Abstract
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KUNARPI

Special Issue on
War: Australia’s Creative Response

BY AUSTRALIANS.

RAISE BY THE ADMIRALTY.

TURKISH LOSSES.

RECE BATTLE.

LEON GAMBETTA

MESSAGES TO THE GOVERNMENT

ACHIEVEMENT.

ALLIES.

KILLED.

TURKISH.

OFFICIAL LIST.

KILLED.

MELBOURNE, Sunday.

SOUTH WALES.

FERD VICTOR KNIGHT

BATTLES.

TENNANT (60th), 3rd Infan
ty, between April 27 and 29.

VICTORIA.

CHAPMAN, 7th Battalion.

HENDERSON, 7th Battalion.

F. HODGSON, 9th Battalion.

CLOSE, 8th Battalion, April

T. A. TAYLOR (50th), 9th Bat-

H. H. HOOK, 51st, 9th Bat-

A. F. JONES, 8th, 9th Bat-

EXECUTIVE APPEAL TO THE

NOTIFYING CASUALTIES.

TO AUSTRALIA.

BE PATIENT.

BRILLIANT FEAT.

ADMIRALTY’s MESSAGE.

ALLIES’ T.

WORK OF CO.
KUNAPIPI

VOLUME XVIII NUMBERS 2 & 3
1996
**Kunapipi** is a tri-annual arts magazine with special but not exclusive emphasis on the new literatures written in English. It aims to fulfil the requirements T.S. Eliot believed a journal should have: to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent, to provide critical evaluation of the work of living authors, both famous and unknown, and to be truly international. It publishes creative material and criticism. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics plus film will also be included as well as graphics and photographs.

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The cover photograph is by David Beal and features the war memorial at Kapunda, South Australia.

While every attempt has been made to trace copyright, in some cases we have not been successful. We would therefore be grateful for any information that might lead us to make contact with the Aboriginal artist Kurwingie, Peter Kocan and David Beal.

This has been a long growing project. Many people have been of help and offered advice but there is one person in particular whom we would like to thank and that is Glenda Pattenden.

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Kunapipi refers to the Australian Aboriginal Myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol both of creativity and regeneration. The journal’s emblem is to be found on an Aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory in Australia.
A dying man has no nationality

Vera Brittain
"Themistocles", 28 July 1916, at wharf, some in front row holding spurs in hand
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Michael Ackland,</strong> ‘War and Colonial Identity: The Poetic Response’</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shirley Walker,</strong> ‘“A Man Never Knows his Luck in South Africa”’</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Australian Literary Myths from the Boer War</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>David Kent,</strong> ‘Bean’s “Anzac” and the Making of the Anzac Legend’</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>John McQuilton,</strong> ‘Yackandandah’s War’</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alick Keat Documents</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tom Millar,</strong> ‘Conscription for Military Service’</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ric Throssell,</strong> ‘My Father’s Son’</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Judith Rodriguez,</strong> ‘Zouave Marching Team, Rollins College, 1913-1914’</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pat Dobrez,</strong> ‘When Blackbirds Sing: Martin Boyd and the Reality of Good Friday’</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vane Lindesay,</strong> ‘Australian Cartoonists and World War I’</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>John McLaren and Vane Lindesay,</strong> ‘The War Cartoons of Claude Marquet’</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>James Wieland,</strong> ‘Winter Witness: Will Dyson’s <em>Australia At War</em> and Other War Drawings’</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Richard White,</strong> ‘The Soldier as Tourist: The Australian Experience of the Great War’</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>James Wieland,</strong> ‘“What do you think of this Card?” Postcards To and From Australia During The First World War’</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>K. S. Inglis and Jan Brazier,</strong> ‘The Silent Sentinel: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape’</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geoff Page,</strong> ‘Smalltown Memorials’</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Philip Salom,</strong> ‘Seeing Gallipoli From The Sky’</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peter Kocan,</strong> ‘Photograph’</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bruce Clunies Ross,</strong> ‘Silent Heroes’</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anna Gray,</strong> ‘Sufferers, Workers, Lovers: Australian Visions of Women at War’</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maurie Scott,</strong> ‘Images of War in Australian Screen Drama’</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Livio and Pat Dobrez,</strong> ‘Old Myths and New Delusions: Peter Weir’s Australia’</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graeme Turner,</strong> ‘ANZACS: Putting the Story Back in History’</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Laurie Hergenhan,</strong> ‘The Containment of Violence: Aspects of the Roles of War in the Work of David Malouf and Les Murray’</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amanda Nettelbeck,</strong> ‘Languages of War, Class and National History: David Malouf’s <em>Fly Away Peter</em>’</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gareth Griffiths,</strong> ‘John Romeril’s Wars: The Dissenting View’</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Veronica Kelly,</strong> ‘“Lest We Forget”: Louis Nowra’s <em>Inside the Island</em>’</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kevin Green,</strong> ‘War in Australia, or Australia at War With Itself: David Ireland’s <em>Burn</em>’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bruce Dawe, 'For the Other Fallen' 290
Kurwingie, 'Aboriginal Anzac' 291
Helen Gilbert, 'GI Joe Versus Digger Dave: Contemporary Australian Drama and the Vietnam War' 293
Richard Tipping, 'VIETGRAM: 1968' 307
Anna Rutherford, 'Mars versus Venus: The Dialectics of Power in Shirley Hazzard’s The Transit of Venus' 309
Anzac & Why I Write: Author's Statements
Les A. Murray 328
'The Ballad of the Barbed Wire Ocean' 330
David Malouf 331
Geoff Page 332
'Christ at Gallipoli' 333
Roger McDonald 334
John Romeril 335
Philip Salom 339
Louis Nowra 342
Notes on Contributors 345
Index 349

List of Illustrations

'Themistocles', 28 July 1916, at wharf, some in front row holding spurs in hand, Australian War Memorial (PB 1030) 6
Norman Lindsay, 'A Bonzer Crop', Bulletin, 22 February 1917 11
Cover of The Anzac Book, 1916 28
Yackandandah School and Soldiers’ Memorial Hall 40
J.S. Watkins, 'Women of Queensland' (99 x 72), Australian War Memorial (V5632) 55
Harry J. Weston, 'Would you stand by while a bushfire raged?' (75 x 51), Australian War Memorial (V148) 56
D.H. Souter, 'It is nice in the surf' (76 x 50), Australian War Memorial (V141) 57
Unknown, 'Don't falter go and meet the Hun menace' (74 x 50), Australian War Memorial (V816) 58
World War I veteran on 50th anniversary of Anzac day, 1965 63
George Lambert, 'Captain Hugo Throssell, VC.', from Ric Throssell, For Valour (Sydney: Currency, 1976). Sketch in possession of the Australian War Memorial 64
Albert Tucker, 'Psycho, Heidelberg Military Hospital', 1942 (charcoal and coloured pastel 25 x17.9), Australian War Memorial (28305) 82
Norman Lindsay, 'Nothing sacred to him', Bulletin, 4 July 1918 85
C. Marquet, 'Fat', Australian Worker, February 1916 86
D.H. Souter, 'Behold! I stand at the door and knock', The Sydney Stock and Station Journal, 1918 89
C. Marquet, 'The Blood Vote', Australian Worker, 12 October 1916 90
C. Marquet, 'Hastening to the Front', Australian Worker, 6 August 1914 92
C. Marquet, 'Hats off! The 5% Patriot', Australian Worker, 10 February 1916 94
C. Marquet, 'Club that Bug Early', Australian Worker, 13 January 1916 96
C. Marquet, 'I’ll have you', Australian Worker, 13 December 1917 99
Lyndon Dadswell, ‘Munition workers’, 1942 (bronze 71.8 x 30.6 x 30.8), Australian War Memorial (40926) 196
George Gittoes, ‘Corporal Julie Baranowsk i, Military Police, Searching Somali women’, 1993 (pencil), Australian War Memorial (90105) 197
Will Dyson, ‘Compensation (Back at the wagon lines)’, 1918 (lithograph 52.2 x 78), Australian War Memorial (2274) 197
Frances Lymburner, ‘[Soldier with girlfriend]’, 1942-44 (pen and brush and ink 25.9 x 20.3 [irregular]), Australian War Memorial, purchased in 1985 (28731) 198
Roy Hodgkinson, ‘One Sunday afternoon in Townsville’, 1942 (brown crayons with watercolour and pencil 34.1 x 47.2), Australian War Memorial (36282) 199
Will Dyson, ‘The other virgin of Albert’, 1918 (pencil, watercolour 56.4 x 48.1), Australian War Memorial (16155) 200
‘Archy’, Gallipoli, Associated R & R Films 216
‘Frank’, Gallipoli, Associated R &R Films 217
Canberra Views 1950-69, Anzac Parade, Canberra, National Library of Australia 228
Stills from Anzacs. Photo: Greg Noakes. Producers Geoff Burrowes and John Dixon 234
Sidney Nolan, (Anzac soldier with rifle), (oil, crayon and acrylic on card) 260
Advertisement – Denyer Brothers, in NSW Anzac Memorial, 25 April 1916 272
Paul Chubb (Sergeant Collins), Tony Blackett (Captain Henry), Warren Coleman (Private Higgs), Dinah Shearing (Lillian Dawson), Louis Nowra, Inside the Island, 13 August 1980, Nimrod Theatre, Sydney. Directed by Neil Armfield. Photo: Peter Holderness 275
Dinah Shearing (Lillian Dawson), Tony Blackett (Captain Henry), Judy Davis (Susan Dawson), ibid. 275
Bill Conn (Private Miller), ibid 282
‘Aboriginal Anzac’, Kurwingie ‘88 291
‘August Mobilisation to End the War in Vietnam’ (poster, 51 x 31.8), Australian War Memorial (V3099) 292
Artist unknown, ‘Two Years Gaol’ (poster, 50 x 38), Australian War Memorial (V3051) 297
Rob George, ‘Sandy Lee Live at Nui Dat’, The Stage Company Production, Adelaide 1981. Photo: David Simmonds 298
Barbara Hanrahan, ‘Popp y Day’, 1982 (colour screenprint 23.76 x 57) 308
Will Dyson, ‘Winnie’s Need’, Daily Herald, 14 May 1919 311
Advertisement – Gowing Bros., Australian Worker, 1 October 1914 323
‘“Runci” Officer with two stripes holding wallaby, 20 June 1916’, Australian War Memorial (P.B.946) 324
‘Sister’s wedding. Sister and native bear, Anzac Provost Corps.’ (Abbassin) Cairo, Australian War Memorial (1714) 324
Anzacs at the graves of the fallen, on the Western Front, Australian War Memorial (E.166) 348
FOREWORD

Since 1885, when, at England’s beck and call, New South Wales sent troops to the Sudan, hardly a decade has passed when Australian troops have not been fighting on foreign shores in someone else’s war. Ironically, although we’ve assiduously tried to deny, forget, or write out our internal wars, we’ve always been very publicly involved in someone else’s conflicts. Australian men have seemed good at war. As early as 1883, The Age was promoting them as ‘splendid material for an army’ and offering them up and ushering them off to fight for England in the Sudan. It is not an exaggeration to say, however, that it is Australia’s involvement in the great European War of 1914-18 which continues to generate the most interest, despite Paul Keating’s recent attempts to engineer a re-orientation in time and place. And while Australia’s participation in any subsequent wars – be it in Spain in the thirties, in Europe, the Middle East or the Pacific during the Second World War; in Korea, Vietnam or even the recent conflict in the Gulf – gave rise in each case to its own small literature, the First World War is that crucial point to which so often we return when we think of Australians at war. As Richard Nile’s comprehensive bibliography attests, the literature which now surrounds it is enormous.

Whether the explorations of this involvement are used to glorify war or express its trauma, Australian commentators have been unable to let it go. Perhaps it was our ‘great’ war because our casualties were the highest of the Allied forces relative to our population; hardly a household escaped without the loss or maiming of a son or husband. Perhaps it is because the war saw the coalescence of bush and warrior legends into the ANZAC myth which, at a time when Australia was rapidly urbanizing, enabled the continuation and romanticization of the bush myth and its central tenet, mateship. Perhaps it is because, coming hard on the heels of Federation, it became inextricably linked to the birth of a nation. Or, more ironically and subliminally, it is central to identity questions in Australia since, in foregrounding the Gallipoli Campaign, as is the case with so many of our significant cultural indicators, Australians celebrate a defeat.

While ranging in time from Michael Ackland’s essay on ‘war and colonial identity’ in Australia, which centres the poetry of Charles Harpur, Henry Kendall and Adam Lindsay Gordon, and Shirley Walker’s exploration of the many permutations of the ‘Breaker’ Morant story, to Helen Gilbert’s paper on two plays which dramatize the dynamics of the power relations which are at work in ‘the story of Vietnam’, and with essays by Gareth Griffiths, Veronica Kelly, Kevin Green and Anna Rutherford on the place of war in some contemporary writing and plays, WAR: Australia’s Creative Response nevertheless teases out the enduring meaning, and we hope adds to that meaning, for Australians of what Paul Fussell calls that ‘great war in modern memory’. David Kent speculates on Charles Bean’s contribution to the formation of the Anzac Legend in his production of the Anzac Book; Tom Millar outlines the conscription issue and John McQuilton, with the aid of some evocative documents from Alick Keat’s war, explores what, in reality, recruitment and conscription meant for the small north-eastern Victorian community of Yackandandah.
For many of the young men who enlisted, the war presented them with their first overseas trip. Richard White takes this ‘touring’ as his theme, exploring the experience of war through the lens of travel, to which James Wieland’s, “What do you think of this Card?”, provides a kind of visual commentary and addendum, whilst Ken Inglis and Jan Brazier’s essay on war memorials in the Australian landscape speaks of commemoration and public consolation, and the consequences, for many, who went on this tour of duty.

There is the sense, of course, that memorials are a kind of visualization of one of the meanings of war but more direct interrogations of images of war are transported into the book through Anna Gray’s expansive essay on images, in a number of artists, of Australian women at war; Wieland’s study of Will Dyson’s war drawings, collected in Australia at War; Vane Lindesay’s survey of the leading Australian war cartoonists of the First World War; and his supplementary essay, written in collaboration with John McLaren, on the work of the socialist cartoonist, Claude Marquet. More recently, mass audiences have had access to moving images of war through television and screen interpretations of Australia’s war stories, and Livio and Pat Dobrez’s essay on Gallipoli, Maurie Scott’s survey of war images in Australian screen drama, and Graeme Turner’s reading of the tele-drama Anzacs explore these media and their narratives.

In verse and fiction, with the exception of Leon Gellert’s Songs of a Campaign, and a couple of poems by Harley Matthews, it was not until the thirties that Australia produced significant war writing and, indeed, the major flowering of both genre’s treatment of war did not come until much later, in the work of such writers as Les A. Murray, Geoff Page, David Malouf and Roger McDonald. Bruce Clunies Ross’s penetrating essay of the ‘silences’ in Australian representations of war – both the omissions from literary histories of much of this early writing, and the silence of many veterans about their experiences – introduces this aspect of the book, and essays by Laurie Hergenhan, on the work of Murray and Malouf, and Amanda Nettelbeck, on Malouf’s Fly Away Peter, bring the studies up to the present. Explorations of other contemporary works, Kevin Green’s reading of David Ireland’s Burn and Anna Rutherford’s essay on Shirley Hazzard’s Transit of Venus, round the book out and take the study of war into a more pervasive concern with violence in society, the horror and pity of war, and the human cost of those who wield their power through control of money and munitions.

A number of rich poems by Judith Rodriguez, Geoff Page, Les A. Murray, Philip Salom, Peter Kocan, Bruce Dawe, Kurwingie, and Richard Tipping which play variations on the book’s themes are salted throughout, while the collection closes with reflections by David Malouf, Roger McDonald, Les A. Murray, Louis Nowra, Geoff Page, John Romeril and Philip Salom, on why they have taken war as a subject of their writing, and, earlier in the text, Ric Throssell shares memories of his father, Hugo Throssell, V.C.

Anna Rutherford
James Wieland

Wollongong, 1996
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:
Should the cannon’s iron rattle sound between these harbour doors
Ye [Fathers of an infant nation] must wage and win the battle, in your just and righteous cause.  

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:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{The hand of Vengeance found the Bed} \\
\text{To which the Purple Tyrant fled} \\
\text{The iron hand crushd [sic] the Tyrant's head} \\
\text{And became a Tyrant in his stead.}^7
\end{align*}
\]

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 Geoffrey 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’, 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 forfeiting 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 ascendancy 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'.20 But this bellicosity proved to be intermittent and short-lived. 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'.21 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'.22 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.23 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)

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.25

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.26 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’.27 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.

One night late in 1901, in the Spelonken district to the North of Pietersburg, a certain Australian Lieutenant in the Bushveldt Carbineers lay with his men in ambush above the laager of Field-Cornet Tom Kelly, a notorious Boer irregular leader:

The night was intensely cold, but we lay there within 50 yards of them until the first streak of dawn. During the night a dog scented us and started to bark; a Boer got up and gave it a kick to quieten it, at which Morant remarked, 'A man never knows his luck in South Africa'.

The commando was captured, to the great surprise of its leader Kelly, and Lieutenant Morant - for this was the notorious 'Breaker' Morant - was court-martialled and executed in Pretoria early in the following year. Not only did South Africa test the luck of individual Australians, it was the testing ground of certain myths that Australians held, and still hold, about their national character and identity.

Australia's involvement in the Boer War, like her later Vietnam adventure, was a controversial affair, at least to certain sections of the community. The debate, which raged in the various state parliaments and in at least one notable newspaper correspondence, was argued at first on ethical grounds: that is, whether to support the Empire 'right or wrong', or whether to question more closely the justice of the cause. These ethical arguments however did not seem to appeal to the hearts of the Australian people until a different note was struck: that of outrage at the treatment of Australian troops by Kitchener and the British High Command in a number of courts-martial of Australian soldiers. The most outrageous example was that of the trial and execution of Lieutenants Morant and Handcock, of the Bushveldt Carbineers, for the alleged killing of a number of Boer prisoners and a German missionary.

To understand the vehemence of the Australian response it is important to look at the timing of the Boer War involvement. The 1890s was the period in which Australia seemed to be reaching self-definition
in both politics and literature. The favoured self-image was that of a nation of 'battlers', all individuals, facing great odds with courage and swagger and, above all, acknowledging no authority. This image was fostered by political events; for instance the shearer's strikes of the 1890s and the movement towards Federation. It was fostered most of all by the literature of the 1890s, in particular that of Lawson and Paterson. The outbreak of the Boer War, then, found a nation of Australians conscious of an image which was guaranteed to affront British notions of colonial subservience. The inevitable confrontation, focused on the Breaker Morant affair, generated a further national myth, that of the sacrifice of Australian soldiers as scapegoats – 'scapegoats of the empire'.

Apart from outbreaks of controversy in the newspapers over the affair, fuelled in the early days by first-hand accounts from Australian Boer War veterans, there have been seven literary presentations of the Morant affair under the guise of history, autobiography and fiction. The one which has been the most influential, Kit Denton's *The Breaker,* is frankly fictional. There has also been a successful play – Kenneth Ross's *Breaker Morant,* which formed the basis for the film of the same name acclaimed, some years ago, at the Cannes Film Festival – and a series of paintings by a leading Australian artist, Pro Hart. The obsessive way in which Australians return to this matter, and the way in which it has been manipulated in a certain direction, demonstrates the popular need for a myth which justifies and romanticizes Morant and thus preserves the Australian self-image.

The facts of this matter – insofar as they can be called facts, for so much has been romanticized (and in any case the Australians have never really wanted the facts) – are as follows: Harry Morant, a young English scapegrace consigned to the colonies for some youthful escapade, was, before the war, well known throughout Australia as a rough rider, a polo and steeplechase rider and also as a bush poet of renown. His ballads appeared regularly in the *Bulletin* under the pen-name of 'The Breaker', which could equally refer to his reputation as a breaker of horses and of women's hearts. Though his reputation was often unsavoury, he was apparently very popular. This is the account of Will Ogilvie, another poet:

He will leave when his ticket is tendered,
A bundle of debts, I'm afraid -
Accounts that were many times rendered,
And bills that will never be paid;
While the tailor and riding boot maker
Will stand with their thumbs in their mouth,
With a three cornered curse at the 'Breaker',
When the 'Breaker' is booked for the South.
This then was the man who enlisted in Adelaide for the Boer War, who covered himself with glory in the field and was commissioned from the ranks. He certainly returned to England on leave, and claimed to have been reconciled with an adoring family (he said he was the son of Admiral Sir Digby Morant) and to have become engaged to the sister of his best friend, Captain Hunt. On his return to South Africa he joined, as Lieutenant, the Bushveldt Carbineers, an irregular unit raised to clear guerrilla bands of Boer Commandos from the Spelonken territory. The campaign was apparently marked by atrocities on both sides, and the niceties of warfare were not observed. Inflamed by the death of Hunt, Morant ordered the shooting of Visser, a prisoner from the commando unit which had killed Hunt, then later another group of Boers from the same commando unit who came in under a white flag to surrender. He and a brother officer, Lieutenant Handcock, were also suspected of shooting a German missionary, Heese, who was aware of the shooting of the Boer prisoners and presumably would have reported the matter. Four officers – Morant, Handcock, Witton and Picton – were arrested, court-martialled and found guilty of shooting Boer prisoners, but exonerated on charges of murdering the missionary. Morant and Handcock were executed almost immediately by firing squad, and were buried in Pretoria Cemetery, Witton was sentenced to life imprisonment but subsequently released, and Picton was cashiered. However, and this is most important, the Australian Government was not at any stage consulted, or notified of the execution, and the transcripts of the court-martial have never been made available.

This then is the raw material of myth, and a fine myth, both popular and literary, has evolved. It is a myth of national self-justification with Morant as a representative Australian figure. His faults are freely admitted, but these – drinking, womanizing, fighting, carelessness with debts and the appropriation of horses – are at least part of the national ‘macho’ image. The traditional Australian virtues – independence, the ability to ‘clean up’ in a rough situation and, above all, loyalty to ones mates – are emphasized. Morant, like Ned Kelly, has become a mythic hero and the mythic hero must conform to, as well as create, the national self-image. Furthermore he must be seen as a victim of the British in order to conform to national xenophobia and a false sense of national maturity, of release from the mother. The mythic version is melodramatic, adolescent, and has proved itself irresistible. It is interesting then to trace the way in which essentially sordid material has been transformed into myth in the literature which has dealt with the subject.

The first literary account was Bushman and Buccaneer, written in 1902, very soon after the events, by Frank Renar (Frank Fox, a journalist from the Bulletin). This sets the fashion for future accounts
by including a selection of The Breaker’s own verse, thus giving not only the ‘factual’ account (based, according to Renar, on ‘trustworthy documentary evidence’) but also proof of the high sensitivity of the victim Morant. Included is his last poem, ‘Butchered to Make a Dutchman’s Holiday’, which begins:

In prison cell I sadly sit,
A d---d crest-fallen chappie!
And own to you I feel a bit -
A little bit - unhappy!

and continues:

If you encounter any Boers
You really must not loot ‘em!
And if you wish to leave these shores,
For pity’s sake, DON’T SHOOT ‘EM!!

to conclude with more than a touch of bravado:

Let’s toss a bumper down our throat,
Before we pass to Heaven,
And toast: ‘The trim-set petticoat
We leave behind in Devon.’

Renar’s account is a fairly dispassionate one which recognizes the choice of interpretation required of any reader, who can consider either ‘the trusty friend, the daring rider, the man of great boldness to meet his death’, or ‘the stark bodies of Boer farmers, killed not in fair chance of war and heat of sturdy battle, but most ignobly in cold after-thought’ (p. 2). However Renar’s account is more manipulative than this suggests, particularly in the language, which is lofty and elegiac, especially when he deals with Captain Hunt’s death, his supposed mutilation before death, and the duty of all good Australians to avenge their dead mates:

With grim hearts the men rode out from Fort Edward, Lieutenant Morant leading them, sternly set upon avenging the blood of a comrade and wiping out from their own names the stain of cowardice. When men move in such a mood it is ill for those who chance to meet them. (p. 20)

The justification for later murders committed by Morant is given in the same heroic terms:

The body was there, sorrrily mangled in truth – whether in loathsome spite or in sad but unavoidable happening of battle no man can say with certainty ... (Morant’s) heart grew more savage, and his face took a sterner set as he saddled up again and followed on the track of the Boers. Not war but vengeance was in his mind. (p. 21)
Here the mythic dimension, obviously that of the Germanic heroic tradition, of the *comitatus*, is gratuitously imposed upon raw material which is essentially sordid.

The next full-scale treatment was that of George Witton in his *Scapegoats of the Empire*, published in 1907. Witton, one of the accused Carbineer officers who was sentenced to life imprisonment, served part of his sentence in England but was released in 1904 as a result of strong representation from an outraged Australian Government and public. Witton continues the vindication of Morant on the grounds of a justifiable passion for revenge. All murders after the death of Captain Hunt are excused by Witton on the grounds of Morant's sensitivity, his finer feelings for a brother officer and potential brother-in-law. Some other of the more sensational and legendary elements of Morant's story stem from Witton's account; for instance he emphasizes Morant's high birth (that this was the preferred version indicates the depth of colonial snobbery). Witton testifies to this, as well as to the fact that Morant spent his leave with his family in Devon, fox-hunting, and that there he became engaged to Captain Hunt's sister, the owner of the 'trim-set petticoat' of his last poem.

The truth of this has now been exposed. The Breaker was really Edwin Henry Murrant, the son of the Master and Matron of the Union Workhouse, Bridgewater, Somerset. He arrived in Townsville, North Queensland, in 1883 and was employed as a stockman on Fanning Downs Station near Charters Towers when, in 1884, he married Daisy O'Dwyer, a governess from the station, in the process lying about his age - he was still a minor. Any future marriage to Hunt's sister would have been bigamous. The bride, Daisy O'Dwyer, was deserted soon afterwards and was herself bigamously married nine months later. She too achieved mythic status in the Australian pantheon as Daisy Bates or Kabbarli, a woman said to have been disappointed in love, who devoted her life to the Aborigines on the Nullarbor Plain, living with them and writing about them until her death. Eleanor Witcombe, the screenwriter for yet one more film, this time on Daisy Bates and The Breaker, says:

> She and Morant were two of a kind and they never ratted on each other. They both lied about their backgrounds, they both had fantasies that they eventually fulfilled, and then re-worked their histories to fit in.

Let us return now to another aspect of the vindication which Witton and subsequent writers present: that of vindictiveness on the part of the British. This version sees Morant, Handcock and Witton himself as scapegoats marked out to carry the sins of the British army in the brutalities of the mopping-up campaign. Their executions would demonstrate British impartiality, appease the European criticism of the campaign and clear the way for a peaceful settlement. Colonials would
not be missed and, in any case, their government would not know about it until it was over. According to Witton’s account Kitchener is the arch-villain. Orders had come from Kitchener himself that no Boer prisoners were to be taken in the Spelonken, particularly if they were wearing British uniforms. Morant had, being a sensitive man, previously taken prisoners, but after the death of Hunt he resolved to do the right thing, obey orders and kill all prisoners. Visser, a member of the commando unit which had mutilated and murdered Hunt, was (according to Witton) wearing Hunt’s clothing, so was executed. The other Boer prisoners were also executed in obedience to Kitchener’s orders. Subsequently Kitchener personally ordered the verdict of guilty, and the almost immediate execution, and absented himself from headquarters so that no appeal could reach him. Moreover, so the legend goes, Kitchener’s orders came from higher up. The Kaiser, it was said, had prevailed upon his cousin, the King of England, to make an example of the Australian officers because of the supposed murder of the German missionary.

A further example of imperial vindictiveness was suggested in Scapegoats of the Empire. Witton maintains that, when Kitchener unveiled the War Memorial in Bathurst, NSW in 1908, he refused to proceed until the name of Handcock, one of those executed, was removed from the memorial. This has become accepted fact in Australia but is, in fact, quite wrong. Handcock’s name, like those of many Boer War veterans, was not on the War Memorial either before or at the time of Kitchener’s visit. Recently his family and the Bathurst Returned Soldiers’ League have rectified this. What is certain, however, is that there was some sort of cover-up by Kitchener. In fact the cabled report of the courts-martial which Kitchener sent to the Australian Parliament, after repeated requests for information, contains so many factual errors that it suggests either gross inefficiency or a deliberate distortion of the truth.

The curious thing about Witton’s Scapegoats of the Empire is that so few copies of the original edition survive – probably only Witton’s own advance copies. It is said to have been suppressed by the Australian Government so as not to embarrass the British. In any case Angus and Robertson, moved by the commercial success of the film, have cashed in with a reprint of Scapegoats of the Empire which has run to two editions, in 1982 and 1983. At the end of the modern edition is printed a copy of a private letter which Witton wrote to the defending solicitor, a Major Thomas of Tenterfield, in 1929. This letter was deposited in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, with instructions that it not be opened until 1970. In it Witton contradicts his statement in Scapegoats of the Empire that Handcock and Morant were innocent of the murder of the missionary Heese. They had confessed their guilt to him in prison and, because they had been acquitted of this particular crime, he had kept
the secret for twenty-seven years:

[The shooting of Heese was a premeditated and most cold blooded affair. Handcock with his own lips described it all to me ... I consider I am the one and only one that suffered unjustly. (pp. 245-46)

What is more important, Handcock had also made a written confession whilst in prison, implicating both Morant and Witton, as well as himself. Although Handcock later retracted this confession, it was held by Kitchener, and this could explain the apparent vindictiveness of the General.

