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Abstract

For a country spared the ravages of major wars, at least until the twentieth century, Australian creative works preceding federation exhibit a striking concern with martial prowess and the reality or possibility of physical conflict. Bodily encounters with blacks, convicts and bush-rangers frequently provide novelists with dramatic climaxes. Images of the settler literally battling natural disasters such as floods and fires, or of the man on horseback performing heroic deeds are iterated in the verse, while such scenes dominate the sprawling historical canvases of the period. Moreover, the spectre of armed struggle appears repeatedly in the political literature of the colonies, either as an Old World horror to be avoided or as a sacrifice willingly accepted for a free and democratic society. Henry Lawson for instance, at the turn of the century, evoked the famous patriot-image of blood staining the wattle, much as forty years before similar concepts occurred in the verse of currency lads like Charles Harpur who, in the space of a single poem, could oscillate violently between admonitions to ‘spare to use the murderous gun, - /Nor meddle with the sword’ and the ringing call of ‘on, ye Red Republicans, /To Freedom or to Death’.1
War and Colonial Identity: The Poetic Response

MICHAEL ACKLAND

For a country spared the ravages of major wars, at least until the twentieth century, Australian creative works preceding federation exhibit a striking concern with martial prowess and the reality or possibility of physical conflict. Bloody encounters with blacks, convicts and bush-rangers frequently provide novelists with dramatic climaxes. Images of the settler literally battling natural disasters such as floods and fires, or of the man on horseback performing heroic deeds are iterated in the verse, while such scenes dominate the sprawling historical canvases of the period. Moreover, the spectre of armed struggle appears repeatedly in the political literature of the colonies, either as an Old World horror to be avoided or as a sacrifice willingly accepted for a free and democratic society. Henry Lawson for instance, at the turn of the century, evoked the famous patriot-image of blood staining the wattle, much as forty years before similar concepts occurred in the verse of currency lads like Charles Harpur who, in the space of a single poem, could oscillate violently between admonitions to ‘spare to use the murderous gun, – /Nor meddle with the sword’ and the ringing call of ‘on, ye Red Republicans, /To Freedom or to Death’.

Seen in context, this stress on warfare and its varied literary manifestations are grounded in discernible traditions and local aspirations. In what follows, I wish to explore the origins of these martial concerns, to outline briefly the received patterns of creative response to war available in the colonies and, finally, to illustrate in the works of Charles Harpur their specific adaptation to evolving conditions in the New World.

The reasons for the prevalence of martial imagery are at once cultural and political. War, from antiquity on, has appeared in Western literature and art as an ultimate determinant of the destiny of individual and country. The epic, grounded on Homeric and Virgilian precedent, confirmed warrior-spirit and proven generalship as signs of heroic election. Achilles and Hector, Odysseus and Aeneas, Orlando and Roland, are not simply great warriors, but figures upon whose deeds rest the ultimate weal or woe of a given kingdom. Though at times flawed or subject to lapses of judgement or emotion, they are effectively
the standard-bearers of a people. Similarly, the corresponding preeminence enjoyed for centuries by historical painting in the visual arts rested in no small measure on a preoccupation with patriotic actions. Its imposing studies, whether drawn from the past as in Jacques-Louis David’s ‘The Oath of the Horatii’, or based on contemporary deeds like Wolfe’s storming of Quebec, could project a sense of national identity and heroic sacrifice which transcended political divisions and kindled patriotic ardour, as in David’s canvas. There the orchestration of spare, history-charged forms focuses on the soldier-arms of Rome’s saviours, which rise to an apex crowned by the swords of war: an image of classical decorum but bloody consequence which found favour in the salons of the ancien régime, as well as in the coteries of the Revolution. In England, no less than in France, the closing decades of the eighteenth century witnessed a resurgence of interest in the power of art to shape a country’s temper and, in a war-time atmosphere, to provide the icons for renewed national fervour. Related thoughts, in turn, would inspire antipodean monuments to commanding figures and explorers, as in the case of Burke and Wills, who were raised in stone and verse into emblems of the heroic sacrifice demanded by an untamed land.

