



Harland's half acre

By David Malouf

First published in 1984

Genre & subject

Families Fiction

Australian fiction

Synopsis

Frank Harland's life is centred on his great artistic gift, his passionate love for his father and four brothers and his desire to regain the Harland.

Author biography

Malouf was born in Brisbane, Australia, to a Christian Lebanese father and an English-born mother of Portuguese Sephardi Jewish descent.

He was an avid reader as a child, and at 12 years old was reading such books as *Wuthering Heights*, *Bleak House* and *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*. These books, he says, taught him about sex: "They told you there was a life out there that was amazingly passionate". He attended Brisbane Grammar School and graduated from the University of Queensland in 1955.

Malouf lectured for a short period before moving to London, where he taught at Holland Park School before relocating to Birkenhead in 1962. He returned to Australia in 1968 and lectured at the University of Sydney, taught at his old school, and lectured in English at the Universities of Queensland and Sydney.

He has lived in England and Tuscany; for the past three decades, most of his time has been spent in Sydney. Like many writers, he values his privacy and enjoyed living in Tuscany "where he could think and write in anonymity".

Discussion starters

- How did you experience the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"? How did you feel reading it - amused, sad, disturbed, confused, bored?
- Describe the main characters—personality traits, motivations, inner qualities. Why do characters do what they do? Are their actions justified?
- Is the plot engaging—does the story interest you? Is this a plot-driven book: a fast-paced page-turner? Or does the story unfold slowly with a focus on character development? Were you surprised by the plot's complications? Or did you find it predictable, even formulaic?

- Talk about the book's structure. Is it a continuous story...or interlocking short stories? Does the time-line move forward chronologically...or back and forth between past and present? Does the author use a single viewpoint or shifting viewpoints? Why might the author have chosen to tell the story the way he or she did—and what difference does it make in the way you read or understand it?
- What main ideas—themes—does the author explore? Does the author use symbols to reinforce the main ideas?
- What passages strike you as insightful, even profound? Perhaps a bit of dialog that's funny or poignant or that encapsulates a character? Maybe there's a particular comment that states the book's thematic concerns?
- Is the ending satisfying? If so, why? If not, why not...and how would you change it?
- If you could ask the author a question, what would you ask? Have you read other books by the same author? If so how does this book compare. If not, does this book inspire you to read others?
- Has this novel changed you—broadened your perspective? Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or a certain part of the world?

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