So much for *Scapegoats of the Empire*. There is one more account from direct experience: that of Major C. S. Jarvis, C.M.G., O.B.E., a British officer who had met Morant in Pretoria and indeed had almost joined the Bushveldt Carbineers with him. In his book *Half a Life* Jarvis calls the affair 'the most ghastly tragedy of the war'. He describes Morant as 'a typical roistering hard case who took no heed for the morrow', and comments upon his literary pretensions. Jarvis's account is written in a very 'stiff-upper-lip' British manner, but his summing up is the most balanced in all the Morant literature:

My sympathies have always been with the unfortunate man, for I knew and liked him, and moreover one has the feeling that, but for the existence of men of his somewhat ruthless calibre during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the British Empire would not now be the envy of all her neighbours. There were many rough paths to be hewn out of the world between 1750 and 1900, and it was the men of Morant's type who did the work. (p. 133)

F.M. Cutlack's *Breaker Morant: A Horseman Who Made History* (with a selection of his Bush Ballads), published in 1962, adds little to the legend as it is basically a reworking of the Renar, Witton and Jarvis material. As a boy of twelve, in the summer of 1898-99, just before 'The Breaker' enlisted for the South African war, Cutlack had met him at Renmark on his father's property:

My father wrote a letter for Morant and did a lot to persuade a Colonel Morant, a Renmark settler, to recognise The Breaker ... There was no doubt in my father's mind about the identity of Morant's people; but proof of the evidence he had was never kept, for the matter was not under challenge. (p. x)

The notion of the suppression of the court-martial transcripts – an important part of the myth – originated with Cutlack, who had approached the British War Office and had been officially informed that these documents were 'no longer in existence' (p. xi). Kit Denton had no better luck; his later enquiries met with various explanations ranging from 'they were loaned out and not returned' or 'we don't have them but the Navy/Army/Public Records Office/Prime Minister's Office have
them' to 'they were destroyed by enemy action during the war'. This has fuelled the myth of a British cover-up. The truth is that the court-martial transcripts, probably through inefficiency, remained in South Africa. Dr Frank Bradlow, Chairman of the Van Riebeeck History Society in Cape Town, has announced that the court-martial papers have been discovered in South Africa by Professor Arthur Davy of the University of Cape Town. It seems that, although the papers were marked to be forwarded to the War Office, they were, for unknown reasons, never sent.

Kit Denton's 1973 best-seller, The Breaker, is by far the most romanticized version of the Morant myth, and obviously the most popular. In the Preface, Denton makes a gesture towards historical fact:

There was a Breaker Morant. He lived his life in the times and company of the people mentioned in this story, and he went through much of the action in these pages ... I've departed from history only when the facts weren't discoverable or when I felt it was necessary in the interests of a good story. (p.2)

In The Breaker the stereotype is exploited to the utmost. The womanizing, drinking and brawling are glamorized and made to appear somehow heroic, while Morant is seen as a sort of John Wayne of the Australian frontier, a 'centaur' who leaps into the saddle with bird-like grace, who disregards injury: '... I wonder ... I wonder, if you'd mind shaking the other hand! I think that arm's broken.' (p. 38) and whose passion, when aroused, is terrible. The killing of Visser, for instance, performed in fact by a firing squad at Morant's orders, is a personal deed of passion in Denton's account. First Morant tosses a gun to Visser to provide a semblance of fairness:

Clumsily Visser fumbled with the bolt and Harry stepped a pace closer and fired into his face, blasting the head into a splash of red and white which fanned backwards against the tree, the body arching back incredibly under the blow and falling clumsily. Harry stepped closer again and methodically emptied the other five chambers into the chest and belly, and no one moved in those few seconds. (p. 185)

This gratuitous violence is echoed also in the account of the mutilation of Hunt, a significant element in the justification of Morant, and one which receives varying treatment in all the material. In fact it is quite possible that Hunt was not mutilated at all; what is certain is that Morant didn't view the body, which was buried at Reuter's Mission Station an hour before Morant arrived. Denton takes the mutilation to the furthest extreme of violence and male dread:

Captain Hunt's body was struck by a bullet at close range. It passed through his right shoulder. This was a simple wound and did not cause his death. When found the body was stripped naked. The sinews at the back of both
knees and ankles had been severed. The forehead was bruised and the right cheekbone crushed. Captain Hunt had been castrated. (p. 178)

The justification for the shooting of Visser is also unambiguous; he is flaunting Captain Hunt's uniform, therefore must have been implicated in his torture and death.

The importance of this version, and the film which followed, lies in its widespread and manipulative influence upon a younger generation of Australians who had probably never previously heard of the Boer War, and who accept all this as absolute truth. The film, because it is such a good example of the film-maker's art, is particularly manipulative. The casting is superb; that of Edward Woodward, of Callan fame, as The Breaker, brings to the screen just the right mixture of brutality, sensuality and sentimentality. The choice of music is masterly, suggesting by an ironic use of outmoded patriotic airs - 'Soldiers of the Queen' as sung by Edward Woodward, in particular - the foolishness of those young men who rallied to the call of the mother country, only to be victimized. The technique of flash-back is used to good effect, as the camera shifts from the court-martial to cut in on what, according to the film, really happened, always as a justification of the accused. Interestingly enough, Morant and Handcock admit privately, in the film, to the killing of the missionary, but this does not detract from the viewer's sympathy, probably because the emphasis throughout is upon the unfairness of the trial. This emphasis is achieved by the clever argument of the defending counsel, Major Thomas - played as a country hick solicitor by the Australian actor Jack Thompson - who proves too clever and impassioned for the prosecution. The verdict is thus seen as a supreme act of vindictiveness. The film has been very successful, and deservedly so, but it is one of a number of good recent Australian films which cater to a new wave of nationalism and xenophobia by emphasizing national myths and stereotypes. What is certain is that, no matter how carefully and systematically the Morant myth is refuted, the Australian population as a whole will always believe the myth because of its irresistible suggestions of heroism and victimization.

Although the two most recent reworkings of the affair completely demolish any justification for the series of murders perpetrated by the Bushveldt Carbineer officers, they are unlikely to change the popular perception. The first, In Search of Breaker Morant, by Carnegie and Shields, presents much new material, some of it from South Africa, where Shields was researching the background for the film. It is this book which establishes the true facts of Morant's parentage and his early marriage to that other paragon of virtue, Daisy Bates. But what is more interesting is its introduction of another figure into the well-worn fabric of the Morant affair. Ramon de Bertodamo, the son of a Spanish
nobleman and an Australian woman, grew up in NSW at the same time as The Breaker was burning his way through the colony. Educated as a lawyer in Sydney, he became an intelligence officer on Kitchener’s staff, responsible for the Spelonken region. His account of the Morant affair is to be found in the del Moral papers in the National Archives of Zimbabwe. De Bertodamo investigated the murder of the missionary by sending Kaffir ‘boys’ into the camp around the Carbineers’ fort. At least one of these spies disappeared, as did Morant’s ‘boy’ who, according to de Bertodamo, had witnessed the killing of Heese. De Bertodamo relates the following exchange between himself and Morant — two very unusual Australians in South Africa — which, he says, took place in the prison yard at Pietersburg during the trial:

Morant came up to me and said that his trial for the shooting of the missionary was a scandal and a disgrace to the Army, that he was innocent, and that he had been selected as a victim because he had shot a few d—d Boers. You (de Bertodamo) are the man who has worked up all the evidence and you ought to be ashamed of yourself for the betrayal of your brother officers. (p. 210)

De Bertodamo replied:

You know in your heart that you and Handcock murdered poor old Heese because you were afraid that he would report the shooting of the Boers in cold blood ... You are guilty as Hell, and I am glad to help to send you there ... Where is your boy? He has disappeared. Have you murdered him too? (p. 210)

It is well established in de Bertodamo’s account that Morant and the officers of the Bushveldt Carbineers had been engaged in a systematic and cold-blooded campaign of extermination culminating in the murder of the missionary and other witnesses. Kitchener was made aware of all of this evidence which could not be made available to the court-martial because of the disappearance of the vital witnesses, and this too explains his apparent vindictiveness.

Kit Denton’s second book on the subject, Closed File, also demolishes the myth which he had so persuasively nurtured in his earlier romance The Breaker. He excuses his earlier falsification on the grounds of expediency; why spoil a commercial success in the interests of truth?

At the time ... I was concerned to write a good story, to write it as well as I could, and to put into it the sorts of marketable factors for which plain professionalism called. (p. 92)

Denton then proceeds to demolish the main justification for the series of murders for which Handcock and Morant were executed. It is highly probable, according to Denton, that Captain Hunt’s body was not mutilated by the Boers. Moreover the justification for the murder of the Boer, Visser, that he was wearing Hunt’s uniform, was also a fabrication after the event. In fact Denton makes much of the evidence
of Morant’s orderly, given at the court martial, that Morant himself was in possession of Hunt’s clothing.

So much for the mythic hero who was obviously a congenital liar. How then are we to sum up this disparate material? Kit Denton attempts it in _Closed File_:

Morant has gone not so much into history as into legend. He followed the admired track of other Australian folk-heroes – Ned Kelly, Moondyne Joe, Captain Starlight. They were all men against authority; good bad men or bad good men, always with enough human appeal to disguise the fact that they were outside the law, that they robbed and killed and were brought to book. Behind them all are the near-mythic figures of Hereward the Wake and Robin Hood, of William Tell and the outlaws of the Old West. People _prefer_ to think of them all as bold and brave individuals, self-reliant and strong, defiant against great odds. Morant, in the popular mind, has joined their company. (p. 156)

But this takes us right back to the beginning of the affair, which has always had this ambivalent status. One of the earliest reflections on the career of Morant is a poem, ‘A Gaol-Wall Inscription’, published in the Sydney _Bulletin_ in 1902. This poem was written by a brother-poet, a clergyman in fact, who should have known better:

A volley-crack, a puff of smoke,
And dead the Murderer grins;
Come cover with the Charity-cloak
That multitude of sins.
And though some blame and count it shame,
I won’t withhold the tear
For the cold heart, the bold heart,
That ceased its beating here.

They say his debts he oft forgot,
But _one_ he settled up!
They say he used to drink a lot -
His last was a bitter cup!
And right or wrong, or weak or strong,
I can’t keep back the tear
For the Devil-heart, the rebel heart
That ceased its beating here.

I know he went from bad to worse,
I know what ill he wrought,
But I have seen him on a horse,
And heard of how he fought;
And, fool or wise, I own my eyes
Are troubled with a tear
For the rough heart, the tough heart,
That ceased its beating here. 16

This, then, is the version that survives.
NOTES

2. K. Denton, *The Breaker* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1973). *The Breaker* has run to ten printings. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
5. 'F. Renar' (Frank Fox), *Bushman and Buccaneer. Harry Morant: his 'ventures and verses* (Sydney: H. T. Dunn, 1902). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
8. K. Denton, *Closed File* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1983), pp. 155-156. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
15. Although Morant was born an Englishman, his adult life was spent in Australia and he fought in the Australian contingent in the Boer War, hence his Australian status for the purpose of this argument. De Bertodamo, on the other hand, was born in Australia, but spent his adult life in Africa and Spain.
If asked to decide which was the more significant festival, 'Australia Day' or 'Anzac Day', the majority of Australians would ignore the ostensible national celebration for the commemoration of a bloody failure. The Anzac legend which developed around the deeds of Australian soldiers at Gallipoli and on the Western Front has long been a focal point of Australian nationalism. The 'Anzac' has become a cultural and literary stereotype enshrined in popular imagination as someone who was 'tough and inventive, loyal to ... mates beyond the call of duty, a bit undisciplined ... chivalrous, gallant, sardonic'. It is easy to see in the 'Anzac' the idealized bushman of the 1890s translated to a military setting. The legend was shaped by much of the literature of the war but its origins are to be found in The Anzac Book. Like all legends, it has great popular appeal and Australians do not readily tolerate any questioning of the value of the Anzac legend.

The image of the Anzac which is central to the legend, was a careful and deliberate creation of C.E.W. Bean, whose role in the evolution of the Anzac legend and the accuracy of the image he imposed on the Australian public have provoked a vigorous debate amongst historians. I suggest that Bean's portrayal of the Anzac reflected his predilection for hero-worship and his anxiety to salvage something from a grotesque failure. He acted as a prism through which the experience of Gallipoli was projected and distorted so that Australians were presented with an over-simplified view of the realities of war and its effect on men. Finally, I maintain that the immense sales and enormous popularity of The Anzac Book ensured that Bean's image of the 'Anzac' became a model for Australians and the heart of the Anzac legend.

Gallipoli, rather than the battlefields of the Somme or Flanders, established the reputation of the Australian soldier. The first military challenge the AIF faced had a special significance and the people of Australia waited eagerly for news that the young nation had proved itself in battle. Most Australians in 1914 saw themselves as transplanted Britons; they basked in the glory of imperial majesty. The whispered
The Anzac Book

Written and Illustrated in Gallipoli by The Men of Anzac

Cover of The Anzac Book (1916)
fear, however, was that Australia might not be equal to the task of supporting the mother country. When glowing reports of the landing reached Australia, Gallipoli instantly became a national triumph. It was doubly rewarding for Australians that the earliest reports came from the English war-correspondent, Ellis Ashmead Bartlett, the reporter of many imperial conflicts, for he spoke with authority. The Sydney Morning Herald drew its readers' attention to this:

[H]e has not written his despatch for the special edification of Australians – he has written it for the London papers which he represents. So when he says that the Australian troops ... have proved their right to stand beside the heroes of Mons, the Aisne, Ypres, and Neuve Chapelle, we can read into that declaration a glorious meaning indeed.6

Bartlett was effusive in his praise; he had 'never seen anything like the wounded Australians', who were happy 'because they knew they had been tried for the first time and had not been found wanting'. The Anzacs he described were heroic figures, 'a race of giants', whose courage and physical endurance were beyond measure. Hyperbole was such a feature of nearly all the contemporary reporting of Gallipoli that it is not hard to understand how the whole episode acquired 'a most venerated almost mystical status'.7

Much of what has passed into historical parlance as the Anzac legend is derived, however, from the labours of Charles Bean, the war-correspondent, official historian and editor of The Anzac Book.8 It was, as will become evident, his efforts in the last mentioned role which established a particular view of the Anzac in the popular imagination. Bean's wartime despatches, unlike those of most correspondents, were unemotional and matter-of-fact for he refused to write the 'wretched cant' demanded by a public which sought only flattery 'and that in its cheapest form'.9 His historical writing was wholly a product of the post-war period and the six volumes which appeared between 1921 and 1942 merely reinforced the image which was already accepted.

Bean was unique among war-correspondents in seeking out and sharing the everyday dangers of the front-line soldier. He quickly realized that in a situation as unreal as war even the most ordinary actions became heroic. In his diary he acknowledged the difficulty faced by a correspondent who wished to record the mundane, dutiful heroism of the soldier who did his job, at a time when the public in Australia was becoming accustomed to sensationalism.10 He also confided to his diary, what he could never have said publicly, that not all Anzacs did their job properly and some actually ran away from battle, those fleeing passing those advancing 'not taking the faintest notice of one another'.11 Nonetheless, Bean saw in the AIF a nucleus of strong, resolute men who were prepared to stick at their monumental task if possible, 'cheerfully and without the least show of fear'.12 These
were the men who displayed the characteristics which Bean was to popularize in *The Anzac Book* and enshrine in the official history until their image encompassed all and 'Anzac' became a model and inspiration for a nation.

II

*The Anzac Book* was originally intended to be a magazine for the troops to liven the winter period and celebrate the dawning of 1916. It was suggested to Bean in mid-November that an 'Anzac Annual' might be compiled using contributions drawn from the Army Corps. A small committee was formed and within two days it had appointed Bean as editor, decided on the type of material required, offered prizes to stimulate contributions, fixed on a mid-December printing in Athens and rejected the title 'Anzac Annual' as too suggestive of a long stay on the Peninsular. Bean wrote to all units urging contributors to 'make it worthy of Anzac and a souvenir which time will make increasingly valued'. The decision to evacuate Gallipoli gave this directive a prophetic tone and radically changed the nature of the proposed magazine. The committee resolved to proceed with publication but in doing so the venture was transformed from a 'trench magazine' into a commemorative souvenir of an heroic but unsuccessful campaign. Gallipoli, it must always be remembered, was a disaster which cost the lives of 10,000 Australians and New Zealanders; the only unalloyed success was the evacuation. Nevertheless, *The Anzac Book* gave Bean an opportunity to salvage something from this appalling waste of life and show people in Australia why, even in defeat, their soldiers should be a source of pride.

The 'Anzac' found in the pages of the souvenir was tough and enduring, he accepted discomfort with a resigned good humour and was affectedly casual about the dangers of battle. In one short story, 'Icy', the central character is an object of derision because he ducks at each explosion though he finally redeems himself by acting heroically to assist his comrades. 'Icy' was a reluctant warrior but he showed he could stick it out and not let his mates down even if it meant injury or death. These themes are repeated throughout *The Anzac Book*. This 'Anzac' was also a bushman, or that is the impression Bean creates by a few references to the civilian origins of the AIF. 'Wallaby Joe', the hero of one story, rides a thousand miles over drought-stricken plains to enlist. Tall, lean, bearded, 'in appearance the typical bushman', he drinks and swears but is modest and shy with women. Joe adapts easily to life in the trenches for 'the knowledge he had been imbibing from Nature all his life made him an ideal soldier'. This 'Anzac' enjoyed simple fun, good company and the odd beer.

None of the items which produced this picture was written by Bean,
but he chose to build *The Anzac Book* around them because they corresponded to his vision of the essential Australian, the bushman. It must be remembered that although Bean spent his youth and early manhood in England, he developed a romantic attachment to the Australian outback, its values and people, during his journalistic travels just before the war.\(^{20}\) The articles he wrote reveal his fascination with the rough democracy of the inland, the independence of the bushman and the credo of mateship. Some Australian soldiers certainly fitted his image and the author of *Wallaby Joe* enclosed a note with his manuscript which claimed that ‘the sketch is absolutely true to life, and many will recognize the counterpart’.\(^{21}\) It did not matter to Charles Bean, however, that the majority of men in the AIF were from the cities or that they had acquired a most unsavoury reputation in Egypt, for his *'Anzac'* was from the start an image of how some men were and many might be.

Part of the legend of *'Anzac'* began with the circumstances in which *The Anzac Book* was produced. Most contemporary reviewers repeated Bean’s editorial observation that many contributions were written with ‘the crack of Mauser bullets overhead’, and many saw the flood of contributions, which Bean claimed was ‘enormous’, as a tribute to the characteristic insouciance of the Australian.\(^{22}\) The *Bulletin* review was typical, commenting that ‘there must have been almost as many poets as fighters at Gallipoli’.\(^{23}\) The editorial, and the reviews which echoed it, were to found the popular belief that every soldier had a poet’s pencil in his knapsack, a notion which simply added to the lustre of the achievement. An analysis of *The Anzac Book* and the rejected manuscripts reveals the scale of Bean’s misrepresentation. On November 16, when the plans for the evacuation were drawn up, and two days after the request for contributions, there were 134,722 allied troops on the Peninsular and 41,218 at Anzac Cove. Yet only one hundred and fifty individuals offered contributions. *The Anzac Book* had fifty-five literary and fifteen artistic contributors; it was never valid to claim, as Bean did, that the response from the soldiers was ‘enormous’.

*The Anzac Book* was not even an accurate reflection of the contributions Bean received. The file of rejected manuscripts held in the archive of the Australian War Memorial shows how narrow was the range of material he selected. These unused manuscripts provide telling evidence that he excluded any material which might have modified the image he wished to project. Bean chose material which recorded those everyday discomforts which were not suitable copy for despatches, but he rejected totally any material which might have tarnished the name of ‘Anzac’. Where the rejected material expresses sentiments found in *The Anzac Book* it is usually of poor quality and it can be assumed that Bean rejected it because of its literary or artistic shortcomings. Where the excluded contribution deals with a facet of the Gallipoli experience
which is not reflected in *The Anzac Book* and is additionally as good as many in the souvenir, it seems reasonable to assume that it did not accord with the editor's purpose.

One characteristic of modern mass wars is that in their early stages they require a 'definitive work of popular literature' which trivializes the horrors of war. While it is impossible to prove that Bean had such an end consciously in view, it is significant that he rejected anything which documented the danger, brutality, suffering, and dehumanizing effects of war. The dirt, the flies, the cold and the myriad discomforts of Gallipoli are all revealed in *The Anzac Book* and treated with grim humour, but the total effect is most superficial.

Many contributions, however, emphasized the harsh realities and deadly intimacy of trench warfare: 'The Night Look-Out' was excluded, presumably because it was too realistic an account of the sporadic intensity of the fighting.

We peer with strained eyes, yet almost blind,
Into the inky blackness of the night,
Slow moving scrub bending to the wind,
Close to the loophole, all there is in sight.

Machine guns crackle, rifles spit
Their deadly mouthfuls at the bags of sand.
A curse, a smothered groan, tells when a hit
Is registered to foes so near at hand ...

The spasm's over, quiet once again
Save for the hidden snipers deadly zone.
A crack, a fall, a groan of anguished pain,
Another passes to the Great Unknown.

'The Night Attack' focused upon the murderous monotony of trench combat but was set aside even though it displayed conventionally patriotic sentiments.

Crippled and Dead   Dead and Crippled
In ghastly rows as the fighting rippled
The deed of valour – the great travail
Lying and sighing, and stifling the wail.

Ration and Rest   Rest and Ration
The tired men of a fighting nation
A meal to exist – A short respite
Scheming and dreaming and adding their mite

There were poems which told of the relentless tedium of standing watch and others which dealt with the futile assaults euphemistically called 'Stunts' or 'Demonstrations': 'They cabled to the papers we made a Demonstration on our right / Our casualties were heavy and
sniping bad at night'. It is evident, however, that Bean deliberately excluded any contributions which dealt realistically with the dangers of combat, with the result that *The Anzac Book* trivialized the experience.

In a wonderfully reflective passage in his diary Bean noted how few men really wanted to fight, how some had to be driven into action at pistol point, how many ran away and how some would mutilate themselves to escape from the front.\textsuperscript{26} No trace of this all too human reluctance was allowed to appear in *The Anzac Book* even though several contributions accepted malingering and cowardice in a humorous matter-of-fact fashion. Bean’s ‘Anzac’ displayed none of these weaknesses and in embracing all Australian soldiers as ‘Anzacs’, he could not use material which took them for granted. There was, naturally, no place for a letter written by a Sapper to a wounded friend who had been evacuated to Australia; the writer was good-humoured about his assorted privations in true ‘Anzac’ fashion but mentioned a very revealing episode:

A young fellow was being carried down on a stretcher the other day, and in answer to my sad enquiries said ‘I’ve got two bonzer wounds. They’re worth twenty pound to me. I’ll get a trip away at last.’ He seemed quite pleased though he was rather badly hit.

Bean knew that fear, cowardice and reluctance ‘were the true side of war’ but he wondered ‘if anyone would believe me outside the army’.\textsuperscript{27} *The Anzac Book*, as a commemorative souvenir, was no place to mention the fear which gripped most men at Gallipoli. The only reference to fear in the souvenir is the story of ‘Icy’ the ‘cold-foot’ who finally shows his mettle by a solo raid on a machine-gun post.\textsuperscript{28} The sense of sacrificial absolution is very clear, for ‘Icy’s’ displays of fear are forgotten as his comrades carry him to a dressing station. When fear was mythologized in this way there was no room for contributions which accepted it as a fact of life at Gallipoli.

There were other realities which Bean chose to ignore in his idealization of the ‘Anzac’. Many contributions showed the Australian soldiers as they saw themselves and poked fun at their propensity for drinking and getting into mischief. One excellent narrative poem would have drawn a smile from those soldiers who remembered the early days in Cairo:

\begin{quote}
He hadn’t a brilliant record,  
His paybook was full of things  
That don’t help a man to promotion,  
And tell that he don’t wear wings  
For Jim had a little weakness -  
Some fellows call it a gift,  
And told the most envious legends  
Of the beer that Jim could shift.
\end{quote}
And if he did knock out a policeman 
In Cairo, when full of the dope, 
By mistakin' the coon for Jack Johnson, 
And himself as the white man's Hope; 
And if he did let down the guard tent 
It didn't hurt anyone much, 
The things were just done in good nature, 
And should have been taken as such.

Another poem, the 'Light Horse Mule-Transport Song', recalled the incidence of venereal disease among the Australians in Cairo and the treatment ‘Of sandalwood oil an’ the great pot-permang, / For blokes who play loose without giving a hang’. While it is easy to see why Bean might have omitted this offering which would certainly have caused offence to the families of the Anzacs, it is harder to explain why he rigorously excluded all the other poems which showed an enthusiasm for drink. As a consequence, the 'Anzac' of The Anzac Book is not recognizable as the same Australian soldier who is written about in numerous trench and troopship magazines. It seems most likely that the tone of a commemorative souvenir and Bean’s own moral primness persuaded him to ignore the soldiers' self-confessed weaknesses in his memorial to their strengths.

A chivalrous regard for the enemy was one of the 'Anzac' characteristics much remarked on by reviewers of The Anzac Book. One British reviewer thought it was 'a sentiment that adds a proper lustre to the glory of their fame'. Bean was responsible for adding this sporting recognition of the enemy; his poem, 'Abdul', which acknowledged the bravery of the Turks was cited in almost every review. Only Bean with his English public school background could have written:

We will judge you Mr Abdul
By the test by which we can -
That with your breath, in life, in death,
You've played the gentleman.

It is particularly significant, however, that no other contribution, whether used or rejected, voiced a similar sentiment. Bean shaped the image of the 'Anzac' for the most part, from other men’s words, but in compiling the souvenir he frequently ignored feelings which the troops had expressed, and in 'Abdul' he associated the 'Anzac' with a sentiment which no other contributor had shared.

Bean was particularly careful in his choice of material which drew attention to the loss of life at Gallipoli. A commemorative souvenir had to pay tribute to the fallen, especially since there was not even the satisfaction of a victory to justify their deaths, and there are some moving, elegiac poems in The Anzac Book including 'Non Nobis' by Bean. All of them, however, are devoid of any personal anguish and
the sacrifice is justified by a reminder of duty. Even in 'Graves of Gallipoli', easily the most sensitive of these eulogies, the consequences of war are all assuaged by the final line, 'They died pro patria'. Yet there were a number of contributions which displayed a bitter, more personal sense of loss. Bean could not minimize the cost but in excluding any poem or story which expressed the bitterness of personal grief he ensured that the tributes to the fallen remained basically conventional utterances. His determination to mask any bitterness can be seen in his excision of the following verse from 'Killed in Action' which is arguably the only expression of real grief in *The Anzac Book*:

There's a nation filled with madness, crazy righteous
holy gladness,
News of battle! Tales of conquest! Little loss and so
much gain!
But beneath this pride of triumph runs a deeper
note of sadness,
Pity, comfortless and feeble, for the kindred of the slain.34

Although Bean's editing of most material in *The Anzac Book* was minimal, except perhaps for an altered word and improved punctuation, he radically altered the character of two pieces. The story published as 'Anzac in Alex' bears no relation to the original story, 'That Night at Bencis', which was a tale of racial hatred and violence. Bean simply used the opening paragraphs to give an innocent picture of Anzacs at play. More significant though was his subtle manipulation of the piece entitled 'The Landing'. Bean deleted most of the references to death and injury; after his pruning it reads like an account of a glorious, dangerous game. He also removed the author's inference that a blunder had occurred when the order to fix bayonets betrayed the soldiers' positions, by suggesting that it was perhaps shouted by one of the enemy.

*The Anzac Book* is an inadequate tribute to the men who served at Gallipoli. It certainly reflects the daily struggle with hardship and danger in the pursuit of an impossible task, but it is only a partial record of the way the Anzacs responded to the experience. Australian soldiers were demeaned by the shallow caricature which passes for the 'Anzac' in its pages. Bean set aside the suffering, grief, bitterness, horror and plain human weakness about which many contributors wrote. The image of the 'Anzac' which remained, which was so quickly absorbed into the public consciousness, was the product of his editorial activity and the first step in his memorializing of the AIF.
A legend derives its strength and social importance from the number of people who find in it a satisfactory explanation of events. Most legends evolve over a long period but the Anzac legend is remarkable for the speed with which it was established. The essentials of the legend, and in particular the image of the ‘Anzac’, were defined in just a few months in 1916 largely because *The Anzac Book* reached a vast audience and met with great popular approval.

Bean committed his enormous energy to *The Anzac Book*. He completed his editorial work in late December 1915 and left for London where he arranged that Cassell should publish the souvenir and he was back in Egypt with the proofs by early February. He personally supervised arrangements for the sale and distribution with a thoroughness which matched his determination that the Anzac story should be spread far and wide. Soldiers could purchase copies in advance by a direct deduction from their pay and for an extra sixpence on the purchase price of two shillings and sixpence the book would be sent to any address in the Empire. The purchase of a bookplate guaranteed a copy and Bean sold bookplates on the troopdeck of the S.S. *Transylvania* during the move from Egypt to France. Altogether he co-ordinated the sale of over 29,000 bookplates in France, collecting thousands of orders during his visits to Australian units in April. The units of the First Anzac Division ordered over 36,000 copies of an initial printing of 55,000; when the first postal copies arrived in France in May 1916 there was a further rush of orders.

On the day the first copy reached France Bean recorded Brigadier-General White’s opinion that *The Anzac Book* ‘will be a much bigger thing than we have any conception of’. The response from the soldiers and the British and Australian press proved that White’s optimism was well-founded. It was a ‘remarkable volume’, ‘the book of the year for all stay-at-home Australians’, ‘to be treasured in homes throughout the Empire’. The review in the *Sydney Morning Herald* noted that Gallipoli had given Australia a tradition and that *The Anzac Book*, as the record of that tradition, had a unique place in Australian literature. Evidently it was well on the way to becoming the authorized version of the Gallipoli experience.

Bean also endeavoured to spread the ideals of ‘Anzac’ among the reinforcements from Australia and there was no better gospel than *The Anzac Book*. In September 1916 he secured permission to purchase 20,000 copies of a reprinted edition and within days he was offering them to the new units. 3,000 copies were allocated to each Division and unit commanders were given reply forms on which to record their anticipated sales. Right up to the end of the war Bean continued to press sales of *The Anzac Book* even though other souvenir editions had
Bean’s ‘Anzac’ and the Making of the Anzac Legend

The Anzac Book reached a much wider audience than any other souvenir or official history; it could be found in many homes in Australia and New Zealand and was distributed throughout the Empire. Over half the copies ordered by the First Anzac Division were sent directly to Australia and this pattern persisted with later sales. By November 1916 the AIF had ordered over 53,000 copies and a royalty statement prepared two months earlier showed that 104,432 copies had been sold. In this way the ‘Anzac’ tradition, the role-model, the image and the legend was disseminated among the reinforcements and the people of Australia. The Anzac Book was the first evidence of Bean’s life-long devotion to the memory of the ‘Anzac’ and the ‘Digger’. Its importance is best gauged by his insistence that several hundred copies be reserved for museums, memorials and libraries and his belief that the manuscript was an important document which should be deposited with the War Records Section.

