a sort of terror. This men who are not afraid of whirling horsemen in the night with poisoned arrows and firebrands, or of a wild boar with its tusks foaming, are afraid of the child. (P53-54)

After a week Ovid realize that how much he in these last weeks he had cut himself off, how much he had made his life with the

child the entire limits of his world. Now village people decided that the child must live under observation because Ryzak's mother was a magician and she thinks that the child has a spirit in himself. Ovid was anxious and asked Ryzak about that, but Ryzak was assured Ovid that they will not trouble the boy. Ovid was not convinced and thought about the magic power,

But I am not convinced. I am inclined to think that for all his position as headman, and for all his quiet assumption of authority, Ryzak holds less believe, and less sway, also, over the house. Behind his male prerogative, established in law, lies the darker power of women. The old woman his mother, especially, has strange ascendancy over him. He shouts at her, and once or twice I have seen him strike her. But his spirit quails before hers, I feel it...All he has on his side is bodily strength and the authority, such as it is, of the law. (P97)

The village people are barbarous. They are physically and mentally strong, but they frightened by the wild spirit that is why they kept a distance from the child. Here are Malouf want to show that though they are had been strength, authority they are thought on the magical spirit. Malouf's shows the mankind's fear of unknown through these lines.

3.6.3 Aggression

The aggressive nature of male shows their violence and ready willingness to fight. It is challenging other males to compete, confront, or to fight.

At one, night, the child stands in the cold. Ovid feels cold, and the child's body glows. The child shows Ovid the snow as if it were something out of his own world that Ovid might never have seen. When Ovid tries to draw back him in the room that time he resists like an

animal. Animal like power is the one of the characteristic features of male power.

But when I try to draw him back into the room he resists. I have never known him so suddenly recalcitrant. I make the mistake of insisting, and he lashes out at me, spitting, tearing at my cloak, and runs to the wall of the stockade, scratching at the raw timber in his attempt to scale it. When I try to calm him, he hurls me off and begins to howl. It is the old howling from his days in the forest. He howls, scratching at the wall like an animal, spitting whenever I approach, showing me his teeth and his hands with all the fingers tense and extended like claws. (P103)

This animal like power shows again when one night through the open window he tried to throw himself out,

One clear night, when we opened the windows, he tried to throw himself out, and I had to wrestle with him at the sill while he kicked and uttered the raucous animal-like cries. (P110)

After that, the child has a fever and behind shivering. The old woman watches from across the room and thinking that this was no ordinary fever. The child was wrestling with his demon, the animal spirit who protected him out there in the forest and is fighting now to get back. The young woman also frighten, and she think that while we are all sleeping their bodies empty in the dark, the child's spirit slips out, crosses the room and enters her son's body that is why two whole days she refuses to come near the child. After that, the boy Lullo also had a fever. He also suffers like a child and all people think about the spirit. Five days after the boy survives. Ovid thinks that the danger was past. One morning Ryzak has been stricken overnight with some illness. It was not same as the children had. It was dangerous. The old woman examines him and

declares that he was dead. It was a shock to everyone. Now Ovid thinks, with Ryzak's death, they have no protection there. Ovid decided to flee. Through the animal like power, Malouf is showed the aggression of the child. We often think that animals are very aggressive. Animals show their power through their aggressive nature. While living with the wild animals the child learned the same aggression, and he also shows his power through his aggression.

3.6.4 Protectiveness

Protectiveness is a prime characteristic feature of men because they always protect their family and the whole family dependent on them. So this protectiveness explores through Malouf's characters in this novel. The child, Ovid and Ryzak all are protector. The child was lived with the Ovid in his room. At start everyone has refused to touch him. Now Ovid becomes his protector in village. First they spend hours simply staring at one another. Ovid cleans him, manage his food. After some weeks, Ovid now left his hands free. Within this week, Ovid observes the child. He was very much curious Ovid express his curiosity,

He is, after all, a child. He needs activity. His body needs to express itself in movement and his mind to reach out and touch and test things. (P74)

Ovid tries to imagine his own childhood while watching the child and think,

Of course all men put their childhood behind them. It is part of discovering a new self in manhood. (P77)

Ovid now decides that he will teach him to speak human language. Now each morning they go out and practice their lessons in the open where other cannot listen. It was a difficult process. First he tries to

imitate the sounds of birds and from those founds he get some clue that to how he may be taught to speak. Meanwhile, he taught simple manual skills also, like to throw and catch the ball and in this he was very quick. As Ovid taught the child to put sounds together and make words such as men use, the child taught him to make the sounds of the birds. Ovid thinks that he was more patient teacher than him because he shows Ovid the bird in whose cry Ovid trying to imitate. He holds the bird in Ovid's hand, encouraging him and bringing Ovid closer to it,

But he, in fact, is the more patient teacher. (P93)

Ovid and the child are fleeing from the village and coming to the forest, in a new world. Their roles also changes, and the Ovid was a protected now.

