



Remembering Babylon

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Australian author David Malouf has won worldwide recognition for his poetic talents as expressed in such collections as *BICYCLE AND OTHER POEMS* (1970), *WILD LEMONS* (1980), and *FIRST THINGS LAST* (1981), as well as for his ambitious novels, including *AN IMAGINARY LIFE* (1978), *HARLAND'S HALF ACRE* (1984), and *THE GREAT WORLD* (1990). Born in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, Malouf frequently has used his native region as a backdrop to the turmoil of his central characters. The idea of being an exile, of having to struggle to mold a coherent identity, has been a recurrent theme in both Malouf's poetry and fiction.

In *REMEMBERING BABYLON*, Malouf once again uses his native Queensland as the locale of a most intriguing story. British settlers, struggling to make a life for themselves in Australia, meet up with a young man who has been living with the Aboriginals for sixteen years. The settlers are not sure what to make of this strange person. His name is Gemmy Fairley; originally from London, he was shipwrecked off the coast of the region named by the British settlers as Queensland.

The settlers do not know if Gemmy can still be considered "white." They have an extreme fear of the native "black" population. Indeed, the British colonists of the late nineteenth century had great difficulty comprehending the new world of Australia. Gemmy becomes yet another test for the settlers to pass or fail; Malouf uses him to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the various settlers he encounters. Some of the settlers long for the life that they have left behind, while others are brave enough to grasp the opportunities that their new home affords them.

For those who befriend Gemmy, the future shows promise, because they see revealed in him something that they must nurture within themselves. They must find the ability to strip off the past and meet their new environment on its own terms. In *REMEMBERING BABYLON*, Malouf has assembled wondrous and frightening glimpses of what change can do to and for the human spirit.

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