The young Australian colonies inherited these cultural traditions, together with the national hostilities and ideological battles of the Old World. Most obviously, the first settlement at Botany Bay, and even the development of later penal outposts such as Norfolk Island, were in part a result of the naval confrontation between England and France, first in the Great War for Empire and ensuing American War of Independence, and then during the Napoleonic period. The lost expedition of La Pérouse, sponsored by Louis XVI, also provided subsequent French regimes with a plausible pretext for mounting voyages to terra australis incognita, though military motives were not absent from official thinking. Thus, while the Baudin expedition (1800-4) was primarily concerned with discoveries in the fields of science and natural history, it received a more general brief of reconnaissance on the newly implanted English settlements in New South Wales and Van Dieman’s Land from the then first Consul, Napoleon Bonaparte. Resulting colonial perceptions of possible French incursions, no matter how ill-founded, and of the need for British naval power found early expression in David Burn’s plays Sydney Delivered and Our First Lieutenant (1845). Similar contemporary fears are echoed almost twenty years after in Kendall’s ‘Australian Volunteer Song’ that a ‘prowling, plundering stranger pounce upon you whilst you sleep!’. Now, however, the sense of a common colonial identity is stronger, and with it an emphasis on self-help against aggression which looks forward to the jingoistic, nationalist formulations of the 1890s:
Colonization was also dependent on and accompanied by war-like acts, which evoked a variety of literary responses. The early governors and explorers were professional soldiers, and their charter bore marked resemblance to a military campaign. Theirs was the textbook task of sustaining invading forces in a hostile environment. And once the logistical problems arising from over-extended lines of communication and supply were overcome, they still had to maintain discipline within their own refractory ranks, as well as to subjugate the potentially dangerous convict and indigenous native populations: ideas which form the backdrop to the personal dramas portrayed in Marcus Clarke’s For the Term of his Natural Life and James Tucker’s Ralph Rashleigh. Surviving buildings from the penal period support these fictional accounts of existence lived on a war-footing. This goes beyond military compounds and prisons to permeate details of private life. The governor’s kitchen at Norfolk Island, for instance, is dominated by a walled-in catwalk. This was used by armed sentinels whose task it was to keep in check the convict scullions employed below with knives and hatchets, in a dramatic confrontation between repression and hate. Even conventional symbols of advancing empire, such as public works, often bore the unmistakable marks of these hostilities, like the notorious Bloody Bridge at Norfolk Island. Similarly, increasing acreage under cultivation was bought at a high cost of native lives. Harpur makes this clear in his poem and accompanying note on ‘An Aboriginal Mother’s Lament’, where he shows his abhorrence of the Myall massacres (pp. 368-70); and the theme of indigenous losses inspired such notable works as Kendall’s ‘The Last of His Tribe’ and Eliza Hamilton Dunlop’s ‘The Aboriginal Mother’. In short, as Ian Turner reminds us, ‘the conquest of the land had been a half century of violence’. The colonies then, conceived as a result of conflicts, and raised from infancy by a military establishment, afforded the paradoxical picture of peace rocked in the arms of war: a tension denoted most frequently in subsequent literature in terms of an opposition between Old World attitudes or failings and New World aspirations.