Australian public opinion has always had a special regard for the book and Bean’s hope has been realized that Australians would see in the ‘Anzac’ a moral exemplar for peacetime. But has it been such a useful example? It could be argued that the image established by The Anzac Book in fact demeaned the original Anzacs by denying them their complexity as human beings and creating a shallow stereotype instead. As the detailed recollection of the war has faded, the invocation of ‘Anzac’ has had less and less to do with the actual sacrifice at Gallipoli and more to do with unquestioning nationalism and aggressively masculine virtues. It is perfectly possible that the customary philistinism, cultural and racial chauvinism, and insensitive sexism of many Australians has been, in part, attributable to the enduring effect of the Anzac legend and Bean’s representation of the Australian at war.

NOTES


4. C.E.W. Bean, ed., *The Anzac Book* (London: Cassell, 1916). See also, R. Gerster, *Big-Noting: The Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1987), pp. 27-34. While Robertson, op. cit., p. 259, is typical of those who argue that it was the soldiers who 'created' the Anzac legend and not Bean, Robertson acknowledges Bean's role as 'the main transmitter ... of the Anzac legend'.


10. Ibid., pp. 157-8.

11. Ibid., p.159.

12. Ibid., p.158.

13. Ibid., p.179.

14. AIF Publications Box 1, File AIF Publications Sales and Disposals 1915-18. Australian War Memorial Written Records Section (hereafter Sales and Disposals). Circular to all units, 805/2.


17. See for example: 'The Landing'; 'Glimpses of Anzac'; 'Anzac Dialogues'; 'How I Shall Die'; 'Beachy'; 'Confession of Faith'.


19. See for example: 'A Raid on London'; 'Anzac in Egypt'.

20. Bean's articles were published in book form as *On The Wool Track* ([1910]; Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1945), and *The Dreadnought of the Darling* ([1911]; Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1956).

21. Anzac Book Manuscript and Rejected Manuscripts, 3 DRL 8044, Australian War Memorial Written Records Section (hereafter Anzac MSS).


25. Anzac MSS.- Rejected MSS. All the rejected material can be located in this file and will not be given separate footnotes.


27. Ibid., p. 159.


31. Bean had been a pupil at Clifton College, the *alma mater* of both Douglas Haig, C. I. C in France, and William Birdwood, O. C. of the Anzac Corps. Another Old Cliftonian, Henry Newbolt, captured the public school ethos in verses which, while very popular at the turn of the century, are best remembered today in the single line: "Play up! play up! and play the game!". One of Newbolt's poems, 'Clifton Chapel' has a verse which might explain why Bean chose to write 'Abdul' for the souvenir for it could stand as a statement of Bean's purpose in *The Anzac Book* and the official history.

To set the cause above renown,
To love the game beyond the prize,
To honour, while you strike him down,
The foe that comes with fearless eyes;
To count the life of battle good,
And dear the land that gave you birth,
And dearer yet the brotherhood
    That binds the brave of all the earth.

32. See for example: 'Our Fathers'; 'Graves of Gallipoli'; 'Trojan War 1915'; 'The Price'.

33. Anzac MSS. - Rejected MSS. See for example: 'Mothers of Men'; 'Trooper Denver'; 'His V.C.'

34. Anzac MSS. - Anzac Book MS. Bean omitted this the fifth verse and in verse seven changed 'We ain't got no Daddy now our Daddy's killed and dead', to 'Simple words that bring her memories o'er the boundaries of the dead'.

35. Ibid., Bean excised references to 'death dealing bullets', mantraps, snipers, bloodlust, and the shell fire which was concentrated on the landing craft.


38. Bean Diaries, Australian War Memorial, Written Records Section, No. 41, pp.64-65.

39. Sales and Disposals, letter to Bean, 13/12/1916 re. sales of *The Anzac Book*.

40. Bean Diaries, No. 44, p.8.


43. Sales and Disposals, telegram Bean to White, 15/9/1916; circular from Carruthers, 27/9/1916.

44. Ibid., Circular from Carruthers, 9/10/1916.

45. Ibid., letter Cassell to Bean, 22/9/1916.

46. Australian War Memorial Registry File 12/12/1. Folder National War Records Section. Bean to Smart, 6/2/1917, p. 5.

47. A facsimile of *The Anzac Book* was published by Sun Books of Melbourne in 1975 which sold extremely well. The publishers noted on the back cover that the book offered 'the truth behind the legend'.

Yackandandah School

Yackandandah Soldiers' Memorial Hall
The news of the outbreak of war reached Yackandandah at midday on 5 August. Townsfolk were alerted by the ringing of the school and church bells. The news was greeted with excitement and a spontaneous patriotic parade took to the streets in the afternoon. The local rifle club declared itself ready to shoulder arms. The Council met, endorsed the establishment of a patriotic fund and voted £25 for the cause. The local paper, the Yackandandah Times, reflected local opinion with its call to the citizens of Yackandandah to serve the Empire in its hour of crisis. The women of the shire organized a patriotic concert and began to raise money for the war effort. It is likely that Andrew Fisher's pledge of the 'last man and last shilling' swung the vote for the Labor candidate, John Parker Moloney, who took the electorate of Indi for a second time.

The first man to volunteer was the teacher at the small school at Kiewa who travelled to Sydney to enlist in the AIF. Whether he volunteered out of a sense of imperial loyalty or to escape the classroom remains unknown. However, his enlistment, and those that followed, were reported with considerable approval in the Yackandandah Times.

Yet, the war also seemed remote. The disruption it brought to trade, worried farmers. The Yackandandah Times felt removed enough to suggest that it was not in Britain's best interests to 'annihilate' its 'natural ally', Germany, and expressed reservations about the French, claiming they were 'brave in attack, but panicky in reverse'. Although the war was 'the biggest game on earth', capable of 'inspiring a noble purpose in life', the editor, Nolan, noted that there had never been a 'just war'. The war also provided good advertising copy for local businesses. A car dealer claimed his vehicles 'are like the British Empire composed of good material, and they resemble the enemy in the fact that they run well'. The harshest criticism of the Kaiser the paper could muster was a comparison with Australia's King O'Malley. Of far greater importance was the movement of stock into the shire from the drought stricken Riverina.  

This changed dramatically in May 1915 with the first reports of the landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula. The news of the first casualties stunned the local community. Suddenly, the war had come home. The
paper noted with pride the local men who had taken part. The Council placed on record its admiration of the men who had landed at Gallipoli and extended its sympathies to the relatives of those who had been killed. The motion was proposed by Councillor Clutterbuck whose son had been among the first men to land (YT, 13 May 1915).

The community began to organize activities to raise funds not only for the Belgium Relief Fund but also for the Red Cross and the wounded soldiers. Fund raising activities included swimming carnivals, athletic meetings, horse races, cricket competitions, operettas and a ladies’ ball (men were strictly forbidden and some of the women dressed themselves as men for the evening). The two most popular activities, though, were dances and euchre nights.

In the aftermath of the landing at Gallipoli, the government launched its first recruiting campaign which reached its peak in mid 1915. Recruiting posters made their appearance for the first time and were treated with more respect than was the case in nearby Yarrawonga where the poster demanding, ‘Wake Up! Your Country Needs You!’ was found tacked to the gates of the local cemetery. Yackandandah was not a recruiting centre, the closest centres being located in nearby Beechworth, Wodonga and Albury. In July, a recruitment committee was formed in the town and a recruitment sergeant was posted to Yackandandah. Although he was not a local man, the sergeant came from a rural background which proved to be a considerable advantage for recruitment activities within the shire (YT, 8 July 1915).

The recruitment committee held seven meetings during July with the theme ‘a young man could not ask himself how can I go, but how can I stay’. The campaign ended on 4 August in a public meeting which passed, unanimously, a motion expressing the shire’s ‘inflexible determination to continue to a victorious end the struggle in the maintenance of those ideals of liberty and justice which are the common sacred cause of the Allies (YT, 5 August 1915). A measure of the recruitment committee’s success was clearly reflected in the fact that of the 138 men who enlisted in 1915, 64 joined up in July.

Until August 1915, recruits had left the shire without any civic acknowledgment of their departure. Plans were made for a public farewell of the men who had enlisted in July but were abandoned when it became clear that all the men would not be on leave at the same time. But the idea of a public farewell was appealing and was adopted with enthusiasm by the districts within the shire. Each recruit received a send-off from his local community and was presented with a gift, sometimes a gold medal, more often a wristlet watch (which were no longer regarded as effeminate after their endorsement by Lord Kitchener).

Interest in the lives of local recruits continued after the men had left the shire and the Yackandandah Times printed reports of the men’s
activities. At times, the reports read like a social column detailing the minutiae of furloughs, illness and chance meetings although the ever present reality of death gave them a sombre tone at times.

The newspaper also published letters written by local men to their relatives at home and in one recruit from Gundowring, Percy Keat, found a semi-regular correspondent. The letters provide an interesting insight into the thoughts and changing attitudes of a young farmer overseas fighting a war. Keat's early letters had a naive quality to them He 'had no idea that there was such good country in Egypt' but found farming practices primitive. He hated Cairo, describing it as 'filthy' and 'disgusting'. He fought at Gallipoli, where he was wounded, and in France, where he was wounded a second time. His observations of French life and the life of the Australian digger on leave in London were lively, but with time the patriotic tone evident in the early letters disappeared. He found it impossible to convey to the readers at home the quality of trench life. His last letter was published in June 1916, a week after the Yackandandah Times reported his death in battle.3

Although enlistments occupied the attention of the local people and recruitment rates were seen as the most important elements in the war effort, two groups emerged as major forces on the home front during 1915, the shire's women and its teachers.

The women took on the tasks traditionally associated with women's work during the First World War. They joined the local branch of the Red Cross where they knitted socks, scarves and balaclavas. They collected old magazines and wrote to lonely soldiers. Seven local women from the upper social echelons joined up as nurses. But the women also played a prominent part in recruitment drives and monopolized the shire's fund raising activities, particularly after the formation of the Yackandandah Young Ladies' Patriotic Guild under the leadership of Miss Molyneux in 1915. As fund raisers, the shire's women were only rivalled by the school children.

The teachers demonstrated their patriotism by both example and practice. In October 1914, they voted to contribute 2.5% of their salaries to the State Schools' Patriotic Fund for the duration. In their schools, they stressed notions of sacrifice, debt, honour and imperial loyalty and encouraged a staggering array of activities to raise funds for the war effort. These ranged from school gardens, stalls and the knitting of socks to collecting frogs for Dr Leech's experiments in Melbourne University's Botany Department. The district inspector informed the shire's school children that these activities were more important than their lessons. The response of the children, unfortunately, was not recorded. By August 1915, the Beechworth Inspectorate (of which Yackandandah was part) had raised £2328 for the Patriotic Fund and were clear state leaders. A staggering £300 alone had come from the tiny school at Kergunyah (YT, 1 October 1914, 25 March, 26 August
The children were also used in other ways to promote the war effort. They frequently led the processions that preceded recruitment meetings and the schools were the first institutions to observe Anzac Day with a memorial service and patriotic sports in 1916.

The recruitment committee continued its meetings throughout 1915. It added concerts, films and displays of military drill to attract an audience: the drill ‘Fire, bayonet, thrust and club’ was described as ‘especially interesting’ (YT, 21 October 1915). In 1916, the committee threw itself wholeheartedly into the second recruitment drive mounted by the government. Among the men who enlisted in 1916 was Alick Keat, a cousin of Percy’s. Yet, the campaign of 1916 did not repeat its success of 1915 and although the citizens of the shire met on 4 August to reaffirm the motion passed the year before, the meeting lacked the fervour so evident in 1915. In September, enlistment levels were so low the recruiting sergeant was withdrawn from the shire.

Mid 1916 also saw the first signs of an uglier side to the shire’s war effort. Resentment directed against eligible men who had not enlisted began to surface. Men who had been rejected for service on medical grounds sought details on badges that designated them as volunteers who had been so rejected. One anonymous scribe wrote to the *Yackandandah Times* in June condemning those who had not enlisted, dubbing them ‘shirkers’ tied to their mothers’ apron strings and concluding, ‘in some towns they would be hunted by the community’. His letter drew a response, also anonymous, which claimed that ‘the few’ who had not enlisted had good reasons for not doing so (YT, 22 June, 13 July 1916).

In July, the first white feathers, five in all, were posted. To add injury to insult, the letters were not stamped and the recipients had to pay 2d for the privilege. Although no-one claimed responsibility, guarded comments in the paper suggested that the Young Ladies’ Patriotic Guild were the culprits. One of the recipients penned an angry letter to the *Yackandandah Times*. Another took a more laconic approach. ‘SIR’, he wrote, ‘Some old tart in Yackandandah has posted me some White Leghorn Plumage’. He went on to give detailed medical reasons why he had not been able to enlist (YT, 27 July 1916).

Nolan had little time for tactics like white feathers, but he was also appalled by the decline in enlistments. The answer, he believed, lay in universal conscription for service overseas. By September, conscription had become the dominant issue in Australian politics and Nolan was vigorously extolling its virtues. His view may well have been partly shaped by the fact that his brother had died at Gallipoli.

On 5 October 1916, the paper carried a formal notice informing all single men aged between 21 and 35 that they were required to report for registration for military service. Prime Minister Hughes was using existing powers under the Defence Act (which allowed for conscription
for home defence) to begin the call up even before the referendum had been held. Men who felt they had grounds for exemption from the call-up were advised to lodge their claims for hearings before a special court. In the same week, the federal member, Moloney, and the state member, Leckie (a Liberal), arrived in the shire to argue the issue. Moloney argued the case against conscription, Leckie the case for. Both spoke to packed meetings. Moloney’s meetings were enough to alert Nolan to a groundswell of local opinion opposed to conscription and he printed an ‘anti’ piece in the *Yackandandah Times*. Nolan himself wrote the piece, not because he agreed with its views but because he could find no-one to write the anti-conscription case. Editorially, however, the *Yackandandah Times* remained uncompromisingly for conscription: ‘Every “Yes” vote will be a nail in the enemy’s coffin. Every “No” vote will be a nail misplaced’ (*YT*, 19 and 26 October 1916).

The exemption court began its hearings in Yackandandah on the eve of the referendum’s polling day. Eighty-one men had applied for exemption: 75 were farmers’ sons or rural labourers. It was an unexpectedly high number of applications. Few sensed the irony in the arrest of a deserter from the AIF in the district a few days before. In his opening remarks, the magistrate, Pennefather, made it clear that the regulations would allow few total exemptions: it granted only seven. Five conditional exemptions were granted, 53 temporary exemptions were granted and the remaining 16 applications were either refused or withdrawn (*YT*, 26 October, 2 November 1916).

The conditional exemptions were granted on curious, sometimes rather disturbing, grounds. George Croucher, for example, was one of four brothers of eligible age. Three had already enlisted. One had died at Gallipoli. Croucher’s exemption was granted as long as neither of his two surviving brothers was killed or repatriated from the AIF. Temporary exemptions were granted only until the end of January at the latest. They were granted on two grounds. For most, the exemption covered the harvest period. Once the harvest was completed, the men were expected to report to camp. For the rest, the exemption was granted to give them time to get their personal affairs in order.

The impact of the court’s decisions on the farming communities was profound. These communities had strongly supported the war effort, not only through enlistments, but also with fund raising activities. And farming was booming. The voluntary system had served them well, allowing them to make a contribution to the war effort without efficient farming practice being threatened. For the farmers, the court’s decision seemed to mean one thing: the harvest for 1916 was secure, but the harvest of 1917 was in doubt.

Overall, the shire voted in favour of conscription by a margin of 53 votes (730 for, 677 against). But the result reflected the numerical dominance of Yackandandah township. Yackandandah was the only
booth to produce a majority for the question. The rural booths at Dederang, Sandy Creek, Bruarong and Osbornes Flat returned majorities against the question.4

The conscription issue faded rapidly from the paper, but conscription did claim one victim. During the federal elections of May 1917, Moloney lost the seat to Leckie who stood as a Nationalist candidate. Nolan acted as Leckie’s campaign secretary and the *Yackandandah Times* gave extensive coverage to Leckie’s campaign. The paper did report, however, that Moloney was well received at Dederang, Sandy Creek, Osbornes Flat and Bruarong. Obviously, Moloney’s claim that the real issue in the election was conscription was widely accepted in the farming community. Moloney might not have lost the seat if more voters had been like one voter in Beechworth. Unused to the preferential system, this voter triumphantly informed Moloney that he had given him only one vote, but had given two to Leckie (*YT*, 2 November 1916.).

By 1917, war weariness had surfaced in the shire. Numbers enlisting fell dramatically from 93 in 1916 to 27 in 1917. The recruiting committee was stung into action by their Wodonga counterpart’s claim that parts of Yackandandah remained ‘virgin territory’. A recruiting drive, complete with films and a procession led by the ever-compliant local school children attracted a small and listless audience, most of whom were ineligible to enlist. It did, however, draw one remarkable recruit, a man who already had three sons serving at the front. It was a striking indication that the shire’s pool of volunteers was close to exhaustion (*YT*, 1 March, 10 May 1917). Farewells for men enlisting were still held, but these became increasingly private affairs. Rather, public attention now switched to welcoming home men returning from the front. These ‘welcome home’ affairs eerily resembled the farewells of 1915 and 1916 in their organization, structure and even speeches.

The 1917 conscription referendum simply reinforced the bitterness generated by the first campaign. Leckie again led the campaign for conscription and received strong support from the *Yackandandah Times*. The anti-conscription campaign was organized by local people. The residents at Dederang, for example, called an anti-conscription meeting which attracted ‘a very large crowd’ where ‘the speakers were enthusiastically received’. The most intriguing element about the Dederang meeting is the suggestion that one of its principal organizers was a women who had lost two sons at the front and had a third still serving.5 The results of the referendum mirrored those of 1916: the shire overall voted in favour of the question although by a reduced majority of 34.

By 1918, the war seemed as remote as it had been in late 1914. The total number of enlistments recorded was seven. Reports on the war in the *Yackandandah Times* became occasional and in January, Nolan
described the war as ‘the present appalling effort of the nations to destroy each other’ (YT, 13 January 1918). The news of the Armistice was greeted with relief and celebrations although both were tempered by caution. Germany had yet to sign a peace treaty.

Two of the major controversies that dominated the war seem to have by-passed Yackandandah between 1914 and 1918. The first is the sectarian controversy that followed the Easter Rebellion in Dublin in 1916 and spilled over into the first conscription campaign. Analysis of the response of the shire’s Catholics to the war suggests that economic and social factors, rather than specific religious or ethnic factors, shaped their response to the war. The second is the treatment of German Australians by the local community. Yackandandah had a significant German Australian population, yet none were interned. When allegations of disloyal utterances were made against the local businessman Wilksch, Nolan took the extraordinary step of defending the man in the columns of the Yackandandah Times. It would be ludicrous to suggest that Yackandandah’s citizens, alone in Australia, were devoid of the sectarian and ethnic prejudices that gripped Australia between 1914 and 1918. Indeed, the columns of the Yackandandah Times were filled with references to the ‘bestial Hun’ and fears about the impact of the Irish problem on Australian politics. But it might be fair to suggest that while the stereotypes promoted by both government propaganda and the metropolitan press were accepted by the citizens of Yackandandah, they had little to do with the people they had grown up with, and knew, as neighbours and friends.

After the war, Yackandandah, like so many other communities across Australia, built its local war memorial. It was built to commemorate those who had served and those who had died. Like the grainy sepia photographs of wooden crosses marking the last resting place of sons, husbands, friends and brothers, memorials were more than simply formal commemorative objects. They filled a more personal need: they served as ‘graves’ for the men who did not return and whose families had no chance of ever being able to visit their grave. One of the names on the Yackandandah memorial is Alick Keat. Alick was the youngest of eleven children and a farmer’s son. He liked reading in bed and his mother saved books she thought he might be interested in for his return. A brother, Walter, had served in the Boer War. Alick enlisted in October 1916 at the age of 27, just as the conscription campaign gathered force within the shire. He was Catholic which suggests that Prime Minister Hughes’ claims about the disloyalty of Catholics may have been somewhat extravagant. It seems likely that Alick enlisted over his mother’s objections because she was informed of the fact by telegram. Alick had a photograph postcard taken of himself at the Melbourne Show before entering camp. He was not pleased with the result: ‘I look as if I had a little too much’ he wrote on the back of
Alick’s letters reflected the day to day life of one man’s experience in the AIF. He was less than impressed with his officers. He thought ‘the average Australian in drink is a dangerous nuisance’. He was often desperate for news from home, grumbled about the fact that no-one wrote to him and then apologized after he found twenty letters at a time waiting for him at camp. He appreciated the treats sent to him, especially the soap, sweets and lemon butter, and worried about the fact that Walter still had not married (he volunteered to send home a French girl for Walter to marry). As he sat in fields full of grass near the front, he asked for news of the harvest at home, and his letters often contained pressed samples of flowers and plants he collected on the way to the front and seeds to be grown at home. He frequently wondered when the war would end. His letters never mentioned Empire.

Alick took leave in September 1918 and visited Paris. He found the French capital expensive but had a photograph taken. He returned to camp on 7 September. On 16 September, he sent the photograph home. He was killed two days later at Le Vergieur by a shell exploding a mere yard in front of him. He was buried the next day in a civilian cemetery, under shell fire, by two mates. Mrs Keat received the news of his death with an official letter, complete with a rubber stamp signature at the bottom. His photograph arrived some weeks later.

Among the effects sent home were the wallet book and notebook Alick carried the day he died. Both were shredded by shrapnel and blood-stained. They reflected the matters Alick Keat thought important in his life. There were photographs of family and friends from home (one young woman’s photograph was cut into the shape of a heart) and a photograph of his mate, Albert Parry. He carried a scapular. There was also a small photograph of Bogong (a mountain close to home) for him ‘to gaze upon’ and the remnant of a letter which asked Alick to keep the letter close to his heart ‘or near thereto’. The wallet book also contained a photograph of a black kelpie sitting near two haystacks. On the back of it was a brief note saying that ‘Boxer’ had gone missing and had not been found since Alick’s enlistment. The notebook had been given to him by his mother and contained some addresses. It also contained the flowers and plants he collected and pressed on the way to the front: the dye on the pages is still clearly visible. Alick Keat’s story is not an unusual one in many ways: yet it still has the power to touch us 76 years later.
NOTES

1. Yackandandah lies in the hills of North Eastern Victoria. The small town and its shire were founded on gold and then sustained by the farming communities created by the Selection Acts of the 1860s and 1870s. There had been some excitement in the town during the Kelly Outbreak when it was rumoured that the Gang had an interest in the banks' 'treasures', but by and large Yackandandah was typical of most rural communities of its time. This study of Yackandandah Shire is part of a broader study examining the impact of the First World War on North Eastern Victoria. It complements material already published. Research was made possible through a small ARC Grant from the University of Wollongong and the University of Wollongong's Labor History Group.

2. Yackandandah Times, 13 August, 8 October, 19 November 1914, and 28 January 1915. Hereafter, references to the Yackandandah Times (YT) will be included in the text.

3. See, for example, Yackandandah Times, 20 May 1915, 1 and 29 June 1916.

4. Yackandandah Times, 2 November 1916. In giving this information, Nolan contravened the regulations governing the referendum which specifically forbade the publication of details at this level.

5. Yackandandah Times, 13 December 1917. The information on the woman who helped organize the Dederang meeting did not appear in the paper but was passed on to me by a local resident.


7. As noted in the chapter in Heathcote cited above, memorials can also be seen as symbols of the divisions created by the war and their construction was often accompanied by controversy and argument.

8. The information on Alick Keat comes from a private collection held by Mrs Keat of Gundowring. I acknowledge, with thanks, her generosity in making Alick's papers available and the help of Mrs G McQuilton in locating the material.
AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES.

AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE.

Attestation Paper of Persons Enlisted for Service Abroad.

No. 1466
Name (Surname) KEAT
in full Christian Name Alick Thomas
Unit 7th Field 6th. Co.
Joined on 25.9.16

Questions to be put to the Person Enlisting before Attestation.

1. What is your Name?

2. In or near what Parish or Town were you born?

3. Are you a natural born British Subject or a Naturalized British Subject? (N.B.—If the latter, papers to be shown.)

4. What is your Age?

5. What is your Trade or Calling?

6. Are you, or have you been, an Apprentice? If so, where, to whom, and for what period?

7. Are you married?

8. Who is your next of kin? (Address and relationship to be stated)

9. What is your permanent address in Australia?

10. Do you now belong to, or have you ever served in, His Majesty’s Army, the Marines, the Militia, the Militia Reserve, the Territorial Force, Royal Navy, or Colonial Forces? If so, on what grounds?

11. Have you stared the whole, or any of your previous service?

12. Have you ever been rejected as unfit for His Majesty’s Service? If so, on what grounds?

13. (Form married men, widowers with children, and soldiers who are the sole support of dependants)

14. Are you prepared to undergo inoculation against small pox and enter service?

I, Alick Thomas Keat, do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true, and I am willing, and hereby voluntarily agree to serve in the Military Forces of the Commonwealth of Australia within or beyond the limits of the Commonwealth.

And I further agree to allot not less than two-thirds of the pay paid to me from time to time during my service for the support of my wife and children.

Date 11/9/16

Signature of person enlisted.
| Name | A. T. Kear
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COPY OF D. 16

466. KEAT. A.T. 4th Machine Gun Bn. A.I.F.
Killed in Action 18.9.18.

No. 466 Pte. A.T. KEAT was Killed in Action on 18.9.18. by enemy shell fire in centre of village LE VERGIEUR Ref. Sheet 62C S.E. Pte. Keat was badly shattered from thighs upwards. Death was instantaneous. He was buried by one of his comrades, No. 3146. Pte. ELLIOTT. G. in the civilian Cemetary at LE VERGUIER Map Ref. L.33.b.80.80 Sheet 62C.N.E.

A cross was erected bearing Reg.No. Rank Name Unit date of death etc.

(400 yards S.W. of LEVERGUIER)

Sgd. P.Chance.2/Lt.
for Commanding Officer
24th M.G.Coy
4th A.M.G.Bn.

E.McK. 21st October, 1919

Dear Madam,

With reference to the report of the regrettable loss of your son, the late No. 466, Private A. T. Keat, 4th Machine Gun Battalion, I am now in receipt of advice which shows that he was killed in action on 18/9/18 by enemy shell fire in centre of village Le Vergier, France, death being instantaneous. He was buried in the Civilian Cemetery, 400 yards South West of Le Vergier, France, a cross being erected over his grave.

The utmost care and attention is being devoted to the graves of our fallen soldiers, and photographs are being taken as soon as possible for transmission to next-of-kin.

These additional details are furnished by direction, it being the policy of the Department to forward all information received in connection with the deaths of members of the Australian Imperial Force.

Yours faithfully,

Major.

Mrs. M. Keat, Officer i/c Base Records.

GUNDOWRING, Victoria
WILL

I, Aleck Thomas, of...,

Devising and Real Estate unto...

IN WITNESS WHEREOF I have hereunto set my hand this... 1940.

Alien Thomas, (Signature).

Address and Occupation: 3rd. B.E.P. 3rd Blcchel Q.R.

Signed by the said Testator as his last Will and Testament the same having been read over and explained to him, in the presence of us both present at the same time who at his request and in his presence and in the presence of each other have subscribed our names as witnesses.


Address and Occupation: 3rd. B.E.P. 3rd Blcchel Q.R.


Certified to be a true copy of will of No.466 Pte. KEAT Aleck Thomas 4th M.G.Rn. (Pte.) Original forwarded to D.P.M. 3rd M.B.
WOMEN OF QUEENSLAND!

REMEMBER HOW WOMEN AND CHILDREN OF FRANCE AND BELGIUM WERE TREATED

DO YOU REALISE THAT YOUR TREATMENT WOULD BE WORSE

SEND A MAN TO-DAY TO FIGHT FOR YOU

J.S. Watkins
Would you stand by while a bushfire raged?

GET BUSY, and drive the Germans back!

Harry J. Weston
IT IS NICE IN THE SURF

BUT

What about THE MEN IN THE TRENCHES

GO AND HELP

D.H. Souter
DONT FALTER
GO AND MEET
THE HUN
MENACE
Throughout the period between the first British settlement in Australia (1788) and the federation of the six evolving colonies into a single federal Commonwealth (1901), military forces on land were provided first by the British government (to 1870) and later by part-time or professional volunteers locally recruited. The federal constitution made defence the sole prerogative of the central government, and among that government's earliest pieces of legislation were Defence Acts (1903 and 1904). The existing colonial naval and military forces were integrated under single commands, and all Australian males between the ages of 18 and 60 (except conscientious objectors on religious grounds) were in time of war, made liable for service in the citizen military forces, within Australia or its territories.

In view of subsequent events and the debates which the idea of compulsory military service was to generate in both World Wars and the Vietnam war, the discussion in the early period was surprisingly uncontroversial. This was presumably because many Australians felt their country was vulnerable to foreign attack; they were aware of their remoteness from the protection of a great power, and their proximity to massive populations in Asia, whom they were determined to keep out of Australia. Furthermore, military conflict was in the public consciousness in all six colonies because of the war in South Africa (1899-1902) to which Australia contributed over 16,000 volunteers from a population of less than three million. The strongest supporters of compulsory training were on the political left, within the Australian Labor Party.

International events in the first decade of federation, especially Japan's victory over Russia in 1904-05, and her tension with the United States two years later, reinforced these attitudes. Civilian 'National Defence Leagues' were formed in Britain, New Zealand, and Australia to encourage military service, and in 1909, Alfred Deakin's 'Fusion' ministry amended the Defence Act to provide for compulsory part-time military training in peacetime: junior cadet training (age 12-14), senior cadets (14-18), and citizen forces (18-20) with a reserve force of ages 20-26. Some of the cadets were given naval training. The legislation was implemented two years later, with numerous exemptions (not including religious grounds) and many absentees had to be chased up
and, if apprehended, prosecuted.

When war came in 1914, Australia raised a large force of volunteers – the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) – to serve at Gallipoli and subsequently in France and Belgium. Conscripts, on the other hand, could only serve in Australian territory. As the war dragged on and casualty rates mounted among the British and Imperial forces, the Australian Labor government and especially its Prime Minister, W. M. Hughes, came under pressure to introduce conscription for overseas service, to fill the ranks decimated on the Western Front. Within the Labor Party there was now considerable resistance to conscription especially, but by no means only, from those of Irish descent. The Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, Daniel Mannix, lent his formidable weight to the anti-conscription campaign. Hughes felt that the government had the legal right to introduce a compulsory scheme, but because of the split in his own party and in the country at large, he put the question, somewhat ambiguously, to a referendum where it was lost by a narrow but definite margin, winning neither an overall majority of votes nor the votes in a majority of states.