They had come now in the child's world. He was now very joyful. The child gave Ovid seeds to eat. He found roots that are sweet and tubers, digging them up with his nails and cleaning them off with a thumb to make them ready for Ovid to chew and swallow. The child was now protector of Ovid, and he shows his masculine power also,

Once or twice in the night I wake to find the child sitting stark upright beside me, listening. I hear nothing, but know what it is. There are wolves close by. When one of them approaches he rises softly, stand tall in the dark, and makes little growling sounds in his throat, and I see the wolf's eyes flash greenish as it hopes away. (P144)

The child was taken care of Ovid like a real man,

Each day early, the Child hunts, feeding me now out of his world as I once fed him out of ours. (P149)

The child is taking care of the Ovid like the every headman of a family taking care of his family. Both are knitted in the new bond of relation.

When the child was new in the village Ovid taking care of the child, protect from the barbarous village people. Now the child taking cares of the Ovid and protecting him from the wild animals. Malouf shows here that one of the characteristic features of the male identity that protectiveness through the characters of the Ovid, the child and Ryzak. Ryzak is also protector of the Ovid in the village.

3.6.5 Adventure

Adventurous nature of man is a characteristic feature of the male. These men are physically and mentally strong. Ovid and the child are exploring adventurous nature. The child lives alone in the forest with animal, and it shows his adventure. When he had captured, he resists village people it shows his aggressive nature. Ovid has been learns all things, and ready to go for hunting shows his adventurous nature.

Ivor Indyk has suggested in his book on Malouf that Ovid and the Child set off into the wild in the final section of *An Imaginary Life* in 'heroic masculine terms' (16). It is true that the pair leaves Tomis to face a harsh landscape with no food and meager clothing, and Ovid's words as they set out into that landscape are drawn, in part, from tales of heroic adventure, or perhaps from explorer narratives:

I am going out now into the unknown, the real unknown, and compared with which Tomis was, but a degenerate outpost of Rome... What else should our lives be but a continual series of beginnings, of painful settings out into the unknown, pushing off from the edges of consciousness into the mystery of what we have not yet become except in dreams that blow in from out there bearing the fragrance of islands we have not yet sighted in our waking hours, as in voyaging sometimes the first blossoming

branches of our next landfall come bumping against the keel, even in the dark, whole days before the real land rises to meet us (P135-136).⁷

3.6.6 Obsession with Success

Every man wants to succeed in his life. Every man's criteria are different about success. In society success is often related with the person's income as well as their prestige, fame, and power. So for getting a higher status men are always related with the work and spending much of their lives working as well as planning for work, which give them an income as well as prestige, fame and power. Every man obsessed with success, and this is one of the important characteristic features of men. In this novel, male character, Ovid and child lives in their own different world compare other men, and which was deciding different criteria about their success.

However, the journey into the landscape in this final section is far from an expression of heroic, frontier masculinity. In fact, Ovid and the Child are setting out to try make peace with the landscape, and to become one with it. This is no heroic journey where men pit themselves against the natural world and attempt to defeat its obstacles. It is a mission to produce a different kind of masculinity, a masculinity that is not marked by reason, or by physical strength and opposition to the natural world. Ovid is trying to become one with the natural world and collapse the divide between reason and nature. ⁸

In *An Imaginary Life* at the end of the novel, both Ovid and the child are very much happy because they get their success. They set different masculinity. Both are happy now, and the child was in his world

now, and Ovid founds a new world which is very beautiful than Rome or village.

3.6.7 Status and achievement

In this novel, we see the men are doing those things which are only men are done. Women are only prepared the food, cooking, caring the children and the old people, washing clothes, etc. Men are going for hunting, doing farm work. Hegemony masculinity is explores that it is a division of labor which is made by the society and giving guidance the born child. Ryzak always tries to preserve his status in the society.

3.6.8 Familial patriarchy

According to Lerner (1986), masculinity is also hegemonic as patriarchy –

The manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over woman and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general (P139).⁹

The village Tomis was a having only hundred huts, but in that village there is patriarchy society. Ryzak was a headman of that society. Ryzak's daughter in law, his mother and every woman in the village is no importance than men. They are subordinate in village. Every decision had been taken only by the men. This was going on generation by generation in the society. In this novel also Ovid mention his father and brother but did not mention his mother anywhere which shows dominance of male over contemporary society.

3.7 Conclusion

An Imaginary Life looks at a society that privileges rationality and a society that privileges physical strength, before turning its back on both of them, and proposing a utopian way of being in the world- a masculinity not concerned with direct domination or technical knowledge, but with living peacefully and in harmony with the world. Reading for masculinity opens up cultural texts to interpretations such as these and, in doing so, underlines the fragility of hegemonic masculinity in our own culture, making it evident that change is not only possible- it is already under way.

Contemporary Australian society had male dominance and also faces the problem of aboriginal peoples. The village people always feel that they are different rather than any civilized country. They seem that they are aboriginal. Malouf very beautifully elaborate the village people's problems. Ryzak as a headman wants to develop this situation through the help of Ovid. He understands the power of education, and he want to educate his grandson, Lullo from Ovid. It shows one of the characteristic features of male identity that they always support their family.

The males are how reacting into the new surroundings and place, and how they are keeping their male identity in every field is discussed within this novel which is one of the characteristic features of the male identity. Ovid, Ryzak and the child come from another area, but they lives very strongly in the new world and make a new identity over there. All are always ready to face new challenges. Every male character in this novel presents the masculine traits through his behavior. In childhood also men are very strong like a real man which is shown through the character of the child. This novel is a good example of male identity.

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