Another major though unremarked influence on Australian martial depictions in the first half of the nineteenth-century and beyond was English Romantic poetry. Whereas popular colonial verse tended simply to transpose traditional warrior values to a bush setting, more ambitious works used physical conflict to explore metaphysical and psychological issues in ways which reveal direct links with Romantic precursors. For the latter, armed conflict was generally regarded at best as a problematical undertaking, at worst as self-destructive and
essentially reactionary in its consequences. When viewed positively, it was associated with revolutionary liberation and a Republican credo. Blake for instance, in his poems *The French Revolution* and *America, a Prophecy*, presented with apparent approval the unleashed forces of humanity tearing down the Bastille, emancipating the American colonies, and sending ruinous tremors through the British parliament, while Coleridge and Wordsworth could celebrate the immense promise evoked by revolutionary France. This early surge of optimism, however, was largely either annulled or re-channelled in the course of the 1790s. With the outbreak of the Terror, the carnage caused by the armies of the Directory, and Napoleon’s re-establishment of the monarchy, hopes of human advancement seemed dashed, and war assumed terrifying and protracted forms:

The hand of Vengeance found the Bed
To which the Purple Tyrant fled
The iron hand crush’d [sic] the Tyrant’s head
And became a Tyrant in his stead.7

This cumulative thwarting of revolutionary goals in the political sphere, it is agreed, contributed to a changing conception of literature.8 Art in general came to be viewed as a potential sanctuary for true human values and as a vehicle for spiritual regeneration. Wordsworth extols these merits in his celebrated Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, while the links between war-time experience and a new aesthetic emerge clearly in Blake’s succinct formulation: ‘Art Degraded, Imagination Denied, War Governed the Nations’ (p. 471). These programmatic statements at the turn of the century are complemented by an internalization of the site of heroic deeds in the epic, and by a changing moral emphasis. Blake is representative in disavowing his early advocacy of unrestrained energy in favour of an equally radical but antithetical doctrine of self-annihilation. Similarly, Wordsworth concentrates attention on the growth and liberating potential of the mind, and Shelley makes his standard-bearer of humanity a regenerated titan who, eschewing violence and revenge, redeems the natural and social worlds through an individual spiritual triumph. In general, traditional portrayals of warring armies and battle landscapes are supplanted by the dramatic clash of inner forces or antagonists. Personal self-conquest, rather than bloody victory, is seen increasingly as the key to social renovation, in a paradigmatic displacement of Romantic idealism from the general to the particular which would re-emerge on the great austral continent.

With few exceptions, colonial literary presentations of martial activities have clear English antecedents. The scenes of battle and the actual personae may vary, but the values they convey remain largely constant. The landscape of war and romance, with its attendant frays and noble virtues, could be readily transplanted to the wild and
untamed surroundings of the antipodes, as Henry Kingsley early demonstrated in *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn* (1859). His brave, self-reliant settlers form a natural warrior caste, while their young scion, Sam Buckley, has all the accoutrements of the epic hero: youth, good looks, courage and mastery of arms. The latter qualities are affirmed in the heat of battle against worthy outlaw protagonists, who meet their destined end in the clash of horses and steel. Similarly, the celebrations of empire by Tennyson and the mid-Victorians found a host of faithful imitators, and the writings of the Romantic afforded an ongoing and influential resource. Charles Harpur, for instance, clearly assumes reader-familiarity with their works when he remarks that 'the animal force and feeling of Byron, with the mental sensuousness of Keats, the moral depth of Wordsworth, and the gorgeous ideality of Shelley in equal proportions and intimately blended in the constitution of one man, would create him, perhaps, a perfect Poet' (A89). Moreover, the same note concludes with the wry question of whether 'a perfect Poet were a possible character', thereby illustrating that balance of respectful and independent judgement which typifies the more noteworthy New World treatments in verse of inherited war motifs.