As the war dragged on the attrition rate got worse, and in 1917 Hughes, leading a new government formed from a rump of the Labor Party and the Liberal Opposition, again put the question of conscription – even more ambiguously – to a national referendum, where it was more decisively rejected. Many returned soldiers, valuing the comradeship of volunteers and believing they were more efficient and reliable, joined the opposition.

Surprisingly, in the light of this rejection and the limited military value of compulsory service up to this time, it was retained after the war, though in a reduced form, and was only abolished in 1929, by the Scullin Labor government, on economic grounds. The gathering storm clouds in Europe in the mid-to-late 1930s and Japan’s imperial expansion into Manchuria and ‘China proper’, eventually caused an increase in the part-time militia force levels, but did not result in conscription, such was the social and political weight against it. Only in October 1939, after the outbreak of war with Germany, did the conservative United Australia Party Government reintroduce compulsory training and then only for service in Australia. The militia had only the same limited obligation and so the second Australian Imperial Force had to be specially enlisted, again, wholly from volunteers. It engendered a high spirit among them, but it created, in effect, two armies with intense feeling between them.

It was only when the Japanese were hammering at Australia’s gates in New Guinea, had bombed northern ports and shelled Sydney and Newcastle, that the Labor government led by John Curtin risked party disunity by extending the service liability of conscripts to islands of the South-West Pacific south of the equator. Conscripts thus fought
alongside volunteers in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, but it was never an easy relationship. Conscription ended when the war ended.

Hitherto the full-time component of the Australian army had comprised staff and instructional corps, garrison artillery units, and depot personnel. The formations that fought both wars were basically civilians led by civilians, although by 1945 the majority of Australian generals were professional soldiers. Units specially formed and recruited comprised the Australian army component of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan. These units then became the basis of the combat element of the Australian Regular Army, which were subsequently used as part of the British Commonwealth force in Korea. World War II had brought home to Australians their vulnerability, and the ANZUS Treaty (with New Zealand and the United States) was negotiated to ensure American defence of Australia if necessary against a re-armed Japan. But by the time the treaty was signed – in September 1951 – the government saw a more imminent threat, from aggressive militaristic communism that appeared a worldwide phenomenon directed from Moscow aimed at world domination. Events in Asia seemed to demonstrate that it was well on the way to achieving it.

The Menzies Liberal-Country parties coalition government, elected in late 1949, considered that a third world war, promoted by the USSR, was a distinct possibility. Accordingly, in addition to attempting (unsuccessfully) to ban the Communist Party, it reintroduced military conscription under the euphemistic title of ‘National Service’. If this was a military move and not just a political one, it did not profit from the lessons of the two world wars. Service was only for three months full-time, and again it did not include an overseas commitment. Thus had more men than the Regular Army field force been required for overseas combat, as they were in Korea, they once again would have had to be specially enlisted, the Citizen Force training and organization being largely wasted. There may have been some benefit, as the government claimed was its intention, in developing ‘national discipline and physical fitness’, although some National Servicemen would have contested even that. There were numerous grounds for exemption from training including those ‘whose conscientious beliefs do not allow them to engage in any form of naval, military, or air force service’.

During the early 1960s, two situations developed in South-East Asia that affected Australia’s sense of security. The first was Indonesia’s ‘confrontation’ of the new state of Malaysia (including the former British colonies of North Borneo and Sarawak and, initially, Singapore). This was a small but ugly war designed to fracture the new state. The second was the growing civil conflict in Vietnam which had been
divided by the 1954 Geneva agreements at the 17th parallel of latitude. The British government pressed Australia to be involved against Indonesia, and the Americans sought help to shore up the government and forces of South Vietnam. The small Australian Regular Army might have been able to manage a contribution to one or other of these, but not to both at the same time, and in late 1964 Sir Robert Menzies announced a new National Service scheme to be introduced early in the following year. This required 20-year-olds selected by a ballot of birthdays to serve full-time for two years, overseas if necessary, with a subsequent three years in the reserve, part-time Citizen Military Forces. Those selected could, alternatively, fulfil a longer period of reserve service.

In view of the history of opposition to conscription, it is surprising that there was initially so little resistance to the new scheme. The birthday ballot was capricious and arbitrary, but not patently unjust. But in the country at large there was disquiet about the situations to Australia’s north, and especially about Indonesia which, since the late 1950s, had been acquiring arms, including modern fighter and bomber aircraft, submarines, and even a naval cruiser, from the Soviet Union. It was this national disquiet that made the new National Service scheme more acceptable, even when conscripts were sent to Vietnam to help the South defend itself, and to demonstrate to the US Australia’s dependability as an ally. But the nature of that war, as fought by largely conscripted American forces, its moral ambiguities, and its uncertain relevance to the security of Australia, all came in the late 1960s to reinforce ‘natural’ resistance not only to compulsory combat service but also to compulsory service overseas. Churches, some educationalists, some politicians and other politically active groups combined to press the government to withdraw Australian troops from Vietnam, and even to urge young men to defy the law. The government was not deflected from its course, and only withdrew the forces in late 1971 and early 1972 pari passu with the American withdrawals. When the Whitlam Labor government came to power in late 1972, it cancelled the National Service legislation and withdrew the handful of Australian advisers left in Vietnam. In the seven years of this second National Service scheme, nearly 64,000 men had been conscripted, a quarter of whom saw service in Vietnam. Their combat efficiency was widely remarked upon.

As a footnote to Vietnam, in 1983 the Senate referred to the Standing Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs the whole question of ‘Conscientious objection to conscripted military service’. The Committee recommended (Parliamentary Paper No 233/1985) that legislation should add to the present recognition of absolute conscientious belief to allow ‘exemption from participation in a particular military conflict where to be compelled by law to do so
would violate the individual’s sense of personal integrity’. Exemptions should be determined in proceedings which so far as possible are informal and non-adversarial before a tribunal of at least three members.

Most of the immigrants to Australia since World War II have come from countries with a history of compulsory military service. With or without such a program, it seems unlikely that sizeable Australian forces will be sent overseas in the foreseeable future, and conscription for home defence has never been a problem. It thus seems unlikely that Australia will again see the massed protests against conscription of the period 1966-71. And if there were a cause in which Australians believed, it is suggested that Australia’s experience will, if belatedly, endorse the experience of other countries. It seems, further, that many conscripts are in fact willing to serve and can be a vital part of a nation’s military strength.
Captain Hugo Throssell, V.C.
My Father's Son

RIC THROSSELL

The Cross is heavy in my hand. Dull bronze gun metal moulded from the captured Russian guns of the Crimean War, it bears the weight of time past. There is the memory of victory and defeat in its cold form. The tangled purple ribbon, modest among the bright campaign medals of the First World War, called the Great War, 'the war to end wars', speaks of my father's courage, and his defeat by life. Turn it over. His name is carved into the steel. 2nd Lieut. H.V.H. THROSSELL A.I.F. 1915.

Symbol of those desperate hours of his life when he led men in the fury of battle, the Victoria Cross came to represent his whole life; but a brief battle for a few yards of soil scratched out of Gallipoli's stony ground is not a man's life; could not explain courage, or his decision to die. His honour lay in the event, not the recognition of it by a grateful nation. Seeing it from the perspectives of today, I could believe that the greater honour was his surrender of the esteem of the conventional society of his own time and the sacrifice that he made in his choice of what the safe self-righteous call the coward's way to die, giving up not only the life that he had once found so good, but also his hero's reputation, so that we, my mother and I, might have a livelihood. Seventy years later, I could give the Victoria Cross to the peace movement knowing that he would have made that sacrifice too. My memories of him remained.

Nowhere is there any trace now of how my father felt about the V.C. No private letters. No memories amongst those old enough to know. He never spoke of the war. Rarely wore the medal; only when once or twice he led the Anzac Day March in Perth, with a young son holding his hand wondering what it was all about, vaguely disappointed that he only had the dull bronze cross with its purple ribbon pinned to his ordinary, navy blue, office-going coat, instead of the carefully preserved khaki uniforms and clinking rows of shining brass stars and silver medallions on rainbow striped campaign ribbons that all the other men wore so proudly.

By the time Victory Day came round in July 1919, Jim Throssell had made up his mind. He had been asked to lead the Victory Parade in Northam and to speak at the official celebrations. He was a natural speaker, easy and relaxed before a crowd. He had a knack of winning people, treating them all as friends - and they would be in Northam, of
course. There wouldn’t be too many who’d agree with him, he knew that. But there wouldn’t be a man-jack there who didn’t know Jim Throssell. All the same it was going to be hard for him to say what he had to. All of the family would be there; including Jimmy Mitchell, the Premier, a Northam man, and an old friend. They would have the soul ease shocked out of them.

When the day arrived, Jim Throssell rode at the head of the Victory Parade in full Light Horse uniform. It was as much his personal triumph as a victory celebration. The crowds lining Northam’s streets saw it as the welcome home of the local hero and the men who had gone to the war with him. He looked splendid sitting on a big bay with all the natural grace of a born horseman. The crowds cheered and cheered as he rode by, bands playing, flags flying.

The young Throssells, Jim’s nieces and nephews, his brothers’ and sisters’ kids, knew that Uncle Jim would be speaking. They idolized him. He was their own special hero. They revelled in his reflected glory among school mates and friends. Gerry Throssell, Lionel’s eldest, was about sixteen then. He remembered how Aunt Katharine had told them all to be sure to clap like anything and give Uncle Jim a big cheer when he finished his speech. They got into Fitzgerald Street early and made sure of finding a place close to the platform. There was the usual boring stuff from the Mayor and Jimmy Mitchell. Everyone knew what they were going to say off by heart. And then it was Uncle Jim’s turn. It was alright at first. Everyone clapped like mad. Then he started talking about the war and the grown-ups went sort of still.

‘You could have heard a pin drop when Jim told them that the war had made him a socialist … he had seen enough of the horrors of war and wanted peace’, Katharine wrote to her friend Nettie Palmer. ‘Jim himself was ghastly, his face all torn with emotion. It was terrible – but magnificent’.

She had not realized just what that public declaration of his change of heart would cost Jim. He knew that to all of his father’s followers, the farmers and shop keepers of Northam, it would be like treachery.

From an unlisted official address in Perth a secret report went out to Military Intelligence in Melbourne, disclosing that the latest recruit to the ‘social democrats’ was Captain Hugo Throssell V.C. ‘Many attribute his leaning towards socialism to his wife’s influence, but he states he saw the need for such principles whilst on service and on his return to Australia. However, he was struck on the head at Gallipoli and further he was a victim of cerebro-spinal meningitis, his mind having perhaps been affected’, the agents of the law reported.

The tiger of socialism was already a real fear among the good conservatives and loyal patriots of Western Australia.
Captain Throssell VC, who received an enthusiastic reception, in thanking the people for the warm welcome, said it was good to be back in old Northam again and receive dozens of warm-hearted hand shakes. He made humorous references to his exploits on the football ground and in the arena of the ring and, then becoming intensely earnest, said during the past five years he had seen much of the world. They had known him as a sort of irresponsible lad, but he claimed now to be a man. Nearly five years ago he had ridden through the streets of Northam in charge of eighteen men, who were amongst the first to enlist. With him were the late Harry Eaton and the speaker’s brother Eric. Of that eighteen, seven were lying either in Gallipoli, Palestine or France. His hearers would realise the feeling within him when greeted by happy faces on his welcome home. War had made him a Socialist ... He had seen enough of the horrors of war and wanted peace.

Judith Rodriguez

ZOUAVE MARCHING TEAM,
ROLLINS COLLEGE, 1913-1914

‘Quick and spirited drill’ they repeat, no doubt, weekly on campus. And try their costumes out, wrong in detail, but always look to the spirit. War is turning this way – prepare, prepare it! They have looked for their rig to the Civil War and the young, would-be grandfathers it did for.

Look at the shy, lit faces having fun; only this might pass as the least bit Algerian. Busty for jackets, put off by puttees, Injun headbands for caps, a gipsy wheeze the cross-tied pumps, and of course skirts, quite short. Like the recollection that war hurts.

In Perth, the Boer Wars past, my aunt was twelve, in Assembly with teachers and scores boys who fell – the State’s best these, the first scholarship school. Husbands never to wed. And War was announced, and the girls leapt to their feet and gloriously sang ‘Rule Britannia’ – this was before Anzac.
When Blackbirds Sing: Martin Boyd and the Reality Of Good Friday

Should he like St Francis have bent and kissed that hideous cheek? Then he thought what a beastly thing that would have been when the boy offered his whole face, to kiss only the side that was distorted and horrible, ignoring what he still had of life and health.

When Blackbirds Sing

Dominic Langton’s conversion to pacifism in When Blackbirds Sing (1962) links Martin Boyd’s novel of protest about the conduct of the 1914-18 war to the autobiographical narratives of Robert Graves in Goodbye to All That (1929) and Siegfried Sassoon in The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston (1937). Boyd had already borrowed Sassoon’s incarceration in a military hospital for the major plot development of Lucinda Brayford (1946), a fictional narrative which ends with the martyrdom of a conscientious objector to the pacifist cause – the setting, however, being World War II. Lucinda Brayford was written at Cambridge where Boyd, disillusioned by his World War I experience as a British infantry officer, sought the company of Quakers and left-wingers intent on doing what he ‘had not the courage to do’ in 1914. As he listened to the voices of conspicuous pacifists like the Duke of Bedford, his position became one of, as he put it, ‘qualified pacifism’ and he blamed Churchill for prolonging the war and so causing unnecessary killing and destruction. He also thought that Australia was being deceived by the British military and had ‘better turn its eyes to America’. At the end of When Blackbirds Sing the hero Dominic Langton, safely returned from the Western Front, throws his medals, one of which is inscribed ‘The War for Civilization’, into a waterhole on his Australian farm. In this act of ‘repudiation of the social order as well as of the war’ (pp. 186-87), he mimics Siegfried Sassoon’s throwing his Military Cross into the Mersey in 1917.

Boyd’s pacifist ideas developed over a number of years and the writing of several books. The 1928 novel The Montforts gives an unsympathetic portrayal of a conscientious objector. Such Pleasure (1948) examines, through the characterization of Maurice Bellamy, ways in which soldiers grew to mistrust authority during the protracted campaigns of the First World War. As in When Blackbirds Sing (whose
title is taken from Julian Grenfell’s 1915 poem ‘Into Battle’), Boyd is drawing on material rehearsed in *A Single Flame*, his 1939 autobiography dedicated to another generation on the brink of war. The autobiographical self-portrait is of a young World War I volunteer not untouched by pacifist and socialist ideals. This means that, despite his youthful acquiescence, Boyd was primed to reject the rationale of military solutions. Shaw and Morris had been early mentors, and the *fin-de-siècle* call to embrace a ‘new Hedonism’ had won his approval. While others on their way to the front occupied themselves with *Infantry Training*, he read Max Beerbohm’s *Zuleika Dobson*. Like this young man of utopian imagination, the fictional Maurice Bellamy and Dominic Langton are aesthetes who find themselves in the trenches before they have come to terms with the reality of having to kill. They face the war in Rupert Brooke’s 1914 *carpe diem* mood, prepared to encounter beauty on the battlefield and to enjoy themselves when on leave. Both come into conflict with their company commanders in circumstances resembling those given in Boyd’s account of his struggle with an officer of the career type who accepts the war machine. In the *When Blackbirds Sing* episode which describes an atavistic Dominic – ‘full of antique conventions’ (p. 110) – who has to be saved from duelling with his C.O., the actual officer appears as Harrison, one of the numerous secular puritans in Boyd’s novels who are consistently allocated destructive roles. Dominic comes to a disturbing conclusion, subversive of the allies’ war aims:

> The Germans are only my artificial enemy. I know nothing about them except what I read in the papers. When I see them, when the prisoners come in, they are not my enemies. They are the same as everyone else. They are just like the people you see in the street – in London or Melbourne or Paris or anywhere. They are not my real enemies. Harrison is my real enemy. (p. 113)

At this moment the war is internalized for Dominic, his own psyche becoming the battlefield. It is a convulsion of conscience which, in its sympathetic treatment, illustrates how far Boyd has come since *The Montforts*.

Extrapolated as they are from the novelist’s actual experiences, *Such Pleasure* and *When Blackbirds Sing* analyse the conduct of the war in the same socio-political terms employed in the autobiographies. Both novels castigate Lloyd George (for the ‘knock-out blow’) and all those who, motivated by social revenge or profiteering, contributed to the general ‘fighting-lust’. These are the representatives of a newly dominant bourgeoisie. In a chapter from the second autobiography *Day Of My Delight* (1965), entitled ‘The Upper Middle Class’, Boyd blames the new English commercial class, with its public school veneer of civilized values, for the delinquencies of the war. The opposition is between the old landowning aristocracy and the new Etonian
businessmen whose 'defects have affected the whole country': 'They have created an artificial caste, based on money, and the caste mark is conformity. The caste marks of the aristocracy were individual taste and independent judgement; and blood was more than money'. Later, in a protest pamphlet written during the Vietnam War, Boyd was to describe the two modern European wars as Civil War I and Civil War II – such was his conviction about the self-interested class motivation of war leaders on both sides.

The framework that Boyd constructs for Dominic's conversion to pacifism is a system of values in which pleasure and beauty are given primacy. All the life-ambitions projected in Boyd's writing, from his first published work *Retrospect* (1920), a book of war-inspired poems in a Brookean vein, to his anti-war pamphlet, *Why They Walk Out*, which he himself published in 1970, are predicated on an ethic of pleasure. In the early fiction – in *Love Gods* (1925), for example, or *Scandal of Spring* (1934) – his attempts to draw the parameters of a modified fin-de-siècle hedonism are inconsequential. However, in later novels, most significantly in the Langton books, which address the issue of pain from the standpoint of an ethic of pleasure, Boyd is persuasive in challenging the tradition of western puritanism. There are affinities with the Oscar Wilde of *De Profundis* who, not forgetting his love of physical beauty, wrote in neo-Platonic fashion of a new dimension opened out to him by his religious conversion. As someone who, as he said, 'hated Good Friday', Boyd rejected abnegation as the focus of a religion whose stories of wine-from-water and harlots forgiven appeared to him 'a clear guide to a life of pleasure'. By temperament he was an 'incarnationalist', as *Much Else in Italy* (1958), his Socratic dialogue on the subject of Christian and Classical approaches to the sensible world, makes clear. Joan Lindsay (of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* fame) recalled in her autobiography the specific way in which her cousin Martin expressed his resistance to the war: 'he had embellished his dugout in France with a large statue of his favourite Dancing Faun, dragging it from one filthy hole to another'. The protagonists of Boyd's fiction exhibit a similar belief in the supremacy of beauty and pleasure.

As Boyd sees it, the ideal of a pleasurable existence is the only guide available to human beings in their search for fulfilment. Moreover, it is an ideal associated with the aristocracy. Yet, while confessing to class bias, and making clear that his hedonistic values are pursued at the expense of bourgeois ones, Boyd stresses that it is a vision of a satisfying life he wants to salvage from aristocratic forms – not class privilege. In the words of Maurice Bellamy's mentor in *Such Pleasure*:

The truth is ... there is no aristocracy and never has been one. There is a class of people which approximates very crudely to the aristocratic ideal, and among them are a few genuine aristocrats. Imagine half the great noblemen if there
had been no architects, nor painters, nor writers, or the great generals if there had been no tailors or band music ... The real test of aristocracy is disaster. It's only when a king is dethroned that he ceases to be vulgar. How incredibly shoddy the French aristocrats were before they went to the guillotine. Again it's only the superb work of the artists who gave them any distinction.10

The novelist's stance, as it emerges in his autobiographies and occasional writing, is not a simple one. While consistently presenting feudal structures as superannuated, Boyd focuses on the fact that aristocratic culture has successfully projected images of human fulfilment. The point is not to perpetuate outdated and oppressive structures, but to avoid the other extreme, the modern iconoclasm which would generate a European equivalent of the Cultural Revolution. In practical terms this means not giving up in the face of 'the difficulty which confronts the man who has been brought up in a traditional culture, but also has a genuine desire to see the end of social and economic injustice'.11

*When Blackbirds Sing* is the last novel in a sequence which traces the fortunes of an Anglo-Australian colonial family from the mid-nineteenth century to the post-Federation period culminating in the First World War. An amalgam of the novelist and his elder brothers Merric and Penleigh, the character Dominic represents Boyd's delayed coming to terms with his participation in the European struggle he came to regard as a disguised civil war. Dominic is an Australian Briton (to use W. K. Hancock's and Manning Clark's expression) who spontaneously springs to the defence of the 'home' country. What is more, he joins a British regiment. This is exactly what the novelist himself chose to do in order to secure himself a position as a commissioned officer. Had he enlisted with the Australian forces, he would have been obliged to work his way up through the ranks. His brothers, who submitted to the egalitarian Australian system, did not gain commissions. Merric, who had pacifist sympathies acquired through the influence of his Christian Scientist wife and mother-in-law, enlisted late in the war and never saw action. Penleigh, who thought Merric a 'shirker',12 was stationed like Martin on the Western Front but was less exposed to the horrors of trench warfare in his position as a sergeant with a transport unit. In 1917, however, he was gassed and, after being invalided to England, became 'oppressed by the thought of the accumulated pain of the war'.13 The author's own experience as a British officer, Merric's pacifist ideals and Penleigh's depression gave *When Blackbirds Sing* the major plot elements it required.

As the final novel in Boyd's tetralogy *When Blackbirds Sing* sets out to dramatize the confrontation of the Langton family's pleasure ethic and the fact of pain. Dominic's experience of a psychic division in which the pleasure-seeker faces his own murderous self represents the apex of the Langton family's self-knowledge, its coming to an
awareness of its instinctive values and of their limitations. As colonists, the Langtons find the conditions of a life satisfying to the senses in a country which appears to them not unlike Italy or the south of France. As in all Boyd's novels the emphasis is on the pleasures of outdoor activities like horseriding, fishing and swimming. The archetypal Australian is envisaged as a natural hedonist, someone like the character Lucinda Brayford whose declaration 'I like people who live for pleasure' astonishes members of her *nouveau riche* family who see their social activities as obeying 'some obscure moral purpose'.

In the first chapter of *When Blackbirds Sing* we encounter Dominic on his way to join the British forces. He begins to reflect on his life with his wife, Helena, on their New South Wales farm. His remembered experience of a harmonious, unthreatened existence begins to assume the status of a myth of the Golden Age:

He filled his mind with pictures of her, in the dairy skimming the cream, or doing things with plums and apricots and tomatoes, drying them in the sun to use in the winter, or shaking the seeds from the pods of poppies. She was always engaged in country activities of this kind. Sometimes she was waiting for him, leaning over the gate when he came in from riding, or even sitting on the flat top of the gate post, which made him laugh. (p. 8)

Since he never married, Martin was presumably drawing on his brothers' strong attachments to their wives and nostalgia for their newly-established homes. At the time Penleigh enlisted, he and his family had just moved into a self-designed house at Warrandyte, on the outskirts of Melbourne, a place which the painter Clara Southern had established as an artists' colony. Penleigh's letters from the Front described his longing for the familiar scenes of home which he pictured in all the sensuous detail of an Australian impressionist landscape of the Heidelberg school. Like David Malouf's narrative in *Fly Away Peter* (1982), Boyd's makes maximum use of the geographical division underlying the colonial experience. Australia in both instances stands for Arcadian Innocence and Europe in the grip of war for traumatizing Experience.

Elaborating the idea of Helena as the figure in an innocent landscape, Martin Boyd begins to associate Australia, the Sunny South, with a utopian vision, establishing one counter in an antipodean version of the familiar North-South, Gothic-Classic debate which, in the nineteenth-century literary context, coloured the imaginations of Arnold, Pater, Swinburne and Wilde. In all Boyd's novels about colonial families, beginning with *The Montforts*, Australia represents the values of Matthew Arnold's Victorian Hellenism, articulated in antipuritan terms in *Culture and Anarchy*:

Hebraism and Hellenism, - between these two points of influence moves our world. At one time it feels more powerfully the attraction of one of them, at
another time of the other; and it ought to be, though it never is, evenly and happily balanced between them.\textsuperscript{16}

Pater argues in \textit{The Renaissance} that, not content with its 'underground life', a suppressed 'Hellenic element' in our culture will periodically assert itself: 'Hellenism is not merely an absorbed element in our intellectual life; it is a conscious tradition in it'.\textsuperscript{17} Wilde's plea for a 'new Hedonism' in \textit{The Picture of Dorian Gray} is a teasing, \textit{enfant terrible}, version of Arnold and Pater. In a direct line of descent from the Hellenic Victorians, Martin Boyd gives us 'Helena', the gentler side of Dominic, who in \textit{A Difficult Young Man} (the novel of the Langton group concerned with Dominic's childhood) is himself associated with Gothic values. In both novels, Dominic's attachment to Helena is seen in the same light as his appreciation of beauty and order in nature.

An important incident in the first chapter of \textit{When Blackbirds Sing} centres on Dominic's desire to join young men diving for coins at Teneriffe, a desire which scandalizes the Melbourne matron with whom he has found some companionship on the voyage. Dominic is rapt in the privileged moment:

> The bodies of the young men were a golden brown, and as they fell like arrows into the sea, and moved about in marvellous patterns deep down in the opal clarity, Dominic's eyes glowed and darkened, as always when he saw something supremely beautiful, above all when it showed the freedom of men in the natural world. (p. 11)

Mrs Heseltine restrains him on the spurious grounds that he is 'an English gentlemen' and 'can't dive for coins with natives', to which Dominic replies: 'I'm an Australian: and they're not natives. They're Spaniards, so am I partly' (p. 11). The intensity of these feelings of human equality is evident in Durban where Dominic refuses to take a rickshaw: 'As they walked in search of a cab, this feeling of affinity with the negro ... produced a slight smouldering in him, that the man's splendid body should be exploited' (p. 10). Boyd's novels are full of such images of physical health, Apollo figures whose effect is to disclose the \textit{numen}, the divinity suffusing the visible world. As it happens they also disclose the homosexual element in the author's aestheticism.

The sensation Dominic experiences contemplating the Spanish divers 'that there was no division between man and the natural world' (p. 77), returns to him as he listens to blackbirds announcing the end of a bitterly cold period spent in the front line. Dominic and his friend Hollis, a nineteen-year-old subaltern, are possessed by a euphoric emotion which prompts them to strip off their clothes in a blossoming orchard: 'Hollis was going to say: "We are like the Greeks"', but he could not speak. There was something in the night far beyond this
allusion’ (p. 79). (Again, the subtext is homosexual, though Boyd chooses not to explore it.)\(^{18}\) After a brief respite from fighting, the characters are returned to the battlefield where Hollis loses half his face in an artillery barrage. As a *doppelgänger*, he touches that area of Dominic’s psyche which clings to the possibility of wholeness of being, even in the midst of violence. Disorientated by Hollis’ injury, Dominic is precipitated towards a crisis in which he explores to the full the violence in his own nature.

This psychic struggle relates to the already established division of Dominic’s personality between ‘southern’ and ‘northern’ attributes. On arrival in England, Dominic re-establishes relationships with members of the English gentry with whom his family are connected and who are known to him from a previous visit ‘home’ as a child. ‘Home’ is Waterpark, his family’s estate near Frome, on the border of Somerset and Wiltshire. As a guest at a neighbouring house – Dilton – he renews his sense of English upper-class life. Since he is someone for whom ‘the present actuality has most power’ (p. 41), he immediately shifts his allegiance from his Australian to his English home, writing magisterial letters to Helena about moving back to Waterpark after the war. Submitting fully to the change of hemispheres, he returns to his old fiancée, Sylvia, who is now married. A figure of ‘northern’ will, in contrast to Dominic’s ‘southern’ spontaneity, Sylvia functions to escort Dominic from Eden. His attachment to her originates in a passionate desire for knowledge of the world. When they become lovers, he feels ‘that at last he possessed all that he rightly owned, the other part of his double world, making it complete’ (p. 64). This feeling dissipates, however, when he begins to observe Sylvia’s expedient callousness in human relationships. For her sex is not love but adventure and titillation. Finally, Dominic recognizes in Sylvia’s behaviour the arrogance behind the prolongation of the war.

Sylvia’s barbarism, manifest in the savagery of her taunt to a young subaltern about to depart for the front – ‘Have you been over the top yet?’ (p. 104) – is viewed by the novel as typical of secular puritans caught up in their own self-interest. Through her insolence, Sylvia is aligned in Dominic’s mind with callous military figures like the staff captain overheard complaining about notions of fair play in war. The captain’s assertion that ‘the only good Boche is a dead one’ (p. 105), sparks off Dominic’s recognition that ‘She [Sylvia] and the staff captain were the same type’ (p. 106). It is an epiphany which links sexual adventure and the conduct of the war.

Dominic has two major experiences at the front which serve to demystify the war effort. Both experiences reinforce his belief in personal responsibility – however limited the possibilities of its exercise. Thereafter he is more disposed to listen to voices raised in public outcry against the policies of punitive war leaders like Lloyd
George, whom his friend Lord Dilton criticizes for his puritan hatred of the forms of traditional society. Until his awakening from ignorance of the factors determining the conduct of the war, Boyd’s blundering searcher resembles the mass of the fighting force: ‘Dominic had never thought where the war was leading, nor had any of the men in his regiment. They concerned themselves with their immediate duties, and had a vague idea that afterwards there would be an earthly paradise for those heroes who had not gone to a heavenly one’ (p. 99).