Henry Kendall and Adam Lindsay Gordon provide contrasting examples of how the heritage of martial depiction could be assimilated to colonial concerns. Faced with crushing personal circumstances in the late 1860s, Kendall produced a series of brilliant adaptations of biblical and classical material which obliquely reflected his own growing sense of impasse. As in the mature works of the English Romantic poets, the Australian is less interested in warfare as an end in itself than as a way of illuminating problematic existential issues. Works such as 'The Voyage of Telegonus', 'Ogyges' and 'King Saul at Gilboa' focus on actual or potential leaders of nations, who trust in physical deeds only to miscarry. Telegonus unwittingly kills the very object of his quest. The once powerful, hunter-king Ogyges is a prey to impotent deterioration, and Saul, defying prophetic warnings, seals his fate by retaining at Amalek booty won by his sword. Collectively, they afford an exemplary gallery of bold but doomed warrior figures whose heroic efforts demonstrate the futility of human attempts to change individual destiny. Gordon, through his equestrian orientation, adapted war motifs more specifically to Australian conditions. In his poetry, ability to ride the wildest animals over demanding terrain becomes an implied surrogate for martial exploits, and the stockman *in extremis* provides the type of a conquering vanguard, whose concerted endeavours have rendered the land tractable to European needs. Often his emphasis is placed simply on heroic physical actions, though armed bravery, in whatever period, can provide an indice of mankind's invincible spirit. Achilles, with his daylight waning, dilates on life as 'this long blood-
spilling/... this ceaseless strife', enacted according to 'Fate's decrees',\textsuperscript{13} much as the apotheosis of Robert O'Hara Burke, a similar if less overtly martial figure, is assured by his final gesture: 'With the pistol clenched in his failing hand, / With the death mist spread o'er his fading eyes' ('Gone', p. 8). With life viewed as a battle 'against odds' and as a struggle 'up hill' (p. 9), both men are presented affirmatively as resolute fighters against adversity to their allotted ends.

In Gordon's verse, adherence to the warrior code can serve as a touchstone of moral values. Though rarely concerned with the broader implications of bloodshed, he at times locates in physical deeds, dependent on individual choice, a determinant of damnation or salvation. In the verse drama Ashtaroth, the traditional Faustian theme of the soul's 'doubtful fight' (p. 323) culminates in an ordeal of arms. Hugo the Norman does not directly choose God, but acts in accordance with his knightly code. It is the repeated challenge to his courage which moves him to seek a Christian death in battle against the Norsemen, rather than short-term mortal safety with the devil. Yet there is no doubting the spiritual repercussions of this martial decision. Hugo himself remarks, 'My soul, tempest-toss'd, / Hath her Rubicon cross'd' (p. 315). Although a self-professed sinner manifold (p. 297), his death and that of his steed represent an ultimate expiation in a world where the warrior's true fight is synonymous with the highest form of moral endeavour. More self-consciously, Lancelot, in 'The Rhyme of Joyous Garde', dilates on war-like deeds in a just cause as a means of resolving spiritual and psychological dilemmas, and locates in Simon Peter the prototype of the peccant but faithful bearer of arms, whose smiting 'seem'd good in Thy sight' (p. 170). A comparable though less exalted role would have been his had he 'died as a Christian knight – no saint / Perchance, yet a pardon'd sinner' (p. 163) in fighting infidels. Instead, he has lived to be disloyal to his liege and knightly vows, thereby forfeiting both grace and the unqualified joy of battle:

Now I know full well that the fair spear shaft
Shall never gladden my hand, nor the haft
   Of the good sword grow to my fingers;
Now the maddest fray, the merriest din,
Would fail to quicken this life-stream thin,
   Yet the sleepy poison of that sweet sin
In the sluggish current still lingers. (p. 166)

Rhetoric eclipses grim reality to suggest that death-dealing warfare can be life-kindling, while interchangeable epithets like 'maddest' and 'merriest' underscore the essentially amoral status of these physical acts. Their worth depends on the intentions, codes and values of the participants, with war being presented as an inescapable element of life, and as a potentially uncomplicated acting out of duty. In such an
unrelenting creation, where even God can be projected in warrior terms ('The Lord shall slay or the Lord shall save' ['Laudamus', p. 188]), open courage provides a laudable 'TYPE OF OUR CHIVALRY' ('Ye Wearie Wayfarer', p. 14) worthy of emulation, be it in the doomed exploits of the Light Brigade or of King Arthur's knights. The traditional notion of humanity's journey through life is supplanted by that of the warrior's ride: an exhilarating and heroically intensified metaphor with attendant dangers and spills commensurate to existence envisaged in battle terms.

The most sustained and critical colonial treatment of the ethics of war and violent, bloody deeds appears in the writings of Charles Harpur. The shedding of blood for Harpur, unlike for Gordon, was deeply problematical. So, too, was the received equation of national development with martial prowess, and his later works reveal the familiar Romantic shift from engaged political writing to a preoccupation with internal warfare as a key to individual and social progress. Harpur's presentation of war and its consequences in the New World is informed by the two lodestars of his life, Christianity and Republicanism. For the currency lad, bloodshed was generally seen as an affront to the primal tenet of 'Thou shalt not kill', as well as to the saviour's reforming precepts of mercy and forgiveness, and was an act fraught with dire consequences. In 'The Creek of the Four Graves', for instance, the narrator links all mankind, from Adam down to Egremont and the black inhabitants of terra australis, as joint destroyers of a potentially paradisal setting:

O God! and thus this lovely world hath been
Accursed for ever by the bloody deeds
Of its prime Creature – Man. Erring or wise,
Savage or civilised, still hath he made
This glorious residence, the Earth, a Hell
Of wrong and robbery and untimely death! (pp. 171-72)

Although this passage and the action of the poem implicate both black and white in fratricidal acts, usually the poet's attack on man's Cain-like impulses is levelled specifically at Europeans, as in 'The Spectre of the Cattle Flat' and 'The Slave's Story'. Their language, to expand Harpur's implied critique of Egremont, contains a 'word for mercy' (p.169), and these supposedly Christian civilizations provide, through their famed battles, hideously multiplied re-enactments of primal slaughter, and confirmation of our fallen state. Thus in the poem entitled 'War' (pp. 696-98), armed conflict is branded as 'disnatured' and a 'national madness', warrior-conquerors and the 'great captains of their age' are called 'murderer[s] 'who fail to 'honour God', and heroic tradition debunked as 'That national mischief [which] is the epic road / To national distinction'. These charges culminate in the apocalyptic image of a sea incarnadine swallowing up all existence, 'Even as the
landmarks of the earth were lost. In the blind growth of the prevailing deluge! Here past and present, biblical and European history, are linked by a common spiritual blindness which is translated into the physical deeds of war. Repeatedly in the Australian’s works, the unchecked sway of ruthless, violent instincts leads to the forfeiture of God’s favour, and wreaks havoc in the unspoilt garden of the New World.

Given Harpur’s insistence, in the words of his essay on war, that ‘violence can but beget violence, as the tiger can only procreate its kind’ (C376), the only armed struggle the Australian sanctions is that waged in self-defence, and to protect the innate and God-ordained democratic rights of mankind. Wars motivated by greed or the desire for power and personal glory are anathema. On these issues he is unrelenting. They underlie his judgements of historical personages and events, and explain certain of his apparently contradictory statements. Fervent support is given consistently to nationalist struggles for freedom whether in Italy, Hungary, Poland or Ireland, as well as closer to home by praising the leader of the Maori Independence fighters, John Heki. Also he cites Washington, Tell, Milton, Kossuth, Hampden and Deniehy as patriots or Republican heroes and, on these same grounds, responds with contempt to contemporary adulation of Wellington, the ‘great minion of the crown’. Like Blake in similar anti-portraits of Pitt and Nelson, Harpur characterizes this conquering hero as ‘the atheist / Of a conventional and most earthy duty’ (‘Wellington’, p. 716), and as antithetical to all truly human and revolutionary values: knowing ‘no right, no wrong, / No faith, no country, and no brotherhood’ (p. 717). So too, in ‘A War Song for the Nineteenth Century’ the poet alternately denies or affirms the efficacy of the sword, depending on whether he envisages the triune ideals of ‘Mercy, Justice, Truth’ as requiring the support of ‘armed right’, or as conquering ideally through ‘the artillery of the intellect – / The thunder of the mind!’ (p. 782). Armed struggle may be countenanced in defence of Republican values; however, Harpur’s devout hope and Blakean preference is for the triumph of mental over physical warfare.18