The first intimation that he has been deceived about the morality of the war is a cruel one, and one which links his part in the struggle with the brutality of Harrison and the blood-lust of his childhood mentor in the military arts, now a warmonger, Colonel Rodgers. After his disillusionment with Sylvia, Dominic has disturbing dreams in which he gives himself up to violence: ‘He ... was somehow Harrison and also Colonel Rodgers. He was saying: “We must have the orgasm of killing. Never mind the women. Pierce another man with a sword. Don’t release the seed of life, but the blood of death”’ (p.107). Dominic’s dream is actualized when officers like himself are ordered to ‘give their men lectures on the physical pleasures of fighting’. Boyd interrupts his account of Dominic’s moral and psychological breakdown to evoke the historical context:

The government and the generals on both sides must at this time have been on tenterhooks lest the soldiers woke up to the futility of their lives, that some common humanity such as that of Christmas 1914, or the sheer weariness which the French were beginning to show, might lead them simply to stop fighting. It would have been a disaster for either High Command if the enemy had walked away. There would have been no glory attached to victory. At Christmas 1914, this disaster had been prevented by a high-ranking English officer firing into the German lines while the opposing troops were dancing together round bonfires in No-man’s-land. At Etaples there had been a riot and the soldiers had killed five military policemen. Always there was fear of the psychological uncertainty of a million men, and everything possible was done to prevent peace breaking out. Lloyd George addressed those Old Testament exhortations to the armies which so disgusted Lord Dilton. He would not consider an armistice ‘as it might be difficult to get the nations fighting again’. Raids like that in which Hollis was wounded were ordered ‘to keep alive the spirit of the offensive’. A general came to inspect the battalion. He asked each subaltern: ‘What were you in civilian life?’ When the young man answered modestly: ‘I was at school’, or ‘I was reading law’, the general replied: ‘Well you’re going to be a soldier for the rest of your life, remember that’. (pp. 114-15)

Surrendering to the pressures of the moment, Dominic makes ‘violence his god’, inciting his men with an extremism which exceeds expectations:

When he spoke of the pleasure of killing another man, his words had the strength and impact of a work of art. He did not merely give them a few facts
to which they could listen in half-hearted boredom. He touched their imagination. Their fundamental decency was disturbed. They came out of the barn silent, not knowing what to say to each other. Even the bloody-minded sergeant thought he had gone too far. (p. 116)

In his autobiographies, Boyd describes how in 1917, when ‘no private soldier had the faintest idea what he was fighting for, so that the generals ordered more and more raids to keep the blood-lust simmering, and to try to key up the necessary hatred of the enemy’, he himself lectured his men in this brutish way.19

Interestingly, there is a direct comparison with Memoirs of George Sherston. In Sassoon’s account of the events of 1916 Sherston is subjected to a lecture on ‘The Spirit of the Bayonet’. A major speaks with ‘homicidal eloquence’, taking the Manual of Bayonet Training as his text. He is assisted by a sergeant, who ‘had been trained to such a pitch of frightfulness that at a moment’s warning he could divest himself of all semblance of humanity’:

With rifle and bayonet he illustrated the major’s ferocious aphorisms, including facial expression. When told to ‘put on the killing face’, he did so, combining it with an ultra-vindictive attitude. ‘To instil fear into the opponent’ was one of the Major’s main maxims. Man, it seemed, had been created to jab the life out of Germans. To hear the Major talk, one might have thought that he did it every day before breakfast. His final words were: ‘Remember that every Boche you fellows kill is a point scored to our side; every Boche you kill brings victory one minute nearer and shortens the war by one minute. Kill them! Kill them! There’s only one good Boche and that’s a dead one’.20

Boyd’s version of the story suggests that When Blackbirds Sing combines memory of actual events and a reinforcement coming from Sassoon.

The author wrote of When Blackbirds Sing that his chief preoccupation in writing it was ‘to spotlight as clearly as possible the iniquity of the individual act of murder, which multiplied by hundreds of thousands was the reality of war’.21 What simpler means of spotlighting this than to represent a specific act? Shortly after his ‘dedication to violence’ (p. 118), Dominic finds himself facing a young German on the battlefield. He kills him, but not before he has seen the boy as another Hollis: ‘Dominic did not stay the instinctive movement of the hand, and in that instant of mutual recognition, with eye open to eye, he shot the boy, who fell dead a yard in front of him, rolling over and over as Hollis had rolled in the dew’ (p. 119). This is the second intimation of evil: in his killing of the doppelgänger, Dominic kills the thing he loves, and so his moral self. The treatment of the episode echoes Wilfred Owen’s ‘Strange Meeting’, in which a dreamer journeys to hell to face a stranger whose suffering mirrors his own. The stranger reveals himself:
I am the enemy you killed, my friend,
I knew you in this dark: for you so frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.22

Dominic suffers from what are described as periodic 'jams in the brain'. He cannot keep his mental compartments separate: allies like Sylvia and Harrison appear as the enemy, the enemy as ally. Injured at the moment of killing the German boy, he is invalided to England and finds himself billeted with a friend of Sylvia's whose house has been converted into a hospital. This house is a symbolic Heartbreak House, a shell of European tradition emptied of meaning. Untouched by its eighteenth-century opulence, Dominic continues to reside 'in the half-second in which he exchanged with the German boy that glance of human recognition, and at the same time shot him dead' (pp. 121-22). Letters from Sylvia and Helena exacerbate his sense of deadlock, the impossibility of reconciling extremes of pleasure and pain, innocence and experience. The outcome is a pacifist conversion.

Its catalyst is the man to whom he owes his commission, Lord Dilton, whose unguarded confidences about his own hostility to the war leadership provide Dominic with the logical framework he requires. When Sassoon's Sherston was about to take his stand against the war, he set out his reasons:

Something must be put on paper ... and I re-scrutinized the rough notes I'd been making: *Fighting men are victims of conspiracy among* (a) *politicians*; (b) *military caste*; (c) *people who are making money out of the War*. Under this I had scribbled, *Also personal effort to dissociate myself from intolerant prejudice and conventional complacence of those willing to watch sacrifices of others while they sit safely at home.* This was followed by an indignant afterthought. *I believe that by taking this action I am helping to destroy the system of deception, etc. which prevents people from facing the truth and demanding some guarantee that the torture of humanity shall not be prolonged unnecessarily*.23

Dominic is not, like Sherston, an intellectual, but he can appreciate intellectual arguments, and the ideas he receives from Dilton are close to those of the *Memoirs*. In one respect, however, they are distinctive. Dilton's views return the reader of *When Blackbirds Sing* to the opening chapter of the first novel of the Langton sequence, *The Cardboard Crown* (1952), where the narrator wittily reverses conventional political categories of Left and Right to produce the following model of class division:

I am ... not concerned with the horizontal divisions of society, but with the vertical, which is down the middle, 'per pale' ... At the top on the Right is the duke, at the top on the Left is the international financier. At the bottom on the Right is the peasant – on the Left is the factory worker. On the Right between the Duke and the peasant are all kinds of landowners and farmers, all artists
and craftsmen, soldiers, sailors, clergymen and musicians. On the Left side are business men, stock-brokers, bankers, exporters, all men whose sole reason for working is to make money, and also mechanics and aviators. We on the Right cannot make money. When we have it, it has only come to us as an accident following on our work, or from luck.24

Boyd’s major social conflict of Right and Left is one of landowning aristocracy and middle-class commercialism, of feudal values and the commodity values of capitalism. Appealing to just such a model of society and social tensions, Dilton argues that the escalation of the war is motivated by class spite. While people like himself and Dominic believe they are fighting to preserve their way of life – that of the ‘Right’ – Lloyd George is fighting to destroy it. Dilton is outraged by the latter’s leadership: ‘He wants a “knock-out blow” and he’ll knock out Europe, England included. He hates us. He declared war on us long ago’ (p. 99). Conversely, Lord Lansdowne is praised for his outspokenness about the threat of the war to the social fabric of Europe. Comparable views emerge from chapter fourteen of *Such Pleasure* where Lansdowne’s historical stand for a compromise peace is given sympathetic fictional treatment in the actions of the character Lord Kirriemuir:

Lord Kirriemuir’s offence was to make a speech in the House of Lords, pointing out that there was no prospect of the war ending for years, and to settle down to a ‘War of Attrition’ which seemed to be our policy, might well end in the collapse of European civilisation. He continued with surprising accuracy to foresee the disastrous sequence of events which has actually happened since that date.25

With obvious authorial approval, this chapter goes on to elaborate notions articulated in *When Blackbirds Sing* of the war as a class rather than a national conflict. Of course acceptance of these notions presupposes social allegiances few modern readers are likely to endorse fully. But it is interesting to note that Lenin, approaching the question from an entirely different political standpoint, likewise came to the conclusion that World War I was a class war.

Lord Dilton, like Paul Brayford – Lucinda Brayford’s last exotic bloom on the feudal tree – stands for a class and a tradition. This is also the case with Dominic, whose conception of a soldier is of a chivalric knight defending his demesne, whether it be Dilton or Waterpark. However, the extremity of Dominic’s war experience forces him to enter a no-man’s-land of faith beyond class and cultural allegiances. Convalescing at Dilton, he visits Waterpark where for the first time he senses their contingency:

The ethos created by long association between one people and one stretch of land, or between a family and their dwelling place seemed to evaporate. The tie which bound his blood to this land had broken. It had not snapped suddenly,
but the cord had slowly perished, and now fallen soundlessly apart. (pp. 153-54)

When Dominic returns to Australia he carries with him a new detachment, and a new sense of freedom to choose, which is not understood by Helena. Change, for him, has come about as a process of unlearning.

Dominic fails to find an adequate language to describe what has happened to him. He appeals to notions of 'the Holy Ghost', natural law and the 'essential self', but always it is the war experience itself which returns to him: 'What made it impossible for him to fight again was the brief exchange of human recognition as he shot the German boy' (p. 137).

This change brings Dominic's divided psyche to the threshold of wholeness. At a home for shell-shocked soldiers in view of St. Michael's Mount, Cornwall, where he had previously spent time with Sylvia, he meets Hollis and for a time suffers once more the confusion which had caused his periodic mental convulsion:

Everything here was double and confused. Even the view of St. Michael's Mount had become a sort of hallucination of duality, which had its exact and dreadful counterpart in Hollis' face. Outside of this place Venus and Mars had kept their separate identities, but here they were united into a horrible hermaphrodite. (p. 167)

Love and war, male and female, innocence and experience: however we choose to view it, Dominic is in need of the Coleridgean miracle of synthesis to make sense of a world divided between Sunny Pleasure Dome and Caves of Ice. He finds it. Usually ashamed of and secretive about the injured side of his face, Hollis, in a pleading gesture, turns it towards Dominic, who contemplates his choice:

Should he like St Francis have bent and kissed that hideous cheek? Then he thought what a beastly thing that would have been when the boy offered him his whole face, to kiss only that side that was distorted and horrible, ignoring what he still had of life and health, the smooth fresh skin of his youth. And that was what everyone was doing. They would only caress youth when it was wounded. The whole and the sane must first pass through the Moloch jaws. (p. 70)

By caressing the unblemished side of the boy's face, Dominic restores himself to grace and finds once again innocence, hope and belief.

The pattern of spiritual growth in When Blackbirds Sing is completed in the movement from Sylvia and war-torn Europe to Helena and Australia, but without any comforting sense that the answer lies in the 'south'. When Dominic finally leaves Europe it is the outward expression of an inward catharsis. The return to Australia is a return to the innocent hemisphere, corresponding to the touching of the
unblemished side of Hollis' face. But Dominic, daydreaming about Helena, is in fact deceiving himself, for the springs of life are more hidden than he imagines, residing somewhere in the obscure region of his relationship with self. He has yet to learn that he will never again be able to inhabit Eden in the unselfconsciousness of his former existence. Helena herself, when she steps out of the myth of innocence into a new conjugal life, is found wanting as Dominic begins to perceive the void of incomprehension which lies between them. Helena's response to Dominic's act of self-determination when he throws his medals into the waterhole is an incredulous 'You are not serious?' Whereas for Dominic 'these medals were given him for his share in inflicting that suffering, that agony multiplied and multiplied beyond the possibility of calculation. And this Military Cross was awarded for what to him was the worst thing he had ever done, when he had violated his own nature at the deepest level' (p. 187-88).

The abruptness and inconclusiveness of Boyd's ending may to some extent be explained by the fact that the author planned, but never wrote, a fifth novel in the series. What its subject matter might have been can be guessed from hints in *The Cardboard Crown*, references to some kind of breakdown suffered by Dominic, as well as to generous but eccentric behaviour, scandalous in the eyes of Melbourne society. The fact that the writing of the story of Dominic's conversion to pacifism presented difficulties is evidenced by a lapse in *When Blackbirds Sing* from Boyd's previous habit of employing a narrator through whose memories and surmises he was able to project a multi-viewpoint approach to events and characters. The other Langton novels are distinguished by Boyd's successful implementation of a technique of literary Impressionism comparable to that of F. Scott Fitzgerald or Ford Madox Ford. *When Blackbirds Sing*, for all its seriousness of intention, lacks the density of texture characteristic of the best of the tetralogy.

Boyd's difficulty is simply the challenge presented by the war to his lifelong preoccupation with an ethic of pleasure. Dominic and *When Blackbirds Sing* focus what Boyd elsewhere designated the reality of Good Friday, of suffering: 'In the trenches ... Good Friday became one of the facts of daily life'. Hence Dominic's legacy repugnant but fascinatedly described by the narrator in the opening chapter of *The Cardboard Crown*:

I look ... at the huge crucifixion painted by Dominic, the tortured body, the face hidden by hanging hair, the conspicuous genitals. It was not a thing that could properly be shown, except to Trappist monks on Good Friday, and yet I could not bring myself to paint it out.

The narrator's ambivalent feelings about Dominic's painting reflect Boyd's own attitude. Throughout his writing life, the novelist was
concerned to portray a reconciliation of opposites, and *When Blackbirds Sing* is his nearest approach to a synthesis. Here we find a summary of the major preoccupations. The espousal of an ethic of pleasure is modified by the confrontation with pain; an obsession with Europe is explored and exorcised. In Dominic we have Boyd’s last statement of a resolution of the varied contraries of pleasure and pain, good and evil, Australia and Europe, South and North, Classic and Gothic, Right and Left, male and female. The result is the portrait of someone no longer at home with family, class or country. Boyd himself remained an expatriate to the end, lived in genteel poverty and died in solitude.

NOTES

1. Martin Boyd, *When Blackbirds Sing* (Melbourne: Lansdowne Press, 1971). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
8. See *A Single Flame*, p. 190; and *Day Of My Delight*, p. 137.
12. See Brenda Niall, p. 68.
18. For Boyd’s observations and opinions about homosexuality in the army see *A Single Flame*, pp. 120-21; and *Day Of My Delight*, pp. 85-86.
19. See *Day Of My Delight*, p. 88; and *A Single Flame*, p. 123.
21. ‘Preoccupations and Intentions’, p. 87; see also *Day Of My Delight*, p. 276.
25. *Such Pleasure*, p. 243. Boyd’s handling of criticism of the war leadership may owe something to his association with the pacifist M.P. Leonard Outhwaite, an Australian expatriate. See *A Single Flame*, p. 111; and *Day Of My Delight*, p. 201.

Albert Tucker, *Psycho*, *Heidelberg Military Hospital*
The total effectiveness of a cartoonist in time of war has depended on the artist’s quality of mind, and on his skill to express concepts graphically. The Australian-born Will Dyson demonstrated this when producing his ‘Kultur’ cartoons in London during World War I.

What distinguished Dyson’s cartoons of the period was of course his draughtsmanship, combined with an intellect that rejected the then popular propaganda lauding the heroism of ‘our gallant lads fighting the bestial Hun’, the latter stereotyped by the Dutch cartoonist Louis Raemakers’ hack-clichés of slobbering Germans with naked babies impaled on their rifle bayonets.

Dyson, with most supporters of the majority Labour movements of Britain, France and Germany, accepted the First World War as a just and necessary one. His approach to cartooning was intellectual, literary, characterized by his ‘grand manner’ concepts, heavy with symbols and allegory-science, death, vice, peace, and his most telling of all images, the devil, a gross beast symbolizing the evil of the Kaiser and German militarism.

The essential task of the cartoonist during a war is to bolster morale of both civilians and of the serving troops. In Australia during World War I three notable but disparate cartoonists who rose to the occasion were Norman Lindsay, Claude Marquet and David Souter. Another, the young David Low recently arrived from New Zealand, was to get only an occasional chance as a Bulletin staff artist and that was late during World War I, for, from the very beginnings of hostilities Norman Lindsay had been appointed to produce the full-page cartoon comment as the Bulletin’s chief cartoonist. Low’s contributions concentrated in the main on the political happenings at home and in particular those events involving the then Australian Prime Minister, William Morris Hughes. The few ‘war’ cartoons drawn by Low for the Bulletin were almost indistinguishable from Dyson’s ‘Kultur’ cartoons. Seemingly, Low was experimenting, even borrowing Dyson’s ‘split-brush’ technique together with the ‘grand manner’ presentation with symbolic and allegorical images dominating. Plainly this approach was not Low’s ‘handwriting’, and he had, as all artists do, to discover his
own style and direction. Curiously, just twenty years on during World War II, David Low was to become a major influence on public opinion throughout the world and the dominant cartoonist of the Western nations.

In contrast, Norman Lindsay, it would seem, had a confused concept of the 1914-18 hostilities. Lindsay's son Jack has said that Norman, for the one and only time, found himself in accord with the ruling powers, without the least sense of the real political and social issues involved; indeed, he had no feeling at all for the need to attempt to understand. But, towards the end of the war, he had revolted against what was happening, not by any acquired political analysis, but by a revulsion from the whole event.

As with David Low from London, Will Dyson was also setting the pace for Norman Lindsay, who adopted the 'grand manner' approach, by borrowing Dyson's cloven-hoofed devil image, to link the cruel excesses of the Kaiser and Prussianism to the ultimate of evil. His themes, mostly supplied by editorial staff, were worked up into magnificent pen paintings, or occasionally studies in crayon, declaring both his graphic skill and his early commitment to the British cause. At this time Lindsay had acquired a unique and most remarkable facility in that he could draw with a pen held at arms' length, controlling it by direct, unsupported contact with the paper.

During the 1914-18 period Lindsay commented also on home-front issues such as strikes and war profiteering, which because he was pro-conscription, became a repeated subject for his cartoons as he underlined its social divisiveness. Angered by Lindsay's jibes at the Irish and his eagerness to involve others in the fighting, the Catholic Monthly Review Australia published this taunt in February 1918:

The sad part of it all is that Mr Lindsay himself shows no sign of going to help Britannia ... although he is of military age and not married. He seems to have marvellous powers of resistance to be able to stay at home while the fate of the Empire is in the balance. He is fond of drawing: he is even very clever at drawing – but not the sword.

It is difficult to judge from this distance just what influence Lindsay's cartoons had on Australians then. Because the Bulletin's circulation was large, 20,000 copies a week at the outbreak of war, we can assume it was significant, but – not significant enough to win the 'Yes' vote for the two military-conscription referendums of 1916 and 1917 doggedly pursued by the Prime Minister of the day, William Morris Hughes.

The most outstanding and successful feature of the anti-conscription campaign of 1916, with the resultant 'No' vote was the printing and distribution of one million copies of Claude Marquet's now famous cartoon 'The Blood Vote', drawn with verse written by W.R. Winspear, originally published in the Worker newspaper.
NOTHING SACRED TO HIM

"This too, must come down to my level"

Norman Lindsay
"Peace rumors have been remarkably persistent in financial circles. As a result, the market for shipping shares and industrial stocks, which has been rising for months, showed marked weakness, and nervousness was expressed in some quarters lest the golden dreams of speculators were to be shattered by a speedy conclusion of hostilities."—"Economist."

THE EXPLOITER: "O. Merciful Providence, I thank Thee for the golden opportunities Thou hast vouchsafed me in these perilous times; and oh, I beseech Thee, heed not the pleas of unauthorised persons for a premature peace!"

C. Marquet
Long before the anxious years of 1914-18, the name of Claude Marquet was a household one with the Trade Union movement, the Australian Labor Party and the radical intelligentsia of Australia. Commencing his working life in the Wallaroo mines, South Australia, Marquet later became a printer's compositor and a process engraver. From this background he emerged as a proficient self-taught black and white artist, selling his work to the Bulletin and to trade union newspapers, to be eventually invited to Sydney as a staff cartoonist of the then called Australian Worker newspaper.

Marquet’s cartoons and illustrations were invariably drawn with pen and ink in the traditional three-dimensional style, and, unusually, revealing no influences from the styles of other artists. That he could draw, and draw well, cannot be questioned, although on occasions his line work, because it was bold appears somewhat hard. But this style ensured his work reproduced well at a time when newspaper printing was frequently rough and ready.

Marquet’s 1914-18 war-time cartoons were in theme essentially home-front concerns – critical of Sydney’s daily press for its anti-working class, anti-Unions policy, the bickering and inconsequential posturing within politics, the greedy Trusts, war profiteers, again the persistent threats of military conscription which was the theme of many of his Worker cartoons, and with only an occasional excursion into the international scene.

Adopting the Labor point of view from actual experience, Marquet was the first 20th century Australian cartoonist of note to adopt and perpetuate ‘Fat’ as the symbol for Capitalism. ‘Fat’, a paunchy, bloated figure in top hat and spats was originated by Australian cartoonists late in the last century to serve the Socialist cause. At the same time, Marquet has recorded some finely drawn political history, among it, ‘The Blood Vote’ cartoon which has rewarded him with a degree of immortality.

That Australia has any cartoon comment on events during World War I is fortuitous really, for it was not until well into the present century that the political cartoon became a feature of Australian daily newspapers. So, what documentation of the period we have, apart from the Bulletin reference, was produced for a handful of illustrated magazines most of which did not survive for long. One such was, to give it its full title, The Sydney Stock and Station Journal which published full page war cartoons drawn by David Henry Souter.

A Scot from Aberdeen, Souter worked both in that city and in Natal, South Africa, drawing for the press before coming to Australia where he contributed drawings to the Bulletin. He had the distinction of having at least one cartoon published in every edition of that journal for over forty years.

David Souter’s beautiful, decorative drawing style of exceptional
"Terrible war - isn't it?"

"Frightful - why this is the seventh Red Cross Dance I've been to this week!"

D.H. Souter
grace of line reflected the emerging Art Nouveau fashion that had originated in Scotland and Belgium. He brought this style, in no way tempered, to his war cartoons drawn for the *Stock and Station Journal*, a style enormously effective for his concepts, again, in the mode of the time, in the 'grand manner'.

In theme, these cartoons had no concern for home-front matters – Souter's vision focused on the conflict in Europe, interpreting it with national images allegoric and symbolic: goatee-bearded Uncle Sam, Britannia with helmet and trident, the British Lion, the German Eagle, and the Imperial Russian Bear all became set pieces not only with David Souter, but with cartoonists the world over including the German artists of, for instance, the satirical Munich magazine *Simplicissimus*.

In Australia during the years of The Great War as it was called then, other cartoonists both professional and amateur, competent and not so, were producing journeyman comment lacking concept, presentation and inspired style of draughtsmanship. None of them came anywhere near approaching these qualities in the work of Norman Lindsay, Claude Marquet and David Souter all of whom have made a significant contribution to the national achievement.

"Behold! I stand at the door and knock"  
D.H. Souter
"Why is your face so white, Mother? Why do you choke for breath?"
"O I have dreamt in the night, my son That I doomed a man to death.
"Why do you hide your hand, Mother? And crouch above it in dread?"
"It beareth a dreadful brand, my son: With the dead man's blood it is red.
"I hear his widow cry in the night, I hear his children weep, And always within my sight.
"O God! The dead man's blood doth leap.
"They put the dagger into my grasp, It seemed but a pencil then, I did not know it was a fiend again For the priceless blood of men.
"They gave me the ballot paper, The grim death warrant of doom, And I smugly sentenced the man to death In that dreadful little room.
"I put it inside the Box of Blood Nor thought of the man I'd slain, Till at midnight came like a whelming flood God's word—and the Brand of Cain
"O little son! O my little son! Pray God for your Mother's soul, That the scarlet stain may be white again In God's great Judgement Roll."

Written by W. R. Winninger, and drawn by Claude Marquet, St. Andrews Press, Sydney.

Claude Marquet
The War Cartoons of Claude Marquet

At the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 the leaders and most members of the Australian political parties were enthusiastic in their support of Britain and the Empire. Andrew Fisher, Prime Minister and Leader of the federal Labor Party, famously pledged 'our last man and our last shilling to see this War brought to a successful conclusion'. At first, only eight Labor members of the federal parliament, including King O'Malley and Frank Anstey, dissented. Outside Parliament a similar minority opposed the war on Marxist or Christian socialist grounds. Among other critics, Henry Boote, editor of the Australian Worker, attacked wartime profiteering, and the increasing casualty lists from the Western front modified the earlier ardour. The suppression by the British army of the 1916 Irish Easter uprising further reduced enthusiasm for Empire. By October 1916, these currents had come together to produce a majority opposition to the first conscription referendum. Boote published in the Worker the poem by W. R. Winspear and cartoon by Claude Marquet that characterized the way this opposition viewed the referendum: 'The Blood Vote' (12 October 1916). This cartoon was subsequently reprinted as a campaign leaflet and more than a million copies distributed (See p. 90). Claude Marquet came to the anti-conscription campaign as an established political cartoonist with a history of commitment to Labor.

Marquet's first engagement as a cartoonist was in 1897 with the Adelaide weekly magazine, Quiz. From 1900 he had work accepted by the Sydney Bulletin, and in 1902 he moved to Melbourne. The following year he became a regular contributor to the Labor weekly Tocsin after it published his cartoon on the Victorian rail strike. The debt-ridden Tocsin could not fully employ him, and in 1906 he moved to Sydney where he had been invited to join the staff of the Worker. Here his colleagues recognized his ability to express complex political issues in a few lines, and his work was used effectively in campaigns to defeat the Fusion government in 1910 and an election campaign by the newspaper proprietor John Norton in 1911. His cartoons had rarely moved from the domestic to the international scene, and when war broke out his interest continued to be in its effects on the home front.
HASTENING TO THE FRONT.

- "Owing to the war a sharp rise has taken place in the price of wheat, and as a consequence the millers have decided to put up the price of flour."
- "The war will have the immediate effect of increasing the prices of all commodities"; and so on.
- "The war has overshadowed everything, and the election campaign now creates little interest." — War news item.

MAIN FUSION SUPPORT: "Politics are a waste of time just now; there is more to be gained from the cannon's mouth.

Claude Marquet
The intense suspicion of capitalism that he shared with the *Worker*'s editor, Henry Boote, expressed itself in cartoons criticising the profiteers who exploited wartime sacrifice and patriotism. As early as 24 September 1914, he showed a young Australian, complete with the Southern Cross on his tie, demanding the nation's bread from a representative of the 'Wheat Ring' who is preparing to sell it 'to the highest foreign bidder'. The man from the ring is shown in the form of Phil May's symbolic capitalist, 'Fat', who was to appear regularly in Marquet's wartime cartoons as representative of the evil interests of money. This figure contrasts with the interchangeable images of labour, democracy and Australia, sometimes male and sometimes female but always young and handsome. For example, in 1915 he welcomed a change to direct parliamentary representation in NSW with a cartoon showing the NSW Labor Party as a virile young man, clad in shorts and standing over the cradle of 'Democracy' and in front of the foundation stone laid in 1890 reading 'For the Emancipation of Labor'.

Marquet's overall attitude to the war is shown in a 1914 cartoon that represents a battered world crying 'Peace! peace! Must be a code word for a new explosive!' The cartoon is a conventional expression of pity, but a digger's hat, fallen off the wounded globe to the bottom of the cartoon, localizes its sentiment. A more characteristic reaction is his allegorical cartoon 'The God of War'. This shows 'Fat', now in the form of Mars and identified by a belt labelled 'Capitalism', with a sword dripping blood and labelled 'Greed'. As 'Fat' contentedly smokes his cigar against a background of war, his sword points down to where his sandalled foot rests on sacks of profits from armaments, munitions of war and high priced food. This figure appears regularly in Marquet's cartoons in the guise of a war profiteer, usually dressed in top hat with a frock coat and waistcoat over his ample girth. In one, 'Fat', now labelled 'Food Combines', is seen hastening to the front to gather a bag of profits falling from the cannon's mouth ('Hastening to the Front', 6 August 1914; see p. 92). In another he becomes a legion of 'patriots' rushing the doors of the Commonwealth Bank to collect their first half-year's interest on the War Loan (23 December 1915).

The images of capital as old, fat and decadent, opposed to Australian democracy and labour as young and healthy, led easily to racism, sexism and antisemitism. In 'Hats off! the 5% Patriot' (10 February 1916), the wealthy War Loan subscriber being applauded by the Tory daily press is distinctly Jewish, and shares with the press the responsibility for replacing the Southern Cross on the Australian ensign with the pawnbroker's sign (see p. 94). The implication is that imperialism is selling out the true Australia to foreign interests. In 'That Promise' the still youthful but now disillusioned returned digger is told by the wealthy banker that in his absence his job has been taken for a lower wage by a female clerk. His cartoons on the referendum to
HATS OFF! THE 5% PATRIOT.

The Tory daily Press applauds the patriotism of the wealthy who cheer to the War Loan in not holding back for higher interest.

Claude Marquet
enforce early closing on hotels suggests that his fundamental attitude was not simply antagonistic to women. In one he shows the 'Liquor Interests' as the Satanic evil of drink from which the strong hand of the people is about to wrench the fang of 'late closing', while by necessity leaving untouched the matching fang of 'early opening'. In another (11 May 1916), 'Fat' has chained the working man, now unkempt and in rags, to the barrel of 'The Drink Evil'. These cartoons show an affinity with the hostility of many in both Labor and women's movements to the liquor interests. Drink, they believed, combined with capital to destroy the working classes, both indirectly by enriching publicans and brewers, and directly by brutalizing working men and impoverishing their families. It thus had no place in their vision of a young and free Australia. Marquet's sympathy for this viewpoint did not, however, prevent him poking fun at Joseph Cook, dour leader of the conservatives in Hughes' National government, and a lifetime abstainer, who was induced in America 'to drink both a cocktail and a glass of champagne, under the impression that they were non-intoxicating'. The cartoon he drew to celebrate this cable shows Cook as far more human than usual, though no less hypocritical (20 June 1918).

These images come together in the cartoons of the conscription campaigns, where the advocates of conscription become figures of evil menacing the youth and innocence of Australia. The un-Australian nature of conscription is suggested in an image of it as a primitive savage threatening with his stone axe the figure of Australian democracy, shown as a maiden in classical garb complete with the Federal Star as a diadem (1916). In a reverse image, the AWU is shown as the youthful man with a club striking at a fiend-like figure with Teutonic head and helmet and wings labelled 'Conscription' (13 January 1916; see p. 96). This cartoon neatly turns a central image of anti-German propaganda against the patriots who sought to use it to justify introducing to Australia what Marquet and his allies saw as the Prussian practice of conscription. The image of the fiend appears in the cartoon, produced for the second conscription referendum, of Billy Hughes wielding the chain of conscription (13 December 1917; see p.99). This image draws much of its power from the way Hughes bursts out of the page to threaten all before him with a form of bondage drawn from the nightmares of the convict past. His facial expression, however, adds to this a suggestion of orientalism. Hughes, by implication, is not a genuine Australian. This is particularly so in 'The Blood Vote', which shows the mother voting yes and so bringing delight to the Satanic or Semitic figure crouching over the ballot box. The accompanying verses, by W. R. Winspear, develop the theme that the Mother who votes yes is sacrificing her 'little son' to 'a fiend a-gasp / For the priceless blood of men'.

After the victory of the anti-conscriptionists in the 1916 campaign
CLUB THAT BUG EARLY.

Claude Marquet
Marquet celebrated with a cartoon showing a young man labelled 'Democracy', pointing with a hand to a poster reading 'Australia Remains Free' and with a Sword to a prone figure in gladiatorial uniform and the Teutonic helmet, and labelled 'Conscription' (November 1916). As with his other anti-conscription cartoons, this reversed the patriotic images to make a monster of the enemy at home. He then returned to his political concern with the state of the nation under wartime government. The images of 'Fat' and the worker continued in cartoons of miners confronting the mineowners (16 November 1916), of Billy Hughes leading the profiteers of the 'Win the War Party' against the Labor trenches (19 April 1917), of the Employers' Federation managing its tame governments (17 May 1917; 28 June 1917; 21 February 1918) and, after the war, of Australia as a little boy carrying on behalf of capital a vast bundle of 'Interest on War Debt' (10 July 1919). Labor renegades Hughes and Holman, the NSW premier, as well as the Victorian liberal William Watt and the NSW conservative Joseph Cook, were the butts of his satire. Hughes and Cook are shown embracing 'With Love on their Lips and Hate in their Hearts', and daggers behind their backs (8 February 1917). Cook as 'Ruth' in a housewife's gown entreats 'Naomi' Hughes to take him to London with 'her' (15 February 1917). Holman blows bubbles of electoral promises, or hides his lack of policy behind the umbrella of the IWW (1 March 1917; 22 March 1917). Hughes keeps the monster of conscription on a chain in case of need (5 April 1917). Hughes and Watts do the bidding of 'Fat', the one by drowning the inconvenient promises that dog him from the past (28 June 1917), the other by implementing the employer's promises on industrial policy (16 May 1918).

A cartoon after the war's end shows its continuing costs, as Watts demands a 'Children's Joy Tax' from two poorly clad young Australians, remarking as he does, 'Come, you brats, shell out: I'm desperate! The big war profiteers have eluded me; but, by heavens, YOU shan't!' (12 December 1918). His wartime concerns are further continued in a cartoon illustrating the continuing campaign of fear waged by the press against the Labor Party, this one by attributing to it the 'curse of Bolshevism' and the ills it has brought to Russia, where, according to the headlines being displayed to the gullible, Romanoffs have been made into sausages, women sold in open markets, and peasants forced to eat their mothers-in-law or starve (6 March 1919).

The tributes paid to Marquet in the memorial volume published after his death show the regard in which he was held as a man, a political activist and an artist. With the decline of the Sydney Bulletin into conservatism, and its active support for both the war and conscription, the Worker remained the most radical publication in general circulation through Australia. Marquet exercised his influence through both this
paper and the political pamphlets which reproduced his work. Although 'The Blood Vote' became in this way the best known of his works, and its effect on the success of the anti-conscription campaign the most direct political consequence of his work, his influence on the wartime consciousness of Australia was deeper. With his colleagues on the Worker and through the Labor movement he kept alive in the mainstream of Australian politics a class-consciousness that could easily have been overwhelmed by the patriotic hysteria induced by Hughes and his supporters in parliament and the press. By questioning the role of the profiteers his cartoons served to question the costs and consequences of the war, and to raise the issue of postwar betrayals. His figures of the heroic working man, the young democracy and the evil 'Fat' may now seem to simplify the issues of a class society and to conceal equally important issues of race and gender, but at the time they resisted massive attempts to co-opt the whole nation in the name of patriotism and the service of domestic and foreign capital. The strength of his lines and the vigour of his caricatures, as opposed to his stereotypes, convey his delight in the variety of the human comedy. His portrayal of politicians as sycophants, clowns and self-seekers building on a rich Australian tradition of disrespect for authority, serves as a continuing reminder that people will enjoy a democracy only as they take their fate into their own hands. This reminder survives the particular forms in which he may have cast the struggle in his own time.

NOTES

"I'LL HAVE YOU!"

Claude Marquet
Will Dyson, Stepping stones to higher things
Late in August 1916, with 'Fanny Durack' diving from the steeple of the Albert Cathedral and Pozieres reduced to rubble, Will Dyson applied to join the Australians on the Western Front. This decision to go to France to, as he explained, 'interpret in a series of drawings for national preservation, the sentiments and special Australian characteristics of our Army', was, perhaps, stimulated by the emotional reception given to the Anzacs when they marched in London on 25 April 1916. But Dyson's nationalist feelings – a complex mixture of anxiety and pride – had been deepening since news began to filter back to England of the Gallipoli Campaign, and as the Australian Fifth Division prepared to enter the war. It was not until December, however, that Dyson, now a lieutenant, landed in France and began his war drawings.

This was not the beginning of Dyson's involvement with the war. He had been drawing vigorous pacifist and anti-Capital cartoons for the Daily Herald prior to the war but, after the outbreak, there was a steady and discernible shift in his attitude to a strong anti-German position in which, while he could not support conscription, he maintained that it was the Allies' duty to oppose German militarism and imperialism. As he wrote in a letter to the editor of the now Weekly Herald, in May 1915,

I would answer the question ['Is war so glorious?'] by saying that, as wars and their origins go, our share in this war is infinitely more 'glorious' than prophesying Socialists ever supposed it was going to be.

Dyson's 1914 cartoons of arms manufacturers, dealers and militarists and his 1915 Kultur cartoons indicated that he held no illusions about the horror of war – he never failed to oppose militarism and loathe war – but as the struggle deepened he felt compelled, as an Australian, to witness and record it. (See p. 100)

His war drawings, however, signal a further alteration in his response to the war. The anti-German propaganda gives way to an
encompassing sympathy for all rank and file soldiers involved in the war. And he replaces the cartoon with realistic drawings: militant irony for a steadily diminishing satiric mode which, in gentler but more searching ironies, foregrounds the human, as distinct from the grotesque or the heroic. Dyson asks for a direct confrontation with the human tragedy of war.

Arguably, one of the most poignant of his war sketches is the ironically titled ‘The Wine of Victory’, which is surely a companion piece to ‘Coming out on the Somme’, ‘Coming out at Hill 60’ and ‘Down from the Ridge’. ‘The Wine of Victory’ depicts a mass of wounded Germans trailing into the extreme foreground of the picture where three figures loom enormous and broken. They limp into our eyes, singular and yet, the drawing insists, simply three of many. To the left and rear of this group is another almost identical group, and behind them others, and more, until the straggling troops become a grey smudge blurring the horizon. We cannot ignore the human cost; and in this statement of defeat there can be no celebration of victory. As Dyson puts it in his prose commentary for ‘Coming out at Hill 60’:

They come out of endless holes and go into endless holes like lonely ants bent on some ant-like service ... Ant-like in the distance, they loom upon a nearer vision things elemental and Homeric, big with destiny. They are merely soldiers at the base, perhaps shopmen at Brisbane [we might add Dresden], but
Will Dyson, *Coming out on the Somme*

they are things of mystery in the line. I feel that here all soldiers of all ranks tend to have the baffling profundity of the peasant, that sense of the nearness to the beginning of things which makes the artist see in the peasant the simple, unsolvable mystery of life reduced to its least common multiple - man shorn of all his vast cultures, which are not mysterious, and left simple man, which is. (p.48)

Dyson’s guild socialism of the pre-war years never left him. His Australians are not so much ‘soldiers of the king’, as essential humans moving and acting, as he puts it, with ‘the baffling profundity of the peasant’. And the heroic values that he notices in *Australia at War* are ‘dull, undecorative’, seen in endurance, stoic courage, and simple dignity; in the ability to withstand boredom, exhaustion, discomfort and filth. The moments he privileges are the ordinary and the commonplace. They speak of community and loss: meal times, stretcher-bearers, a cook lounging in a doorway, men asleep, passing a bottle, engraving a cross, resting on a shovel, coming out of the line in silent, stunned groups, exhausted. The grandeur is in the ability of the human spirit to endure: there is no relish.

Sixty-five of Dyson’s drawings from the Front were shown in an exhibition at Leicester Gardens on 5 January 1918 and twenty of them, including his dedicatory poem which was printed in the exhibition catalogue, were reproduced in *Australia at War*. As far as Australian
DEDICATION.

TO THE MEN OF THE A.I.F.

To you who knew that dire destiny
When we like soldiers joined the ranks of Death,
Grew in its bloody traffic, but who came
Issued upon its market merchandise
With eyes too smart to have yet wholly shed
The tidy moving randomness of the child

To you, like scarlet rays, rough-beaten of the mark
Hounded in a world made primal once again,
With terrors of that legendary past.
Return to your beleaguered,
Rousing upon the earth with every wind—

To you who go to do the work of solitude
Bordered like vinous, and bordering with Death—
To hide the silent phases of the soul—
The soul that knows the half Thousands the blind
It does not wholly anguish you to die—

To you who soar through those days upon the Summer,
From out you still the odours of our earth,
I wait come down, with eyes like tired moths,
Along the seeming traffic of Mourners,
Creeping each turn, detached among the blind,
Along a shadowy Hall of memory—

To you, and you, I dedicate those things
That here no merit save that they, for you,
Were wiser with what truth there went to me
Where you swept up, with Death and heart the sword
Pierced like a lance antler—to save the world,
Or shot to music poor old bloody Bill
Bequeathed in a shell hole on the edge.

W.D.

Will Dyson, To the Men of the A.I.F.
responses to the war are concerned, these drawings and his prose commentaries remain among our most moving and profound: in their simplicity of line and phrasing Dyson touches the essential complexity of the war. Indeed, his poem, ‘To the Men of the A.I.F.’, is one of the most ignored Australian poems produced during the War.5 (See p. 104)

Far from the tone of popularizing patriotic poems, ‘To the Men of the A.I.F.’ joins Leon Gellert’s earnest attempts to find a language for war. This language is not unreservedly achieved perhaps – ‘Death’ needs no personification when it is so constant and close, and ‘bandying with Death’ and ‘pity moving roundness of the child’ are clumsy – but it is a moving poem which celebrates the humanity of the troops, while acknowledging the inhumanity and reversion to a Satanic primal dark in which they are implicated. Recognizing this tone, in his note to the drawings, Dyson apologizes in his Artist’s Note for their ‘winter note’:

They are not primarily cheerful – but it is open to doubt whether we are behaving generously in demanding that the soldier who is saving the world for us should provide us with a fund of light entertainment while doing it.

The drawings are not entirely without humour but, as he says in his poem, what he is trying to expose and to show to a wider audience is not that superficial picture of the soldier which may see him as wolf, mule, murderous hawk, or exhausted horse – that inhumanity thrust upon him – but, rather, he is probing ‘the silent places of the soul’ of both the public hero who might ‘save the world’ and the private gesture, no less heroic in this man’s pantheon of behaviour, which will ‘succour poor old bloody Bill’. And that ‘bloody’ is so accurate. As are the two lines at the poem’s fulcrum: those evasive ‘ribald jests that half convince the blind / It does not wholly anguish you to die’. In one sweep the poem makes contact with the tone of the major English war poets, while retaining an ironic mode common in Australian writing. He may be a satirist, then, and a caricaturist but (and this, of course, is no contradiction) his work is fundamentally serious, his subject, as it was for Gellert6 or Owen, is the pity of war. Dyson is interpreting the war, using drawings and brief prose commentaries which, unlike so many of the early Australian narratives, are pointed and evocative. And so, the stew which is brought up from the wagon lines was not simply, ‘real stew with fresh meat’. It was, says Dyson, ‘a triumph of the art, something to send the boys from the supports into the line if not singing the merry songs of the imaginative press at least with some of the content of the gorged python’ (p. 14). It was also a ‘hope-giving potion, ... the last evidence of the existence on earth of any civilization or culture that the battalion will know for some days’ (p. 14). Besides, he comments, sliding wryly away from questions of ‘civilization’ and ‘culture’ once he has inserted them into the text, ‘To have fluked a good meal before you go [and he means this in the ultimate sense] is to
have cheated death to the extent of having bagged a good human satisfaction under his chagrined nose’ (p. 14). One of Dyson’s most famous drawings ‘A Voice from Anzac’ is of two Anzacs with what seem to be halos of light shimmering above them’ but there is nothing like this in Australia at War. The closest he comes to a transcendent light is the halo from a candle lighting up the Battery in order that two men, back from the forward Observation Post, can set into their Hurley’s whisky. Dyson is interested in the whisky, not the light. This need for a drink, he explains, is something that:

bears no relationship to anything you and I could ever know in a nicely regulated civilian life. It is of a world which the temperance die-hard has never envisaged, and in which the drink does nothing more criminal than make a man more stoical of conditions that in themselves are cruel enough to justify him in committing the seven cardinal sins if that would procure alleviation of those conditions. (p. 16)

The very essence of the drawings and the prose passages is Dyson’s compassion, sympathy and humility. Of a boy he sketched sleeping the sleep of the spent, he writes:

He looked like a hundred others one has seen – like many in the company that were lining the corridors, but that his abandonment was greater – he was emphatically lost, lost like a child, and evoking some of the pity that goes to a child, he looks so very young – that quality which here has power to touch the heart of older men in the strongest way. To see going into the line boys whose ingenuous faces recall something of your own boyhood – something of someone you stole fruit with, or fought with or wagged it with through long hot Australian afternoons – to see them in this bloody game and to feel that their mother’s milk is not yet dry upon their mouths. (p. 18)

He also understands the fatalist; perhaps has a head start in coming to terms with him because of what he knows about the bushman, spiritual ancestor to his fatalist. He locates in these men a ‘hardihood that persists through it all ... a sort of savage irritation with the grossly incalculable element in the mischance of death’ (p. 44). There is a poignant absurdity about many of their actions, but not about the men themselves. He turns to one particular group,

who drift out of nowhere, asking the whereabouts of the 27th, or the 19th, or the 6th, and who drift on into nowhere, and no doubt ultimately find what they seek – no doubt through the exercise of a native scepticism regarding what is told them ... No doubt they will find it [their battalion] for all things are ultimately found in the army, through the Chinese patience with which life has imbued all – a patient and an oriental sense of the unimportance of time bared by countless experiences which tells you that however long it takes you to get there you will one day or one year get there without disaster, and to hurry it unduly is bad in philosophy and unavailing in fact.

They come, these strays, from leave, from all those temporary detachments from their units, from hospital, from rest camps, and they live on the country,
Will Dyson, *A Voice From Anzac*, "Funny thing Bill – I keep thinking I hear men marching!"
Will Dyson, *Labour Battalion Man*
trusting no doubt to the freemasonry, the trades' unionism of the fighting man, the large confederation – the offensive and defensive alliance of the lance-privates. (p. 24)

As this passage suggests, to be serious is not to preclude humour. His two men looking for their battalion, linked in the confederacy of 'lance-privates', who drift out of and on to 'nowhere' are depicted moving 'over France through villages, and over what were villages – over duck boards and shell holes with that grousing league-devouring indifference to all things made which is bared by a life two-thirds of the activity of which is moving from a place you don't want to be in to a place you don't want to go to' (p. 24). The humour is gentle, laconic, and wise, relying upon nuance. As he suggests in his prose commentary on 'Group', he distinguishes two audiences, two distinct responses. The one, 'proper and wise', arises from the shared experiences of the line; the other, tinged with pity – the observer's emotion – is, in Dyson's words, 'scarcely seemly'; is almost voyeuristic. Above the sleeping youth in 'Dead Beat', who could be propping in some slum, is 'Wardour Street', but this is not Soho. In 'In the Tunnel - Hill 60', a group of men, besieged by exhaustion and an aching misery, recline beneath 'Vine Street': but any link with London Society is purely ironic for these men 'from the forge, the factory and the mine' (p. 42). In each case the humour is disconcerting. We get the joke but the drawings subvert any easy response: there is no warming laughter, rather the wish, perhaps, that we have not been privy to these private places of the soul.

Dyson's 'Labour Battalion Man', who is an abjectly miserable and incongruous figure against the grey landscape of war, takes the next step and becomes pungently ironic as the artist tightens the connection between a war-time and civilian plight: 'I am sometimes solaced by the feeling that their miseries are not very much grosser than those in which a grateful country found them when war made her cognisant of their civic existence' (p. 32). Once again, Dyson's peace-time and war work are knotted together; he wants us to recognize that for many the hardships of war are merely an extension of peace-time conditions with, as G. K. Chesterton points out in his introduction to Australia at War, 'less hope of an outlet on victory'.

If, in drawings such as these, Dyson points towards the seeming commonplace of war, in others he draws out its absolute other-worldliness. I have in mind his sombre and moving 'Coming out on the Somme'. There is a face on the right hand upper corner that stops our eye and glosses the whole. He is looking back (out of the picture) from where he has come, his eye is piercing, his face anxious and drawn. We can only guess what he's looking at: a mate, some part of his inner being he's left behind, the unbelievable carnage? The other shapes seem to huddle together, defined only by the faces that speak of
where they have been. Dyson writes:

They come back, these pioneers of the liberties of the world, with them still the eternal mystery of no-man’s land, men walking in their sleep ... Young men bearded like unshorn Andalusians, and garbed like ragged adventurers of another age ... companions of a new Marco Polo returned from gazing on strange and terrible lands. (p. 30)

Having recently visited Polygon Wood on a glorious October day, the sun’s rays playing through the trees, and watched children picnicking, I turn to Dyson’s ‘Back to the Wagon Lines after Polygon Wood’ once more stunned by the chaos and the effect on the human by war. Not merely the physical effect; we see that in all its graphic horror, and perhaps can respond to it, but its psychological effect. This lies at the heart of Dyson’s art. This drawing reveals not just exhaustion but despair and a loss which is almost indescribable; he can only catch it in language through negatives; his men ‘for the while [are] content with the negative joys of being merely out of it’.

It is now that are told stories that will perhaps never be told again, for on his return from the line slowly but surely the civilian habit of mind reasserts itself, standards that are based on the sanctity of human life and which are at variance with the grim necessities of the hop-over, assume their normal control. (p. 34)

Briefly, speaking a language known only to those who have been initiated into this other world, these men seem to speak in whispers; the rest is silence, as the knowledge – never lost – is overlayed by the veneer of sociability. Dyson is taking us into the realm of silence; as an artist he is trying to realize the black space that subverts articulation; wants to capture, in drawings such as ‘Group’, ‘Down from the Ridge’, ‘Coming out at Hill 60’, ‘Coming out on the Somme’, and ‘Polygon Wood’, that moment before the public voice takes over. The British artist Paul Nash, asks implicitly, how do you give form to this space?

[N]o pen, or drawing, can convey this country ... no glimmer of God’s hand is seen anywhere ... the shells never cease ... annihilating, maiming, maddening, they plunge into the grave which is this land; one huge grave, and cast up on it the poor dead. It is unspeakable, godless, hopeless.10

This godlessness is everywhere in the vigorous anti-transcendence of these drawings; sustenance comes from a dixie of ‘real stew with fresh meat’ (p. 24), from a swig of Hurley’s whisky; love finds its expression in the bustling concern of the quartermaster or in the wisdom of cooks who know ‘that love and kindness are best expressed in the primitive world by food’ (p. 34); the hands that reach out, and touch, and are layed upon others are distinctly human and speak of a common suffering. The traditional symbols are denied. The heavens, bleak and
Will Dyson, *The Wild Colonial Boy*: Sooner than dwell in slavery bowed down by iron chains
furious above the world-weary figures in 'Group' offer no signs to the lost traveller in 'Looking for the Battalion' or the solitary 'Labour Battalion Man'. For the most part the heavens are neutral, mute. The radiant light in 'The Mate' foregrounds the expression of human love as the digger inscribes a message on a wooden cross for a dead mate. That is, the light turns us back to the human loss - now marks on wood - and comradeship, and away from the comforts of a vision of eternal life. Two drawings not in Australia at War underline most acutely this seeming disappearance of God: in one, a soldier is gathering wood for a fire, a large plank over his shoulder forms, to the eye looking at the drawing, a cross with a shattered stump behind him. But, at best, this is a tilted cross. This man's peace will come from the fuel he has collected. In another, 'The Wild Colonial Boy', a dead Anzac lies beneath a thunderous sky that offers no solace and a light outlining the body offers no image of deliverance; it simply enables us to see the cost of war.

In his dedicatory poem, Dyson projects an image of the troops as 'cave men rough-hewn of the mud,/ Housed in a world made primal again', and in his prose pieces he kneads away at this image of men returning to a primal, satanic nether-world of mud and slush. At times this is explicit (see, 'Back to the Wagon Lines', or 'Outside the Pill Box' where, Dyson suggests can be seen 'a landscape the like of which man has never gazed upon since early chaos brooded over all'), at other times it is there in an allusion: it lies in the 'downward suck of the Somme mud' in 'Stretcher-bearers near Martinpuich' and in the description of them moving 'slow and terribly sure through and over everything, like things that have got neither eyes to see terrible things nor ears to heed them' (p. 38). They are like creatures adapted to a new, 'liquescent world' in some kind of primal reversion which has no need of eyes or ears. As is suggested by his constant turning in prose to metaphor and simile, Dyson's sketches are multi-layered. In this sense, 'Stretcher-bearers' is also about heroism, and gestures towards what goes on in 'the privacy of the soul'.

The fountains that sprout roaring at their feet fall back to the earth in a lace-work of fragments - the smoke clears and they, momentarily obscured, are again moving on as they were moving on before: a piece of mechanism guiltless of the weaknesses of weak flesh, one might say. But to say this is to rob their heroism of its due - of the credit that goes to inclinations conquered and panics subdued down in the privacy of the soul. It is to make their heroism look like a thing they find easy ... These men and all the men precipitated into the liquescent world of the line are not heroes from choice - they are heroes because someone has got to be heroic. It is to add insult to injury of this world war to say that the men fighting it find it agreeable or go into it with light hearts. (p. 38)

He returns to this theme again in 'In the Tunnel – Hill 60' where he
writes of a fatigue (‘actual brutish and insensate’) which is a ‘Dull, undecorative heroism’:

But the poor fabric of military glory is woven of such – of trials that seem to break down the proud partitions which separate our lot from that of the animals ... These heroes of ours, alas, are unsupported by a helpful consciousness of their heroism. That joy is only for the onlooker. The tragic fact is that the incomparable heroisms of this winter warfare bring no compensations to the heroes – no element of dramatic exhaltation in the performance of them. They are less dramatic acts than long states of siege with exhaustion as the besieger. (p. 42)

Dyson is weaving his themes into each other, he cannot in fact write of or depict the war without speaking of its primitivism, its heroism and its overall unheroic nature compared to any conventional interpretations of heroic battle. In writing of ‘Coming out at Hill 60’, he works away again at the essential behaviour he is trying to convey.

Fatigue at its worst is to the most articulate of our generation the least familiar of humanity’s woes, but here in this world it is about us again with the torturing insistence of the troglodyte past – one of the commonplaces of the Stone Age with which war and the wonders of science have familiarised us ... The brutish weariness of our earliest hairy forbear, trembling in the savage morasses of an unfamilair planet, is the daily lot of men like these – shopmen, men from the forge and factory and mine – heirs to all the amenities of the ages. It is part of the supremacy in suffering of the inarticulate infantry. Fatigue, actual brutish and insensate, is borne by them to a pitch at which mules might be heart-broken. (p. 42)

We are all, we who come later and dip into diaries and letters and read these narratives and poems, trying to understand that incredible War. We are, as Dyson said of himself, ‘timid peepers into forbidden places, who look and go, who keep [a] virginal wonderment at what are the commonplaces of the trenches’ (p. 50). We are in awe of these men, their ‘statuesque quietism ... in places of risk and great events’ disturbs us, and although we may detest war, they draw our sympathy, our compassion. At the same time the subtext of these drawings and the prose pieces is war’s soul-destroying absurdity, its profound human damage.

NOTES

1. The Australians nicknamed the damaged statue of the Virgin, leaning like a diver from the Albert Cathedral, ‘Fanny Durack’, after the Australian diver who had won a gold medal in the 1912 Olympics.
2. Letter from Dyson to the Official Secretary, Commonwealth of Australia, 23 August and 12 September 1916: cited by Ross McMullin, Will Dyson: Cartoonist, Etcher, and Australia’s Finest War Artist (Sydney: Angus &
Robertson, 1984), p. 126. I am in debt to Ross McMullin for details of Dyson’s crossing to France.


4. These three drawings are in Dyson’s, Australia at War: A Winter Record (London: Cecil Palmer and Hayward, 1918). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.

5. It is not included in either J. T. Laird’s, Other Banners (Canberra: Australian War Memorial and the Government Printing Office,1971) or Peter Pierce and Chris Wallace-Crabbe, Clubbing of the Gunfire (Melbourne: MUP,1984).

6. For readings of Leon Gellert’s war verse, see Bruce Clunies Ross, ‘Silent Heroes’, in this collection; and James Wieland, ‘Leon Gellert’s, Songs of a Campaign: reading an un-read poem’, Southerly, 52, 2 (1992), pp. 82-98.

7. This drawing was ‘A Voice from Anzac’ which appeared in the Herald (Melbourne) on Anzac Day, 1927. One Anzac is saying to the other, ‘Funny thing, Bill – I keep thinking I hear men marching’.

8. ‘The passion of soldiers for amusing drawings of the front is a different thing to the civilians’ demand for them’. Dyson, op.cit., p. 22.

9. His cook, a classic drawing that introduces the 1917 Christmas Book, From the Australian Front (London: Cassell, 1917), transporting the bush into the war and standing not for culinary delights but a belligerent democracy, takes the humour in yet another direction.

Our Famous Boys
The Soldier as Tourist: The Australian Experience of the Great War

Foreign travel is commonly an accompaniment to war, but it tends to be seen—by commanders and historians though not always by the participants—as peripheral, incidental to the primary experience of battle. This article suggests, somewhat speculatively, that in the case of the Australians in the First World War, travel was more than fortuitous; that indeed one aspect of travel, a well-established tourist ethos, had a direct impact on the way the troops reacted to the face of battle.¹

Tourists are not much loved by those engaged in social inquiry. Daniel J. Boorstin speaks of ‘droves of these creatures’; Levi-Strauss loathes them in Tristes Tropiques; Roland Barthes derides the Blue Guide’s ‘uninhabited world of monuments’.² A distinction is often made between tourists, who are to be found in ‘hordes’ or ‘flocks’ or, interestingly, ‘armies’, and travellers, who take on a mildly heroic status.³ Paul Fussell’s pained protests that ‘We are all tourists now’ contrasts with his picture of the ‘travellers’ of the 1930s whose relation to what they saw was somehow more authentic.⁴ (We might add that the typical tourist is American, the typical traveller is British.) But this distinction is a dubious one, and is increasingly being questioned.⁵ In what follows, the term ‘tourist’ is meant to embrace Fussell’s tourists as well as his travellers: there is no great moral distinction being made between them. At the same time it is not meant to be as sweeping as Dean MacCannell’s concept, the tourist as a model of ‘modern man-in-general’, or as the industry’s definition, which includes anyone spending twenty-four hours away from home.⁶ Tourists are those who travel for the sake of what they see. They find in what they see a representation of ‘the other’. They can be distinguished from those travelling for other purposes (to do business, to do battle) and also from those thoroughly expatriates whose alienation from the society they grew up in allows them to embrace ‘the other’ as their own.

While not deriding the tourist’s vision, there is an important sense in which it is blinkered. It is limited, as Philip Pearce has put it, by ‘the phenomenological realization that one is acting as, and being perceived
Richard White

as, a transient figure with no enduring relationship to the visited community. Ultimately the most sophisticated anthropologist in the South Seas, the most intrepid climber in the Himalayas, the most conscientious cafe-sitter in Paris, all encounter a cultural barrier between host and visitor, a respectful distance that both sides preserve. The tourist’s relationship to the host culture must by definition be that of the observer, never of the participant. Ultimately, the tourist’s loyalties and sympathies must, to paraphrase Edward Said, lie with the tourist’s own culture, not that of the host. The point of view is always an outsider’s. If it were not, there would, in a sense, be nothing to observe. And this is the point of course: the limitation of the tourist’s vision is also its strength, because the tourist looks on from outside, but always with something to compare, always able to see through the pretensions of a particular time and place.

In the case of Australians in Europe, this distance between the observer and the observed doubles back on itself. Europe is observed from the standpoint of Australian culture; but that standpoint also involves acknowledging that Australia’s literary and imaginative culture is itself European. So Australians in Europe are doubly distanced from what they see. One of the continuing threads in the history of Australian tourism is the sense of having entered literature in Europe, of seeing the imagination made real. At last the place names, the plants and the seasons correspond to art and poetry. For Australians in Europe, the distance between the observer and the observed is also the distance between reality and imagination, between the audience and the stage. Consider how often the tourist experience has been explained by comparisons with the theatre or the cinema.

In letters and diaries Australians have described Colombo, ‘as good as a play’; Aden, ‘as good as a pantomime’; the Suez canal by moonlight, ‘a truly theatrical scene’; Egypt, a ‘living kinetoscope’; a Provencal village, ‘just like a bit of stage scenery for any opera like Cavalleria or Faust or half a dozen others’; a trip through France, ‘like a succession of cinematographic views of Paradise’; England, ‘prettier than anything I have ever seen in a picture show’; and in Wales ‘one could fancy oneself on the front of that train that you see in the pictures where they take all the scenic pictures from’. It happens that all the tourists quoted here were seeing the world between 1914 and 1918, as Australian soldiers, but apart from their preference for the more popular cultural forms, they fit a general pattern in Australian tourism. There was an unreality about the outside world. When they strove to describe it, they found their comparisons, not in places they knew or even in particular pieces of theatre, but in theatre itself, or in imaginary places, dreamworlds and fairylands, places they could hardly believe were open to them. A young ex-carpenter would write, after ‘a rare old time’ on Loch Lomond, ‘fancy me being over here
seeing all these places it doesn't seem real'.

There is another mark of the Australian, or ex-colonial tourist. Much of the literature on tourism uses, explicitly or implicitly, an imperialist model, reflecting the interest of anthropologists in the effect of tourism on third-world host communities. It follows the tourist from the older, industrialized, urban core cultures into what Turner and Ash have called the 'pleasure periphery'. The West's pursuit of the 'exotic' is seen as a new form of colonization. That crucial appendage of tourists, the camera, is, according to Susan Sontag, 'a way of taking possession of the places they visited'.