The crucial phase of Harpur’s thinking on war comes in the 1850s, a period of intense national and ideological crisis analogous to that of the 1790s in England.19 Again the immediate catalyst is revolution, this time the anti-monarchical uprisings throughout Europe in 1848, coupled with intense political debate at home, centred on the proposed constitution and social issues ranging from transportation and land control through to sectarian and temperance interests. Harpur, dismayed by local events such as the increasing ascendency of Wentworth’s pastoralist faction, could describe himself by 1853 as a ‘physical force revolutionist’, and add a final stanza sanctioning bloody ‘weal’ to his ‘War Song for the Nineteenth Century’. ‘The best
consecration of liberty', he maintained, 'is the blood of the patriot'. But this bellicosity proved to be intermittent and shortlived. His basic aversion to violence was again in evidence by the outbreak of the Crimean War, which he perceived as a furthering of reactionary goals through the cynical exploitation of human valour. In a letter to the editor of the *People's Advocate* in April 1855, he boldly attacks the whole campaign as an aristocratic design 'to bolster up existing interests', and asks pointedly 'in what way this war, undertaken to uphold one despotism against another, is calculated to advance the true liberties of Europe, or benefit her suffering and downtrodden nationalities?' (C380). This note of pessimism is even more marked in private utterances, where the polemical confidence of his public statements is replaced by a sense of political frustration, as in the poem headed 'To Myself June 1855'. There Harpur tries to dismiss the follies of 'this Eastern War' as 'passing things', and to focus his thoughts on lasting guarantees of national freedom, fearing that impediments to liberty:

if pondered, can but hurt  
The straightness of thy moral view,  
And foul as with the Old World's dirt  
The virgin nature of the New. (p. 728)

The Australian's final years are marked by increasing eschewal of direct involvement in political issues and by concentration on poetry. Repeatedly he railed bitterly against the 'sham age' in which he had been forced to pass his days. This disenchantment was born of frustration with his own arduous existence and with recent political developments, which saw links confirmed between Britain and the colonies under the aegis of responsible government, and the replacement of radical ferment by parliamentary manoeuvring. By the late 1850s 'republicanism', as Normington-Rawling notes, 'was fading out of practical politics'. The result was what Harpur dubbed 'a sham Government', and scorn directed at 'sham friends' like Henry Parkes, whom he accused of having 'done things that would have hanged an honester and less subtle man'. Increasingly isolated by his views and by his return to life on the land, Harpur became more disgruntled than ever with turncoat politicians and the distinctly mammonite goals of his contemporaries. The way was thus prepared for the familiar displacement of idealism from the body politic to its individual members, and for a corresponding shift of poetic focus. When farm duties and failing health allowed, Harpur directed his energies to verse composition. This took two major forms: the constant reworking of earlier poems with the intention of producing definitive texts for eventual overseas publication, and the creation of his most ambitious work, 'The Witch of Hebron', which is thematically related to 'The Tower of the Dream' (1865). In these last poems of sweeping scope and
universal matter, the locus of conflict is internalized, and the need for self-conquest displaces, or becomes the prelude to, broader social advance. In ‘The Tower of the Dream’ the main action takes place within a tower symbolizing, at one level, the dreamer’s selfhood. There he is shown under the sway of either a liberating intellectual ideal or a violent counterforce, represented by a visionary maiden or Shelleyean epipsyche and by a dark, death-like persona. Respectively they mediate the paradisal and restrictive dichotomies of creation experienced by mankind, and our dual inner impulses. Similarly, the interplay between affirmative and negative impulses propels the unfolding internal drama of ‘The Witch of Hebron’. There the dreamer’s constraining tower finds its counterpart in the witch’s psychic make-up, which remains largely constant even though the persona’s outer form changes as he undergoes metempsychosis. Both agent and victim, mankind is divided against itself in these works. No longer the all-conquering hero, his witch and dreamer are types of peccant, contemporary humanity which must ultimately rely on itself, rather than on Divine intervention, to resolve dissension, shortcomings and inner turmoil.