Now while this is an appropriate model for the rapid development of Bali and Vanuatu as Australian tourist destinations in the 1970s, it is inadequate as a model for the Australian experience of Europe. A trip to Europe was a function, not of imperial confidence, but of cultural dependence. It was a journey of the provincial to the metropolis, to the older civilization, to the intensely familiar rather than the exotic. A more appropriate model might be the Grand Tour of the Enlightenment's young aristocrat, or it can even be seen, following Dean MacCannell, as a pilgrimage, a religious quest in a secular world. Certainly Australians went to Europe as suppliants, not as predators. Unlike the Englishman's mean fortnight looking for the sun in Majorca, the Australian or American version of the Grand Tour of Europe keeps a high moral tone. It is infused with a certain humility and is less likely to end in disappointment. It is intended to be educational, civilizing. The idea is to return a better person, not just a browner one.

In any history of that civilizing pilgrimage from Australia to Europe, the experience of the Australian troops in the Great War stands out. In four years 330,000 men from a population of five million, embarked to travel overseas. It would be another half century before the tradition of the trip to Europe was brought within the reach of so many Australians, and by then the age of jet travel would have robbed the experience of many of its rituals and much of its emotional meaning. The social range of the men who went was a reasonable reflection of male society as a whole. In other words, the war prefigured the age of democratic tourism. Bazza MacKenzie's heritage stretches back to London in 1915.

Soldiers cannot normally be regarded as tourists. They do not travel for the sake of what they see. To fully explain why the Australian troops might be considered as tourists requires far more evidence and argument than can be given here. However a brief survey of a few points in their travels can demonstrate how well they might fit into the existing tourist tradition. First, a desire to see the world - not just a search for adventure - was probably a much more significant motive for enlistment than is often recognized. The Australians remained a
volunteer force throughout the war and the enlistment rate was remarkable – probably half the eligible single men joined up. They were soon called, mockingly or cheerfully, 'six-bob-a-day tourists', a term the troops themselves adopted, not always ironically. There is Bert Facey's claim in *A Fortunate Life* that he and his mates in a boxing troupe thought they should go because, as he put it: 'we were fit, and another thing that appealed to us was that we would be travelling overseas and would be able to see what the other part of the world was like'. There is the common diary comment later in the war that what has been seen has made the decision to enlist worthwhile. And in Dawes and Robson’s collection of soldiers’ reminiscences, there are the men who explained their enlistment by their hopes ‘of seeing countries I had heard and read about for years’, who mentioned ‘5/- a day and the chance of seeing the world’, who took ‘the chances’ for what they might ‘get out of it seeing places and men’. It was not the most common motive given, but the difficulty is that such admissions betray a rather self-interested and naive attitude to the war. If travel were the underlying motive, it was best left unstated, or elevated into a related but more respectable public explanation, such as a love of England or a spirit of adventure (which, incidentally, is how Dawes and Robson categorize it). This is not to say that travel was the dominant motive, or that it was the only one men sought to disguise. Patriotism and the high rate of pay could be more persuasive. I simply want to establish that travel too was a big attraction. There was no other way most Australians would get to see the world.

It is hard now to imagine that anyone would go to war to see the world: the risks seem disproportionate. But it is arguable that both the perception of risk and the desire to go measured up differently in 1914, and perhaps even in 1918; indeed our whole perception of the risks of war probably derives more from the ‘modern memory’ of the Great War than the contemporary experience of it. The troops knew what it was like; the would-be recruit could not. Moreover, there is the suggestive statistic that on the eve of the war, people aged between twenty and forty, the age of most recruits, accounted for fifteen per cent of all deaths in Australia, and twenty per cent of non-infant deaths. Today the figure is less than five per cent. Death was more visible, more calculable. They had less to lose, in a sense, and more to gain. Dawes and Robson also give eloquent testimony to the hopeless routines in the city and the futile loneliness of the bush for many workers. Perhaps the greater tragedy of the war was not the deaths of those who had so much to live for, but the lives of those for whom death was a risk worth taking. In weighing the thing up, it could make sense to decide quite rationally, as one man said, full of the beauty of Marseilles, convinced that Marseilles was Paradise, that ‘this is a chance of a lifetime and is worth running a lot of risk to go through’.
This was not simply a conviction that death would never happen to them. Many men fully expected to die. But many could also believe, as an erstwhile billy boy put it, ‘we did not have a great deal to lose’. 

On the other hand they had a world to gain, a world they had been told throughout their lives represented all that was worthwhile. Different men joined up for different reasons. However the second point at which the Australian troops conformed to the tourist tradition applied to them all: they all undertook a leisurely sea voyage. They sailed in the great passenger liners of the day, leased from the Orient company, P & O, the White Star and Blue Funnel lines. In the first convoy, the ships were still painted in company colours. They left Australia with the same farewells, the same rituals of streamer throwing, gift-giving and band-playing, rituals only recently established, and more elaborate in Australia and Japan than elsewhere. They crossed the Equator with the same ceremonies performed for the entertainment of passengers, not, as they originated, for the recreation of the crew. The troops played some of the same deck games, gloried in the same sunsets, complained of the same ennui and made the same ports of call along the way as any other Australian tourists. Their immediate destination was a tourist’s one: either Egypt, of which it was said that the nominal governor was the Khedive, the real governor was Thomas Cook, or England, which was every loyal tourist’s preferred goal. Coincidentally they were trained within sight of two archetypal tourist monuments, the pyramids of Giza or Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain.

One of the more brazen recruiting pamphlets, put out in 1917, appeared in the form of a tourist brochure. It showed a troopship sailing off into the distance, and announced on the cover, ‘A Free World Tour to Great Britain and Europe: the Chance of a Lifetime’. Inside was a remarkable parody of the purple prose of shipping agents, offering ‘Personally-conducted tours to Africa and the old world, and the dear homeland’. It was of course a gimmick, and yet, as heavy irony often is, it was perversely close to the mark.

This particular prelude to the war – the existential experience of a long sea voyage – was unique to the Australians and New Zealanders. Crossing the Atlantic hardly gave the Americans time to get over their seasickness and there were no ports of call along the way. The Australians had a voyage of over a month to imbue a tourist spirit, and they had a tradition which encouraged them to see it that way. While not suggesting the Australian troops were the only tourists, I am surprised that those who would assert the distinctiveness of the Australian soldier have not given this crucial prelude to his war more serious attention: the reason perhaps is that if the voyage were formative, it detracts from the celebration of the national character.

When the Australians went on leave, they went as tourists, not as
soldiers from the wars returning. Leave rarely meant going home and seeing family, as it did for British, French or German troops. On leave, instead, they saw the same sights as other Australian tourists, followed the same guides and guide-books, carved their names in the same monuments, posed for the same photos, made the same comments about Cairo, London and Paris in their diaries and postcards and letters home. At other times the army itself could take on the role of Thomas Cook. When the official historian, C.E.W. Bean, arrived in Egypt at the end of 1914, his first task was to produce what was, in effect, a tourist’s guide to Egypt, a condensed Baedeker. For a lucky few in Colombo, the authorities provided a train trip to Kandy while their ship was coaling. Officers often marched their men past points of interest, and in England and France many men actually enjoyed their route marches as a way of seeing the country. Chaplains were particularly enthusiastic about pointing out items of historical interest, though we might question the sagacity of the chaplain who, as his ship zigzagged with lights out through the submarine-infested Mediterranean, gave a sermon pointing out that these were the very waters in which St Paul was shipwrecked.

Much of this, of course, was simply coincidental, though coincidence enough to affect the way men regarded what they saw. Travel, after all, was an inevitable element in this war, for Australians more than most participants. It was only natural that they should travel on liners, send postcards home, kill time sightseeing. But there were more consequential ways in which these troops conformed to a tourist tradition. The commemoration of the Grand Tour took the particular literary genre of the travel diary or the collection of letters home, a genre which was naturally episodic, even picaresque. By 1914 this literary form was well-established and widely known in Australia. Letters from abroad would be commonly passed around, and often found their way into local newspapers and trade journals, their only merit being that some of the readership would know the author. Trips abroad, written up by journalists or sketched by artists, were serialized in the popular press and diaries were often published. Much of this was nothing more than the vanity publishing of the travelling class, but there was also a more popular sort of writing. Mark Twain’s immensely successful *Innocents Abroad* (1869) sold well in Australia, and by 1914 there were home-grown equivalents. Randolph Bedford’s *Explorations in Civilisation* had originally been serialized in the popular and aggressively nationalist *Bulletin*. J.H.M. Abbott, who had created in *Tommy Cornstalk* a distinctive image for the ordinary Australian soldier in the Boer War, published *An Outlander in England* in 1905. By 1914 Nathan Spielvogel’s *Gumsucker on the Tramp*, which first appeared in the small-town *Dimboola Banner*, had sold 13,000, which made it as successful, proportionate to population, as *Innocents*
Abroad. As their titles suggest, they all played on the image of an honest, down-to-earth Australian in a sophisticated and worldly Europe. This sort of writing provided the obvious model for Australian soldiers setting out to write about their experiences, a model, I want to suggest, not just for recounting their experiences later on, but for making sense of and giving a shape to their war as it unfolded. Writing about it did help shape the experience of war in significant ways. They carefully numbered their letters home, to counter the vagaries of the post, so their accounts of their journey would be read sequentially. As they lived the experience, they imagined its retelling: 'Wont a man like talking about these days after the war' and 'should I get back you will never get my mouth shut about ... my magnificent experiences'. The writing could heighten the formality of the experience, so a dairy farmer could write to his father of a trip to the pyramids: 'I will be writing to the [Macleay River] Times later when you will be able to see a detailed account of these Wonders'.

The importance of the tourist model in giving shape to the war experience can be seen in the titles of Australian memoirs, usually closely based on letters or diaries, which began appearing from 1916. Notice the role of travel and a sense of place in titles like There and Back, Diggers Abroad, Letters from a Young Queenslander, Letters from France, A Digger at Home and Abroad, 'Over There' with the Australians, Digger Tourists. They were in a direct line from pre-war Australian travel literature, with its titles like There and Back (even the same titles could be used), A Bendigonian Abroad, A Queenslander's Travel Notes, Journal of a Wandering Australian or Madge’s Trip to Europe and Back: By Herself. Compare their emphases to the titles of English memoirs with their references to war itself and the perspective of rank and social position: Bullets and Billets, A Student in Arms, Mud and Khaki, A Brass Hat in no Man’s Land, Trench Pictures from France, Memoirs of an Infantry Officer, Undertones of War, A Private in the Guards, A Scholar’s Letters from the Front.

Consider too the role of tourism in shaping two quite different unpublished memoirs, both coincidentally written by bank clerks and both written up in the 1920s from detailed diaries kept during the war. Donald Day thought that, on the whole, he ‘would hop in for another go if the opportunity came along’. The great attraction of the war was that:

every centre at which I was stationed was made the means of further sightseeing and I must admit that very few in the AIF, were able to make such a lovely War of it as I, and see England so thoroughly.

He often talked of 'We tourists' and 'We of the Third Australian General Hospital Tourists' and by 1929 he summed up the war, its pros and cons, like this:
These times are now just memories and often tend to make one discontented with the desire to experience them again. What a wonderful thing is travel ... a wonderful education, but [it] takes toll of one by way of compensation. That toll is the wander-lust. 31

Frank Anderson had a very different war, a more typical one: 'Four long weary years of agony, distress and misery which benefited nobody but those who profited by money making'. Yet he cannot shake the tourist model off either: for Anderson it provides the antithesis of the horror, performing much the same role as reminders and memories of an idyllic pre-war arcadia played in the English memoir. There were, he concluded in 1921:

many bright and happy days as well as the bad ones. For those who were spared to return it was no doubt a wonderful experience, seeing the great cities of the world, whilst in normal conditions many of us would not have had that opportunity. 32

Another crucial point at which the Australian soldier falls in with the tourist is in the way many men saw the relationship between war and leave. Overstaying leave and absence without leave were endemic. At one point in 1917, the three Australian divisions in the Third Army were recording roughly twelve times the number of absence without leave convictions proved against the other 22 divisions. 33 What kept many men from returning to the trenches when their leave pass ran out was, it would seem, not fear, or family ties (as might happen were they spending leave at home), or simply a naturally civilian outlook, but a staunch belief in their right to see England properly. And what sent them back was not the army's requirements but the fact that their money ran out. 'Men get their parents to send them money from Australia' a sergeant major complained, 'and then they clear out until it is spent'. 34 Rather than multiply examples, it is worth following the experience of one man closely so that his attitude to the proper role of leave in his war service, an attitude which was spelt out by a surprising number of men in letters home, can be fully savoured. Roland Mills was a young clerk from the suburbs of Melbourne. He had been planning his leave for twelve months and finally, in June 1917, he was writing home about the 'real good time' he was having in England: 'really should have gone back on the 11th but am staying here until my money runs out and that won't be for a few days yet. Of course that is a slight risk but very slight'. Back in France a week later, he explained, having met a friend: 'I decided to stay on and chance being held up for my pass as I still had about £8 left and thought I'd have as long as possible while I had the chance. Although I had nineteen days [he should have had ten] in Great Britain so I didn't do too bad eh. I arrived back here alright and everything is OK. The only thing for me to look forward to now is the end of the war and my return to
Australia'. But the war did not end, and he had another leave. In 1918 he was writing home asking for 'another tenner. You might think I'm rather extravagant with money but its not that'. This was, rather, a perfectly justifiable expense: he had been caught this time when he overstayed his leave, and was fined six pounds. With ten pounds he would pay off the debt:

> Then I will have a few pounds to spare for when I get another leave which will be in a couple of months time ... However although it cost me over £6 I had a jolly good holiday. 26 days altogether and only spent £10 during that time ... I beat them for nine days last June when on leave ... so I am still ahead of them.35

Leave was central, sacrosanct: the army was expected to accommodate the needs of the tourist. Even a stickler for army regulations like Sergeant Wilson, a classics scholar and former dux of the elite Scotch College, Melbourne saw it that way. He tried to get an extension of leave in Rome in 1919 on the dubious grounds that time spent travelling between Greece and Italy, between tourist sights, should not be counted. After all, he had not managed any sightseeing in that time. He confided his exasperation to his diary. It was, he wrote, 'ridiculous to suppose that time spent on boats and in rest camps should be reckoned as part of one's leave. But the DAWMG an old colonel had no more initiative than a Lance-Corporal'. The expense, the broken regulations and the risks were all to be justified by the chance to see the sights, and many felt duty-bound to make the most of the opportunity. As a carpenter put it, when asking for more money from home:

> I have spent a bit but I can assure you it has all been spent seeing places in Scotland and England. I can tell you I don't feel like missing this chance of seeing the place whilst I am here ... it is a chance of a lifetime and I don't suppose I shall ever get it again.37

The Australian soldier, then, had more than a touch of the tourist in him, but that is not to suggest that his war was simply a kind of holiday. What always needs to be explained, as John Keegan has pointed out, is why, given the appalling horror of trench warfare, anyone kept on going. Is it possible that one of the ways of coping with the horror that was open to the Australians in particular was this tourist stance which, as I suggested at the outset, always implied they were observers, not participants, and maintained a protective barrier between the observer and the observed. The tourist is uninvolved, and this precious detachment, the capacity to stand aside for a time, might have been a crucial respite in war. Various devices are used by soldiers in battle to distance themselves from the horror around them. Perhaps
the Australian troops, who suffered appalling casualties (almost one in five killed, more than one in five wounded) yet maintained their prestige as capable and callous soldiers, found some refuge in tourism.

The tourist vision revealed itself in many strange situations. For example they set down the macabre beauty of the war, often without any of the explicit, undermining irony which to us sometimes seems concomitant on anything written after 1914. Descriptions of shrapnel bursting could show a tourist grappling with the poetic: ‘a very pretty sight it looked ... huge balls of cotton wool quietly hanging in the atmosphere’. Liquid fire could be a ‘wonderful spectacle’. Strafing was ‘tremendous ... awe inspiring. And far prettier than any firework’s display I’ve ever witnessed’. What was ‘one of the most wonderful and inspiring sights we have seen yet?’ It might have been the view from St Paul’s but in this case it was the sinking of the Triumph. Dogfights had a particular attraction, bets being held on how long a plane would take to crash after being hit: ‘There would be thousands watching these nightly performances and all yelling at the top of their voices’, a reminder again of the relation between tourism and the theatre. A provincial shopkeeper described another memorable dogfight:

saw a airplane fight and saw one of our planes hit and catch fire, the prettiest sight I have ever seen. Placed right to the ground but both pilot and officer burned to death ... The finest sight I have seen. We stayed and watched it all through. Came home and had a tea welcoming Cpl. Higgins into Sergeants Mess. Had jelly and fruits, omelettes (egg). Bonser (sic.).

We can see how the juxtapositions in a day in the life of a soldier might tend towards the ironic, as Paul Fussell has suggested, though we should note that in many cases, such as this, the ironic consciousness is ours, not the writer’s.

The process of turning battle sites into tourist sights began almost immediately. Soon after carnage made their names famous, Anzac Cove and Pozières were visited, by both participants and new arrivals, on a combination of pilgrimage and tourist jaunt. Robert Webster took what he called an ‘excursion’ with four others to the scene of a battle the day after it took place, very much in the spirit in which other men would visit Pompeii or Waterloo:

We had a beautiful ride across country to Beaumetz ... There are any amount of their dead still lying about just as they fell ... quite sad to see them lying there ... In several of their packs I could see their bread and cheese which they will never want now poor boys ... Having seen enough gruesome sights for one day we made back ... rain came on and I got wet to the skin, which little misfortune of course has to be regarded as all part of the game.
Again the irony is ours, not his.

More conventional sightseeing also provided the break that could give shape to the daily routine, even quite close to the line. Ruins were an essential element in the image that the tourist from the new world had of the old. Few men seem to have made the connection between ancient ruins and the modern effects of war, although the cloth hall at Ypres and the Virgin on the basilica at Albert became tourist sights in their own right. Churches were a different matter. They were old, of elevated significance and to be found everywhere in France, and they provided many men with a constant invitation to take on the tourist role. Let us follow for a while the movements of a young lieutenant who combined the war with sightseeing in churches in 1916. At Poperinghe: 'some fine old churches, though rather knocked about. I had a civilized afternoon tea and a good dinner with Capt. Thompson'. At St Omer: 'a good town with some very old buildings, especially the Cathedral ... Had a good lunch also some Manhattan cocktails and cherry brandy, Creme de Menthe, and Creme de Cacao'. Next night: 'very tired. The Benedictine was most acceptable, before turning in'. Two days later: 'Night off ... Had some music on the gramophone and some good curacoa. Lovely night'. Then he went to London, ill. Later, while at a school: 'Went over to Picquigny for lunch. Had some topping cherry brandy. Saw church and ruins'. The next week in Amiens: 'Had a good lunch and some top hole cocktails in the Savoy. Went to Cathedral and had my photo taken'. Perhaps sightseeing was not as effective an escape as the cherry brandy, to which it gradually, over this period, gave precedence. But both were important methods of dealing with the realities of war.

Then there is the camera, which by 1914 was an essential part of the tourist vision. There is a fortuitous overlap here: the camera was to tourism what the gun was to war. The words that explained their use - 'aim', 'shoot', 'capture' - were the same. Cameras were everywhere in Egypt, but they were banned in France: 'Oh for the Brownie' became the cry on route marches in spring. Even so there were enough evaders of the edict - as with anything that hindered tourism - to leave a photographic record of a war quite different to that portrayed in official photographs. Once cameras were allowed after the armistice they appeared, miraculously, from nowhere.

In May, 1915, Captain Webster was in Mudros after a time on a ship off Cape Helles, where he had been trying to get snaps of shell-bursts. He expressed in his diary the constant lament of the tourist, the one that got away:

Captain Lampen and I were sitting with our cameras in our hands on the sun deck and I remarked what a series of magnificent pictures we would get if the 'Majestic' happened to be torpedoed whilst we were lying close beside her. As fate had it we just missed these pictures by an hour.
The other adjunct of tourism was the souvenir. The war cast up its own souvenirs, and men readily sent their families mementos taken from dead Germans along with conventional souvenirs bought in London or Paris, and did not acknowledge any distinction between them. Cameras and souvenirs allowed men to invest the war with a certain normality.

Perhaps the most important effect of the tourist stance on perceptions of the war was the way in which letters and diaries gave the war a particular shape.

NOTES

1. This article is based on research undertaken on a special project fellowship at the Australian War Memorial. It takes up one theme of a book, Europe on Six Bob a Day: The First AIF as Tourists, being written on the fellowship. All misspellings in primary sources have been retained in quotations.


7. Pearce, Tourist Behaviour, p. 3.


18. J.N.I. Dawes and L. L. Robson, Citizen to Soldier: Australia Before the Great
22. Dawes and Robson, Citizen to Soldier, p. 87.
24. First World War Recruitment Leaflets, Special Collections Sub-section, AWM.
28. G. B. Hughes, diary, 19/2/16, Mitchell Library, MSS 3923.
31. D. F. Day, memoir, 121, 135, 138, and diary, 18/7/15, 19/7/15, 7/8/15, AWM.
32. F. G. Anderson, memoir, 1, AWM, DRL 2/1350; and see also, Fussell, The Great War in Modern Memory, pp. 231 ff.
34. N. G. Ellsworth, letter, 12/1/17, AWM, DRL 1/266.
36. E. Wilson, diary, 8/4/19, AWM, PR 84/201.
40. R. J. Webster, diary, 13/5/15, University of NSW Archive.
41. T. E. Cozens, diary, 26/6/16, AWM, DRL 2/2.
42. J. E. Allen, letter, 4/6/17. AWM, DRL 1/27.
43. R. J. Webster, letter, 25/5/15, University of NSW Archive.
44. C. Moore, memoir, 1918, 123, AWM, PR82/142.
46. R. J. Webster, diary, 16/4/17, University of NSW Archive.
47. M. Abson, diary, 29/8/16, 7/10/16, 8/10/16, 10/10/16, 4/3/17, 11/3/17, AWM, DRL 2/5.
49. C. D. Asher-Smith, letter, 30/8/17, AWM, DRL 2/283.
50. R. J. Webster, diary, 27/5/15, University of NSW Archive.
THE LAST TRAIN FOR CAMP

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ANZAC SILHOUETTE SERIES No.1

A COOEEE FROM AUSTRALIA

To an ABSENT FRIEND
I know you'll not forget me
But to keep old memories green
I send a hearty "Cooeee"
With this bright Australian scene.
By 1914, when the Great European War broke out, picture postcards were at the crest of a popular wave which continued throughout the war. They had only been on the market since the Paris Exhibition of 1889 and the divided-back card, providing space for the address and a message, was even more recent, having been legalised in 1902. Not only did the picture postcard allow the sending of a short message—sometimes intimate, often reticent and understated, occasionally inarticulate and almost illegible—but its design and the intention behind its purchase and posting carried signs of other messages for private and/or public decoding and consumption. For, in war-time, while the primary purpose behind sending cards was still to make contact with friends, families, or loved-ones—‘I hope this card finds you in the best of health as it leaves me’, wrote many a correspondent, providing that most telling intelligence in war-time!—they were also a convenient means of expanding Allied propaganda, glamourizing and advertising the war, and adding colour to individual lives while providing education and information about the war and the war zones. There was also an aura of excitement and a sense of occasion about sending and receiving cards. ‘What do you think of our flag and golden wattle?’ writes one man, to his friend Joey, on a beautiful silk-embroidered card featuring the Australian flag and a sprig of wattle: ‘say they are nice’.

Among the earliest of the First World War picture postcards circulating in Australia advertised the plight of ‘gallant’/‘poor’/‘little’ Belgium and invariably reduced the causes of the Allied involvement in the war to the need to rescue Belgium from a belligerent Germany. While some cards depicted the devastation of Belgium or spread hatred of the Hun, others invited Australians to ‘ Advance’ and dwelt on the sympathetic rallying of all the Allied nations. One such card, designed to entertain as well as obliquely carry this latter message, comprised nine concentric circles radiating out from a black centre—yellow, red, white, blue, white, red, white, blue, red—which represented the
national colours of Belgium, England, France, and Russia and signified their common endeavour in coming to Belgium’s aid. It was suggested to receivers of this card that ‘a very pretty effect’ could be created by gently rotating the card. They were also urged to stare at the black spot in the centre of the card for half-a-minute and then look at a white ceiling. Serving the Allied propaganda which was fostering the active support of the populace to drive the war machine, these cards were also used to exhort Australians to help ‘Save Little Belgium’, either by enlisting or contributing to the various ‘Belgian Funds’ which had sprung up around the country. A Christmas card circulating in Australia depicted a study of a little boy – Belgium – dressed in black; waiting!

Circulating at the same time, and suggesting how quickly the postcard industry adapted to the change from peace to war, were picture cards, often photographic and of the fold-out variety, of the training camps. Sometimes taken by photographers who had set up around the camps, these cards had mixed intentions. While, on the one hand, fostering morale and giving assurance that the men were receiving a rigorous and thorough training, and signalling the adventure of military life in which the men are seen skirmishing, drilling, shooting, signalling, boxing; on the other hand, they suggested that the men were happy and well cared for by showing them messing, at leisure enjoying the companionship of friends, at church, or by displaying the facilities they have at their disposal. A souvenir card from the Randwick Camp added sentiment to the information included in the card’s four photographs of camp-life by including the sketch of a sprig of wattle. Furthermore, in certain cases, such photographs may have been the first time that some of the men had been photographed, giving these cards an added sense of occasion for sender and receiver alike. They also provided an opportunity for a man to send back home photographs of his particular mates in camp, giving faces and a vicarious introduction to the men referred to in his letters.

Soon after the first overseas contingent of troops departed in November, cards bearing photographs of the march pasts or the transports carrying the men to the war zones became popular. Readily available were photographs or accurate sketches of such carriers as the White Star Line’s Afric, P & O’s Ballarat, the Aberdeen Line’s Themistocles and Demosthenes, or the Union Castle’s Braemar Castle, advertising the co-operation of commerce with the Allied effort, at the same time as carrying reminders of romantic travel. There were shots of the Euripides, Ionian, Ceramic, Nestor, and Warilda, significant names now in households in which, prior to December 1914, they had never been heard; and there were photographs of His Majesty’s Hospital Ships: Britannic, Galeka, and the Donaldson Line’s Letitia.
And, of course, reproductions of the *Sydney* abounded. One, taken at Portsmouth, ‘after finishing the *Emden*’, shows the vessel being boarded by the King and the Prince of Wales in what for many Australians signified the ultimate accolade.

After the fashion of the cards from Broadmeadows, Seymour and Liverpool, or the rough cards fashioned on board the troopships by hand or on the simple presses, some of the regiments had taken with them, cards depicting camp life at the Australians’ Egyptian base at Mena and these soon began to arrive in Australia. Not only offering the folk at home access to the sights/sites of an ancient and exotic land – their tourist dimension – these cards were also recruiting others to join ‘Our Famous Boys’ in a military adventure.7 (See p. 116) And, if the cards issuing from Australia invariably featured some patriotic or sentimental signifier, those from Egypt consistently included photographs of camels, the pyramids, or the Sphinx. It was not unusual to see all three on the one card, as the presence of the Australians ‘In Egypt’ was advertised.

Among the most popular cards, depicting largely humorous scenes, were the silhouettes. (See p. 130) Modelled on numerous similar series from England, they exploited the humour in such things as being late back to camp, inspecting the guard, emergency rations, letters from home, gambling, detentions, or the ineptitude of the raw recruits at drilling and bayonet practice. And, once again following their British counterparts, G. G. Benson and Tom Cross devoted cartoon series to the men in Egypt and drew their laughs by ridiculing the Arabs and celebrating the rough Australians’ treatment of them.8 (See p. 133) These also seem to have been very popular, although the image of the Australian that emerges from the cards, both silhouettes and cartoons, is that of a loud-mouthed bully and drunkard, noted more for his racism and xenophobia than his heroic military attributes. The men did not seem to see it this way. Rather than resiling from their behaviour, their messages on the cards invariably boasted of it and corroborated the subject of the picture. As one man said of a Cross-cartoon, endorsing, rather than contesting its subject, it is ‘absolutely original’ and authentic. No less than those representations which were soon to follow, of the men as ‘Brave Anzacs’ or ‘Heroes of the Dardanelles’, the larrikin was one of the guises in which they were happy to be imaged. So, in one of Benson’s cards, a group of drunken Australian soldiers are set above the ditty:

We are young K’nuts from Australia
In Egypt for a brief stay we are.
We’ll walk round the sphinx
Have a couple of drinks
Then go back and tell ‘em how brave we are.
On the back of a ‘Paul Barbery’ card, depicting a group of soldiers yelling ‘Imshi’, and trying to escape from clamouring shoe-shines, ‘O.M.L.’ writes approvingly:

This is some of us on leave in Cairo, there are hundreds of niggers, wanting to clean our boots[,] sell us walking sticks, postcards, cigarettes, and all sorts of things. Imshi! means clear out, but it is no use telling them to clear, they will stick to us till we have to get rid of them. This place will spoil us, we can go in a restaurant and have a dinner of six or seven courses and a band of music playing all the time, and it is music too, and while you are eating a nigger will clean our boots, leggings, and spurs, and brush our hat, all for ten piastres that’s (sic) two shillings, I think I will bring a nigger back with me when I come home.

The much-disparaged hawkers, selling anything from oranges and cigarettes, to newspapers, books, and shoe-shines, were doing little more than respond to the well-paid Australian troops who were free with their money. On the back of a card, ‘Mafish filuss ... until next Wednesday’, in which an Australian soldier holds out his empty pockets to clamouring hawkers, ‘Dave’, identifying with the digger on the front, tells his mother that this is ‘what happens to [him] very soon after payday’. Repeatedly, the indiscriminate free-spending of the Anzac is humorously celebrated, rather than problematized. ‘This place looks old’, writes one man of a busy market square at Tel-el-Kebir, ‘but enough money has been spent in [it] to build a second “Savoy”’. In other cards it was obvious that the Australians, making little attempt to understand the trading rituals of their hosts, were not slow to mete out a rough punishment for what they saw as an intrusion into their daily round. ‘[T]his is how we are pestered with natives begging’, writes one man, before explaining that ‘all soldiers call out imshi yalla and then give them a kick to help them along’. Elsewhere, an Australian is sketched punching an Arab: ‘this’, explains the young Anzac in his note home, ‘is what we have to do ... to keep the bootblacks away’.9

The Australians behaved as though they owned the place. Of a cartoon depicting an Australian stealing and thrashing a donkey, one man says, ‘this is a regular sight’. Similarly, commenting on the picture on another card of huge Australians dwarfing their donkeys, a trooper boasted, ‘this is the way we ride into ciro (sic)’; while another man off-handedly explained to his wife that, when racing his donkey on Sunday – a regular pastime – the worthless animal had twice collapsed beneath his weight! It was all, as Kenneth put it to his mother, on the back of a cartoon in which two men abscond with a camel and haul its attendant along in their wake: ‘a form of amusement to our troops ... plenty of fun indeed’. One card boasted that the Australians brought the ‘first fun for 40 centuries’ to Egypt. But, as yet another trooper boasted, prescient and complacent at once, the Australians, by ‘allowing the natives to get too familiar’, had ‘undone’ in a few
To my dear one away on duty.