Complementing this vision of the strife-torn human spirit are harsh fulminations against our bloodthirsty proclivities in ‘The Witch of Hebron’. In this final work, the identification of mankind with fierce, uncontrolled instinct is incessant. Murderous deeds are shown to diminish our human stature continuously, and these make the witch’s reincarnation in the form of such predators as a grizzly lion and eagle particularly appropriate. This bloodlust is further epitomized by warfare, which is once again portrayed as a devilish insanity when armies rush to ‘sumless slaughter, with a madness such / As could have issued only out of Hell’ (p. 951). Harpur leaves us in no doubt as to the extent of humanity’s fall from original love and the ‘sabbath concord of the Universe’ (‘The Creek of Four Graves’, p. 172). When stripped of all else, his protagonist’s last resource in his first life is ‘a hatred of mankind’ (‘The Witch of Hebron’, p. 937), and the satanic Sammael, in a passage which recalls Harpur’s earlier poem on ‘War’, credits mankind with having sufficient ingenious and unbridled savagery to challenge his own primacy in sin:

‘but I must not let
The wickedness of men transcend my own
Or work so far without it, as might make
My influence doubted in the Courts of Hell!
This land throughout shall be a deluge soon
Of blood and fire, till Ruin stalk alone
A grisly Spectre, in its grass-grown marts!’ (pp. 939-40)24

Again violence is seen to threaten the race’s eclipse, and men to be ready tools in supporting the world-wide sway of ‘Some dread
CROP PROSPECTS

OLD COCKY DEATH: “Cripes, it looks bonzer”

Norman Lindsay
Intelligence opposed to Good’ (‘The Creek of Four Graves’, p. 172). As Harpur always stressed, evil would be virtually powerless without a corresponding impulse within human beings, which must be overcome by an internal rebirth of the kind celebrated by Wordsworth, Blake and the younger generation of Romantics.  

Harpur’s complex and evolving literary response to war, then, spans and links the heritage of Romanticism with that of the colonial 1890s. Espousing the vision of a peaceful, free society, in which all could enjoy equal opportunities for unimpeded moral, spiritual and personal development, this early currency lad ideally rejected the use of arms as antithetical to the Republican conception of government based on universal consent. Instead he affirmed the Romantic insistence on the necessary progress of Truth, and projected man, in his last works, as striving to liberate himself from the dread pattern of repeated failings through the mastery of savage instinct and egotism, or in Blakean terms through self-annihilation. Later Australian writers were to echo Harpur’s sentiments when they called for ‘one people, – mighty, serving God’, or threatened to ‘knock the tyrants silly’ in their struggle for freedom in this ‘garden full of promise’. But the dual strains of his thought, with its emphasis alternately on political involvement and individual regeneration, would usually reappear as separate or polarized responses in the verse of such authors as Lawson and Brennan. Moreover, among colonial writers, only Harpur traverses the full Romantic paradigm which culminates in an internalized and particularized response to the reality of conflict, just as his writings go further towards combining Byronic passion with Wordsworthian ‘moral depth’ and ‘the gorgeous ideality of Shelley’. This, of course, is not to suggest that this currency lad represented ‘the perfect poet’ of his own whimsical description. But both his breadth of reference and his subject underscore his own serious engagement with letters, which was shared by his colonial peers. Thanks to their endeavours, the Old World experience of warfare was thoroughly assimilated to a broad spectrum of antipodean battles and debates in the space of a few decades, though with this first successful phase of literary appropriation, the role of war in shaping national identity and perceptions had only just begun.

NOTES

1. ‘A War Song for the Nineteenth Century’, in Elizabeth Perkins, ed., The Poetical Works of Charles Harpur (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1984), pp. 781-82. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
3. Subjects drawn from Britain’s legendary past or present greatness were equally acceptable, while a committee was formed at the turn of the century to organize
a fitting monument to Nelson, who embodied virtuous discipline and self-sacrifice for the nation.


5. The name derives from the period of its construction, when the bodies of guards killed by the prisoners remained concealed in the newly built crossing until a chance observer noticed where blood had seeped into the wet mortar.


9. Nor were these always from a male pen. See, for instance, Mary Hannay Foott’s ‘In Memoriam – C. G. Gordon’ and ‘Up North’, in *Where the Pelican Builds and Other Poems* (Brisbane: Gordon and Gotch, 1885).

10. Prose passages, unless reprinted elsewhere, are accompanied by a MS. reference to the Harpur MS. Collection held in the Mitchell Library, Sydney.

11. Kendall, of course, produced a wide gamut of war-related works, ranging from approved wielding of the sword of freedom against despotism and external threat, through exotic portrayals of warrior prowess as integral to the native way of life, to the conception of bloodshed as part of an informing order, as when Kendall equates Attila’s sacking of Rome with ‘God’s avenging fires’, carried out, for ‘shame / And ... sins beyond a name’ (‘Attila’, in Reed ed., op. cit., p. 113). My discussion here focuses on his most original use of inherited matter.


13. ‘Podas Okus’, F.M. Robb, ed., *Poems of Adam Lindsay Gordon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), pp. 2-3. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.

14. For further discussion of these ideas in his work see Michael Ackland, ‘Charles Harpur’s Republicanism’, *Westerly*, 29, 3 (1984), pp. 75-88.


17. For the sake of succinctness, some of Harpur’s comments have been re-arranged in this enumeration of themes, but without distorting his general meaning.

18. Blake’s best known announcement of this principle comes in the final stanza of the prefatory poem to *Milton*: ‘I will not cease from Mental Fight, / Nor shall

19. Something of Harpur’s mood at the beginning of the decade can be gauged from the facts that in 1849 he named his new-born son Washington, and that he participated as an active lobbyist against the re-introduction of transportation in New South Wales. The immediate cause of constitutional discussion was the granting of a Legislative Council to New South Wales, following its formal separation from Victoria in 1850.


21. *Charles Harpur, an Australian*, p. 204. He continues, ‘New South Wales was leaving behind the earlier period’s radicalism, as politicians like Parkes were sloughing their worn-out skins and preparing to play the parliamentary game. Men like Deniehy who could not compromise were cast aside, with politics declining at the time of Harpur’s death into a quiet simmering – a patient gestation’, pp. 204-5.


23. This was already underway by the mid-1860s, as is testified to by ‘The Witch of Hebron’, and was further strengthened by later events, such as the loss of his post as a Gold Commissioner.

24. This constellation of ideas, which stresses the brutish and even satanic aspects of human warfare, was already in Harpur’s mind when he worked on his ‘War Song for the Nineteenth Century’, as emerges in a supplementary note entitled ‘Military Heroes and War’, reprinted in Perkins, ‘Rhetoric and the Man’, p. 17.

25. For more detailed treatment of these works and their relationship to their author’s life-long preoccupations see chapter four of Michael Ackland, *That Shining Band: A Study of Colonial Verse Tradition* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1994).

26. This is experienced by each of Harpur’s final protagonists. The dreamer, after being locked in a dungeon, undergoes a version of the dark night of the soul, while the witch, after concluding a second Faustian pact with the devil, is convinced that she is utterly worthless and irredeemable.