So many thoughts, so many prayers
I send my boy to-day.
And though I miss him, oh! so much
Far more than I can say.
Yet I am proud to let him go
For that great cause of right.
And till he's home my earnest prayers
Shall guard him day and night.

Ezra
months, the discipline which the British colonisers had taken years to develop and impose. From the perspective of 1915, however, rather than advertising the ugly Australian, these cards were projecting war as a site of adventure in which men could become conquering heroes, while amongst themselves developing a sense of camaraderie and belonging. Folk at home were being told that the experience was new, exciting, and fun.

Writing to his wife, Clive Lynch boasts of ‘the pardonable swank of our lads’, who are depicted strutting before veiled girls and bootblacks. As I have suggested, however, this man’s ‘swank’ and the ‘fun’ displayed in card after card invite alternative readings which expose their racist and chauvinist underpinning. This ‘fun’ was also merely the more acceptable public face of the sinister and crude behaviour of some of the Australians in Egypt, for whom violent assault and theft, rape, arson, and uncontrollable drunkenness were not uncommon and raised questions in some minds about the suitability of the troops for combat action. The accredited correspondent, Charles Bean, was so angered and disappointed by the behaviour of some of the troops in Egypt before the landing that he wrote an open letter to the Australian press exposing the behaviour and advocating the return of the worst offenders to Australia. Such a shadow did it throw over the Australians that, when Bean wrote the first volume of the monumental History of the Australians at War 1914 – 1918, he virtually erased the incidents from his study.

This behaviour by a small group, and the fact that they had been diverted from combat action on the Western Front, led some of the men to ponder their role in the war: was it to be no more than guard duty at Constantinople or involvement in some second-rate action, they wondered. In fact, Benson’s first card – the only serious card in the series – touched on this concern. Here, an Anzac warrior in full combat dress thrusts out his fist at the mirage of a German soldier looming over the pyramids and asks: ‘Will I ever get a smack at you?’ No less than those urgers at home who, having sooled them into joining up, and who were now anxious for them to enter the fray, some among the men were, as Norman Hollis wrote in a message to his brother Ern, ‘looking forward to a scrap’. They were eager to prove their manhood in real combat.

Even as these cards from Egypt were filtering back, the folk at home were responding with their own, which, when not honouring ‘Our Hero’ or ‘famous soldier boy’, were sentimentally evoking them as the ‘Absent One’, or praising them as the ‘Dear One Away on Duty’. (See p. 136) Such cards often included distinctively patriotic symbols – the flag, the sketch of a boomerang, kangaroo, koala, swan, gum leaf, or an emblematic bush (not urban) scene – and, while the verses on many cards were not attributed, sentimental verses by Leuname, in
'What do you think of this card?'

particular, were very popular:

To an ABSENT FRIEND
I know you will not forget me
But to keep old memories green
I send a hearty "Coo-ee"
With this bright Australian scene.

Nor were these cards chosen at random. Coyly hoping that he will 'like this PC', a wife sends her 'dear Love' to her husband on a card bearing the sketch of a boomerang, and then leaves it to Leuname to try to enunciate her pride and longing:

You who have offered life and all
In answer to your country's call,
Our heartfelt gratitude you earn
In safety may soon return.

In another, with her photograph in an inset, a woman admits to missing her husband 'more every day' and longs for him 'by [her] side'. Once again, it is Leuname who says the rest:

Love and best wishes I now send
To you, my hero and my friend.
May peace relax this awful strain,
And send you safe home again.

On a carefully chosen card, 'Dorothy Claydon' writes tentatively to 'Mr Tuckwell'. Having reminded him of picnics they had shared and wished him good luck and hope of a safe return, it is left to Leuname to express what decorum may have dictated she should omit from her message:

I can't find words which will express
Good wishes I would send,
In every sphere I wish success
To you my dearest friend.

Dorothy was doing some preliminary courting. We don't know how Mr Tuckwell responded but 'Bob', having received a similar, but unsigned, card from a lass from Wonthaggi, returned the missive to his parents with an urgent request attached to find out the name of the sender! Having been told by his anonymous correspondent that she was 'working now and looked pretty good on it', he clearly was interested. And she, having lamented that so many 'Wonthaggi boys [have been] killed lately', may have seen Bob as a potential husband in a town where the eligible men were dwindling.

The Wonthaggi girl's card was from the ornate and immensely popular 'Hands Across the Sea' series, the Australian versions of which
A WORTHY SON OF A NOBLE MOTHER

"AUSTRALEO"

We are the Gumnut Corps
We're going to the War
(We'll make things hum, by gum!)
'What do you think of this card?'
centred a large map of Australia into which were inset patriotic symbols or scenes. In many cases, the Allied flags massed along the Eastern seaboard and the joined hands symbolically united men at war and women at home in the common endeavour of war. Inset into the map on Bob’s card was a sprig of wattle and, at the base of the card, were sketches of a transport ship, a waratah, and a bushman, important symbols, perhaps, for a bush lad on active service overseas. An English card in this series reproduced a different but no less redolent cluster of symbols – a train, roses, a globe, a gentle landscape, and a transport vessel – spread around the border of the card to which the symbolically linked hands and a sentimental quatrain were central. Sent to his mother by a lad on his way home with ‘tons of splosh [money]’ in his pockets it must have been a welcome communication.\(^{13}\)

As the cards for Belgium indicated, from the outset, postcards were a valuable source of fund-raising. There were patriotic cards raising funds for such organisations as the Parents and Citizens Association; a ‘Coo-ee’ card sought funds for the Lismore District School; there were cards for Violet Day (14 June); France’s Day (14 July), most of which featured some variation of the dogged poilu opposing German Kultur or, as Lionel Lindsay has it, in a distinctive card, linking arms with a koala; or for War Chest Day (28 September); for Peace Loans, the Soldier’s Club, the Australian Comforts Funds; and the Cigarette Committee of Melbourne, which kept the men supplied with cigarettes, sponsored cards for various occasions. While the Red Cross was everywhere: the popular versifier E. Beaufils Lamb lent his verses to their cause, and Harry Weston’s sketch of the warrior with a blood-soaked bandage around his head – ‘Give Him A Helping Hand’ – was enormously popular and was an important signifier for them. At the other end of the spectrum to this image of the gallant warrior, was another Red Cross card – for Australia Day – in which a burly Anzac, having skewered a fat little Turk on his bayonet, is figured throwing him off the peninsula, which, in case we have not read the card’s racism, is notable for the towers of several mosques in the background of the scene, marking its foreignness and heathen difference. (See p.137) Ugly in its racism and among the more tasteless of the early cards, rivalling the propaganda being directed at the Hun, it was a curious card to have the backing of the Red Cross.

As for satire of Germany and the Kaiser, both of which often went hand-in-hand, it continued unabated from the first British postcards in late August 1914, to a more complex propaganda as the war unfolded. The fold-out, ‘Six Scenes from the Kaiser’s Life’, published in Australia by L. L. Quarrill, humorously traced the decline of the Kaiser from Scene One: ‘Anticipation’, to his ‘Damnation’ in Scene Six; from the confident Kaiser advancing towards Paris and London, to an imprisoned and bewildered Kaiser contemplating a shrunken Germany
As might be expected, after the Landing, there were innumerable patriotic cards dedicated to the selfless heroism of the Fallen Hero; or calling for ‘Australia’ to ‘Advance’; or celebrating ‘Our “Dinkum” Infantry’ (or Light Horse); while, in one of the rare cards which spoke of the active involvement of women in the war, ‘Our War Nurses’ were hailed. But, for every card which depicted the Australians ‘Forcing the Dardanelles’ and marching across the Peninsula to Constantinople, or celebrated ‘Australia’s Fighting Sons’ or, like ‘Some Boy’, advertised the confident-looking digger, there were as many which endorsed the Imperial connection, honouring ‘Old England’ or Boedicea; found in ‘Australo’ ‘A Worthy Son of a Noble Mother’; nailed young ‘Australia’s’ flag to ‘Old England’s’ mast, or threatened, ‘What We Have We Hold’, subsuming all endeavour under the sign of the Union Jack, and eliding individual Australian effort. (See pp. 140,141)

By mid-1915, Gallipoli scenes were everywhere; either cameo-sized shots of a selection of scenes, or card-sized photographs or sketches of topical locations. In this way, a Gallipoli Letter Card featuring Soutar’s populist piece of verse, ‘The Toast is “Anzac”, Gentlemen’, also includes photographs of six key sites. A feature of this card, however, and suggesting the extent to which postcard manufacturers were prepared to negotiate that fine line between providing access to the excitement, even the agony, of combat without revealing the grim reality of torn, dismembered bodies, were two shots, one of which showed the wounded in the field, while the other featured ‘the kits of the dead and wounded’ collected on ‘W’ Beach. Cards such as these were not only beginning to educate the folk at home about the nature of the Campaign and were giving names and an identity to an unknown Turkish landscape but, at a more sub-liminal level, they also spoke of the appropriation of the landscape by the British, as the Turkish names were effaced and replaced by such markers as Pope’s Hill, Quinn’s Post, Walker’s Ridge, or Shrapnel Gully which spoke of war and conquest and denied the landscape its ancient local names.

In these representations of Gallipoli, the beach at Anzac Cove was the dominant site. It was that place where, as the popularising cards were proclaiming, ‘Australian History Began’ or ‘Australia Became a Nation’, as Australian history was re-written to accommodate the Landing, and its nationalism was measured by feats of arms. But while, in the official propaganda, the men may have been making ‘history’, their personal reaction was often altogether different. To his ‘roving brother David’, one man cautions: ‘stay where you are unless you are in search of adventure’. The sender of the card had just recovered from wounds received in an attack in which all but two of his mates were killed or wounded.

At the same time, for the men on the peninsula, the only cards
A Gallipoli Souvenir

Bravo ANZACS!

Rings the wide world with the fame and glory of Australia's name.
Valiant sons of Britain true, our great Empire praises you!

And to history shall go down New Zealand's loyal and brave renown, zeal in every noble heart answering plays a hero's part closer binds our Empire's tracks sons of Britain—brave ANZACS.

7623-U. COPYRIGHT ROTARY PHOTO. E.C.
OFF TO THE WAR
Good'by my little Gum Blossom,
And don't you fret for me,
We'll soon be back together
In the Old Gum Tree
available were the Field Service Post Cards on which they were permitted to write only the date and their signature, while erasing those phrases not required. 'If anything else is added', they were warned, 'the postcard will be destroyed'.

I am quite well
I have been admitted to hospital
    sick
    wounded
    and am going well
    and hope to be discharged soon.

I am being sent down to the base.
I have received your
    letter dated...
    telegram...
    parcel...

Letters follow at first opportunity.
I have received no letter from you
    lately
    for a long while.

Signature only
Date:

Yet, as enigmatic as these cards were, they carried that one vital piece of information which everyone at home wanted to know; that, at the date of posting, the sender was alive. It is also possible to imagine the impact on the receiver of the detail: 'I have received no letter from you ... for a long while'.

These field cards were military issue and cost nothing, but the men also improvised inexpensive, if crude, cards out of cigarette boxes cut to size and often carrying individual decoration. One such card from France was decorated with a piece of ribbon from a German Iron Cross, while Private McDiarmid’s card from the Dardanelles to his Nelly — unfortunately we don’t know her response! — comprised a hand-written copy of Colonel McCay’s enthusiastic summing-up of the March past in front of General Sir Ian Hamilton before the men left Egypt on 29 March 1915. The men also used regimental cards, the production of which for some units seems to have commenced on board ship or in Cairo. Often carrying photographs of the commanding officer or some particular symbol or notable characteristic of the unit; after the Landing, they began to advertise regimental fame achieved ‘on Gallipoli’; and, by 1917, they had become personalised. D. V. Owers, of the 53rd Battalion, had his own card; the 14th’s card carried an original painting by George Roberts; while the 17th used their’s to advertise their 1,000 days of service. Like the custom-made cards on the home front, memorializing the recent dead, or returning thanks for sympathy cards, the regimental cards were to be taken seriously. For, if the regimental cards honoured ‘Our Soldier Brother’ or were sent ‘In Memory of My Pal’, the former honoured the regiment in whose
bosom the valiant had died. And this, unlike those cards from Egypt, was no laughing matter.

Purchasers of cards in the ‘Our Boys at the Front’ – series, which included some thirty-five different cards drawing on official photographs which ran the gamut of the war effort in France and Belgium – from the stately general on his charger, to combat shots, photos of ruins, heavy guns and tanks in action, to snaps of the men at leisure, or showing off their new-issue hard hats, or looking eerie in their gas masks – were being told: ‘by buying this card you are GIVING to our Soldiers’.

At the same time, these cards and others like them added to images revealing the thrill of combat, while portraying the men as they liked to be seen, either by catching a particular posture or facial expression, or by displaying them in a significant action. As was the case in this series, but more generally, cards were now repeatedly representing the devastation of historic French and Belgian towns. But, if the destruction of the Cloth Hall at Ypres was topical, the new Allied tanks – whether looming out of a snow storm on the Somme, or dominating the sands of Palestine – were no less so and formed an important part of that advertising of the machines of war which, in an age when war was still exciting and the carnage a technological war could wreak was only slowly unfolding, had a fascination and glamour.

As the war progressed, then, tanks replaced the big guns (which, in turn, had replaced horse-drawn ambulances or the cavalry) as the subject of cards and provided, as a side-effect of these subjects, an abbreviated social history of the technological innovations being created as a consequence of the war. In a similar way, cards traced the shift from soft hats to gas-masks and steel helmets in 1916.

Gas masks, tanks, and pictures of the convulsed countryside and devastated villages and cities were now compelling signifiers of the exotic landscape of war. And cards carrying these images were readily available behind the lines for, whereas, at the outbreak of war, few local cards had been available in northern France because tourism was not a significant regional industry, it was a different matter by the time the Australians arrived in 1916. Of a different order altogether were the elegant French-made, silk-embroidered cards which were even more popular than the topical silhouette, or novelty moving-part, cards. Beginning as a cottage industry and produced by women behind the lines, production of the ‘silks’ was soon semi-automated as the patterns were embroidered on continuous strips which were sent to factories for cutting and mounting. In the end, with some deterioration in the quality, the production was wholly taken over by the Paris postcard houses and produced in assembly lines. Accommodating all Allied markets, not least the Australians who, like the Americans, had money to spend, the ‘silks’ blatantly exploited sentimental and patriotic themes. Sometimes elegant, they were also often very ornate: anchors
The Girls I left behind, me.

Copyright
crowns, flags, wattle, kangaroos, and various versions of the rising sun, patterns of interlocked Allied flags, or embroidered flowers were common and formed the visual accompaniment, in golds, reds, pinks and greens, to legends which ran the gamut from ‘Right is Might’, to ‘Merry Christmas’; from ‘My Dear Wife/Mother/Sister’, to ‘A Kiss from France’; to regimental names or insignia, and assertions of liberty.

Enormously popular with the men, the cards’ colours, symbols, and sentimental legends often distracted sender and receiver alike, from the harsh reality of war, its destruction and monochrome grey colouring. ‘What do you think of this card?’, enquires a father of his little daughter, as he sent her the first of several silk cards for her collection. Like these, silk cards were invariably sent to someone special or for some particular reason, other than merely making contact. Ern Payne tried to find special silks for his wife’s birthday or Christmas and New Year, and sometimes took the opportunity to enclose a handkerchief or a coin in the pocket which was a feature in some of the cards. If one man purchased a card because he thought it ‘awfully sweet’ and wanted to share it, another, on an ‘Ever True’ card, assured his wife of his constancy, while another wanted it to be a memento of his love: ‘I will never four get (sic) you’, he writes. While yet another, writing to his ‘Dear Lovie’, aware perhaps that this may be his last contact, having just explained that he is going back to the Front, ominously signs his note, ‘Goodbye and goodnight’; and, one, George Burrough sends a card featuring a delicately-worked bouquet (over ‘Australia’) to his special ‘Aunt Bella’.

As May Gibbs was saying, in a whimsical card which was putting to work some of her characters made famous in *Snugglepot and Cuddlepie*, these ‘old Aunts’ were ‘very anxious’ about the men. (See p. 150) In another, Mrs Kangaroo promises to ‘keep the billy boiling, till you come marching home’ while, in others, Gibbs takes the ultimate step and sends the Nuts off to war; in a ‘Gumnut Corps’! (See p.140). Plucked from their Australian arcadia, the Nuts are, however, to be seen as warriors – their sticks changed to rifles –, and it is with no little relish that they take up arms and plead with their Blossoms not to ‘fret’: ‘We’ll soon be back together/In our old gum tree’ (See p. 145). No less than the children’s authors Ethel Turner and Mary Grant Bruce, or Lionel and Norman Lindsay, May Gibbs was lending her persuasive voice to Australia’s recruiting drives by endorsing this ‘Human’ war. But, like them, not only was she fuelling recruitment; in her portrayal of the active engagement of the Nuts and the passive submission of the Blossoms – those weeping ‘girls’ each Nut seemed to leave behind him – she was also consolidating gender stereotypes hardening during the war. While Mrs Kangaroo and the ‘old Aunt’ Kookaburras tend the hearth and wait, worry and knit (socks?), it is the Nuts who promise to ‘make things hum, by gum!’ and assure the
We'll keep the Billy boiling, dear, till you come marching home.

Your old Aunts are very anxious about you.
Blossoms that they will protect them. (See p. 140)

It was not only May Gibbs who worked these narrow gender stereotypes. Repeatedly, in cards (as in many other representations during the war), while men are shown as active, and are seen in battle dress, handling a rifle, or in some battle posture, women were positioned as defenceless, passively accepting that men will protect them, or quietly urging them into battle and then waiting for their return. But, of course, many women were complicit in these representations and (no less than the mens’ endorsement of their ‘larrikin’ behaviour in Egypt), endorsed the images by their use of the cards. So, a Mother, overseen by the inset of a digger, anxiously waits and prays for deliverance of ‘The Absent One’; while, in a reciprocal card (from The Absent One), the digger, signified by his uniform, hopes that his thoughts will ‘span the miles that sever’: the woman waits, and the man does his duty. (See p. 153) Indeed, the (female) speaking voice in ‘To My Dear One Away on Duty’, not only expresses her longing but also her pride in letting ‘him go/For that Great/Cause of Right’. With her photograph inset at the foot of the card, she is both incentive and reward to the man answering duty’s call. In another, ‘Loving Thoughts of My Dear Soldier’, sent by a woman to her husband in France, ‘relief’ for the ‘grief’ of the female speaker is found in the male’s valour:

Ah! Sweetheart, since you marched away
I know the gloom of grief,
And yet divinist whispers come
Affording me relief,
That he who won my inmost heart
Is playing now a hero’s part.

It is the active male, taking on duty and adventure, who will save the passive woman and protect the (female) nation.

Consolidating war as the solution to international affairs, glamourizing its machines of destruction, advertising the life of the Australian warrior and sending out propaganda against the enemy, and enlisting all in the war effort, as I have suggested, postcards also consolidated, even if obliquely and unconsciously, pervasive gender stereotypes which cast women as submissive, passive and ineffectual, serving both as a lure to recruitment and a prize for those heroes who came back. Angels of the hearth and home, waiting and weeping, women are denied history and nation-building which are ceded to the masculine domain. Moreover, personal as they were, being addressed to an intimate, the cards – in their complete inscription, as picture and message – also spoke of national character and idealised identity, while providing a kind of social history of Australia’s involvement in the war. The postcards, in their commercialisation of innocence, sentimentality
and patriotism, continued the lie of the Great World War; that war was honourable and glorious.²⁴

NOTES

1. I wish to thank the Australian War Memorial for allowing me access to the resources of their research collection and a grant from the 'Literature and the Colonial Legacy' Programme at the University of Wollongong to enable me to develop this paper.

2. See, Eric Evans and Jeffrey Richards, A Social History of Britain in Postcards 1870-1930 (London and New York: Longman, 1980), pp. 2-4; and Toni and Valmai Holt, Till the Boys Come Home. The Picture Postcards of the First World War (London: McDonald and Jane, 1977), pp. 3-9. First issued in Austria on 1 October 1869, plain postcards became instantly popular for both commercial and private use. The British Post Office was turning over 50 million cards by 1879. After the development of the picture postcard and the incorporation of a message space, circulation reached 600 million in 1903 and 880 million by 1914. The British Forces postal service was handling 2 million letters and postcards daily in 1917. (T. and V. Holt, Till the Boys Come Home, p. 4)

3. An entire series of cards seems to have been designed to introduce the unenlisted to the procedures once one has entered the barracks.

4. In some variations the wattle was dried and pasted on. Similar cards also advertised European camp sites, when the men travelled to the Western Front. Cards featuring photographs of such things as the men gathering at the 'Cheer-Up Hut' in Adelaide were also popular. The Cheer-Up Hut provided comfort to new recruits and old hands alike for the duration of the war. Appealing to the loyalty of the people, these cards spoke of national endeavour and duty, as well as providing mementoes of a place which had given the men succour.

5. On a card featuring a sketch of the 'Demosthenes', one man indicates with an arrow the location of his cabin for the folks at home.

6. Invariably humorous, these crude cards often carried Christmas or New Year greetings.

7. As soon as the men transferred to England, an almost obligatory purchase was a card which carried a map of England showing the location of the camp in which the sender was training. 'This is where they've landed me!' they said, as an arrow pointed to Lark Hill, or Tidworth, or Heytesbury, etc.

8. When he followed the troops to England, Cross by contrast, found most of his humour in the men's particular predicaments in camp-life.

9. As another man wrote, explicating a sketch of a young Anzac involuntarily having his boots cleaned while other Egyptian lads squabble for the privilege and the soldier bellows 'Imshi Yalla!': 'This picture shows you wat (sic) happens every time we go into cairo (sic)'.


11. Norman Hollis' card was dated 7.2.1915.

12. On a 'Well Done Australia'- card, officially addressed 'To a Brave Australian
The message that I send to you,
Will span the miles that sever,
And tho' I cannot clasp your hand;
In thought we are together.
Soldier’, the proud father of one man sends some wattle to his son, ‘for luck’.


14. The divider between the message and the address on this card is in the form of a cartoon sketch of a plucked and forlorn-looking eagle hanging head-first down the centre. It is likely that the cards were produced in 1917 or early 1918.

15. These cards were distinguished by having regimental colour patches inscribed in a corner of the card.

16. Commenting on a similar card, Laffin points out the errors in the sketch, noting that the Australian Imperial Force is incorrectly designated an ‘Expeditionary’ Force, while the hat band is wrongly proportioned. On the back of this card, a man partly disowns the expression on the sketch (which he mistakes for a photo), finding the face ‘too cross’. Laffin, The First World War in Postcards, p.49. ‘Some Boy!’ was one of several cards sent to his young daughter (Doris) by a man in the war zones; they included a couple of silks, a moving-part card from the leering behaviour from which he was careful to disassociate himself, and a photograph of the interior of his barracks: ‘can you tell which one is me?’ he asks her.

17. Widely circulated in Australia after the Landing, the text of Soutar’s poem was as follows:

The toast is ‘Anzac’, gentlemen,
As long as life shall last;
They need no costly monument
To keep their memory fast.
To the men who lived, the men who died,
Then give it three times three!
The toast is ‘Anzac’, gentlemen,
On far Gallipoli.

18. The authorities legislated against reproducing the photographs of dead Allied soldiers on cards because of the possible effect on morale, both at home and abroad. It was, of course, acceptable to use photos of dead German troops. (See, Laffin, The First World War in Postcards, p. 3.) Another consideration, when taking account of the subject matter of cards, is commercial; few Australians would have thought their dead a suitable subject for a postcard.

19. In one of the more bizarre conjunctions of written message and picture, a photograph of a shell-burst at Quinn’s Post became the vehicle for a cake mix!

20. Proceeds from the sale of cards in the series went towards the Australian Comforts Fund.


22. There are in excess of twenty silk cards among the War Memorial’s ‘Cpl. E. E. Payne Collection’, a comprehensive collection of cards, mainly to and from Ern Payne to his beloved wife, Bella, who, on more than one card, refers to him as ‘the one I love more than my life’.

23. In Snugglepot and Cuddlepie, the gum nut babies, at first, are wary of humans whom they associate with killing and indiscriminate incarceration.

24. Postcards had no such role in the next world war.
On 4 August 1920, the sixth anniversary of the day the government of Australia committed its people to war on the other side of the world, a memorial was unveiled in the town of Gladstone, New South Wales, to the men of the district who had gone to that war and died, and to the men who had gone and returned. The local paper gave this account of the ceremony:

In the heart of Gladstone township stands a silent sentinel. It is the figure of an Anzac, with grounded arms, carved in white marble. From its pedestal it overlooks the main streets of the town as if guarding the liberties of the citizens as they were guarded on foreign shores. A more fitting memorial of the heroic dead and the honoured returned soldiers could not be.

The first silent sentinel erected as a monument to Australian participants in the war may be the one unveiled outside the post office at Newcastle on 16 September 1916. From then on, and through the 1920s, almost every community built one. They became omnipresent in the landscape. Yet there has been little investigation of how they were erected, what forms they took, what they expressed in inscription and symbol, what rituals were created around them. One in every seven Australian citizens went off to the Great War. That was one in every three to four males; every second man between 18 and 45. One in five to six did not return, and more than half of the men who did come home had suffered some wound. Only one of the dead bodies was repatriated: that of Major-General W. T. Bridges, killed at Gallipoli, buried above the Royal Military College in Canberra. The commodious cemeteries of the Imperial War Graves Commission received the bodies of all the rest, or all that could be found and identified. For mourners at home, the war memorials became a substitute for graves.

In many Australian imaginations the stone soldier is the most typical of memorials. The cartoonist Arthur Horner, depicting ‘myths and monsters of down under’, draws ‘the Anzac: a brave youth who fought the enemies of his master, and was turned into stone on his return’. But the soldier figures are not the most common type – not in New South Wales, at any rate – where our counting is most nearly complete.
The War Memorial, Harden-Murrumburrah, NSW
In that state obelisks are the most numerous form; columns occur as often as soldiers; and utilitarian memorials such as halls make up about a quarter of the total. We may find a higher proportion of soldiers in other states, for New South Wales alone had a Public Monuments Advisory Board (PMAB), with power to control the building of monuments in public places. The initiative for establishing the PMAB came from architects, artists and other people apprehensive about seeing the landscape covered by artless enterprise. The New South Wales Institute of Architects did not want ‘the stiff, stark, stock figure of the soldier’ put on his pedestal ‘by the laudable enthusiasm of citizens, accompanied by a very regrettable want of knowledge of what is fitting and appropriate’. A member of parliament believed that the law should prevent ‘statuary by monumental masons which are not characterised by any degree of dignity or art, and which can only by the subject of derision and contempt’. The architects, artists and town planners who composed the PMAB issued a bulletin of appropriate designs for local memorials, encouraging diversity and good taste. They rejected some proposals, modified others, and when it came to the point they wisely did not try to prosecute a local committee which defied or ignored the guardians of taste.

The soldier figures are typically expressionless, standing at ease or with head bowed and rifle reversed, signallmg not victory but mourning. They are classless, and nearly always without rank. A dying soldier is much more rare than in the comparable monuments of say France or Italy, and (despite the Australian tradition of mateship) the soldier is rarely shown with another one. The passive stance is partly due to limitations of material and maker. Marble figures cannot easily be made to lunge; stonemasons, rather than sculptors, made most of the memorials, and their skill was primarily in making upright objects for cemeteries: their soldiers stand stiffly supported by stone tree-stumps. A popular belief that they were somehow mass-produced is wrong. The masons’ soldiers, many of which were imported from Italy, differ considerably from each other. The Sydney stonemasons’ firm of Anselm Odling had a branch office at Carrara, while some of those made locally were by Italian immigrant craftsmen. The figure at Harden-Murrumburrah, with its angelic face, was carved by Francis Rusconi, a stonemason of Gundagai, Australian-born but trained in Italy, who also made one of Australia’s most visited civil monuments, the Dog on the Tuckerbox. Sculptors were seldom engaged, mainly because they were more expensive, also because they were professional people who could not, except in a very general way, be told what to do. Sculptors’ figures in bronze, as at Double Bay, do tend to be more aggressive.

In the novel Kangaroo, written during his Australian visit of 1922, D. H. Lawrence wrote of the memorial which had recently been
The War Memorial, Newcastle, NSW
constructed at Thirroul, north of Wollongong, which he called Mullumbimby. He saw it as:

really a quite attractive little monument: a statue in pale fawnish stone, of a Tommy standing at ease, with his gun down at his side, wearing his puttees and his turned-up felt hat. The statue itself was about life size, but standing just overhead on a tall pedestal it looked small and stiff and rather touching ... wonderfully in keeping with the place and its people, naive but quite attractive, with the stiff, pallid, delicate fawn-coloured soldier standing forever stiff and pathetic.6

Standing forever? Many soldiers and obelisks and columns stand now in dwindling townships, in a landscape transformed since they were put up. Many have been moved. Others have been damaged, wilfully by vandals, innocently by well-meaning restorers. A few have disappeared. The idea of a national heritage, taken up by the Whitlam government of 1972-5 and institutionalised in the Australian Heritage Commission, may be the saving of them. Meanwhile they invite study as evidence no less illuminating than what lies in libraries and archives about a society which is fading from the memories of old Australians and has no place in those of the new.

NOTES

1. Mcleay Argus, 6 August 1920.
2. Since this essay was written, an unknown soldier killed on the Somme has been returned to Australia for ceremonial burial at the War Memorial.
3. Age, Melbourne, 4 December 1978.
5. T. D. Mutch in New South Wales Parliamentary Debates 19 October 1920, 1 07.
Breeza, New South Wales. Population 90
No matter how small
Every town has one;
Maybe just the obelisk,
A few names inlaid;
More often full-scale granite,
Marble digger (arms reversed),
Long descending lists of dead:
Sometimes not even a town,
A thickening of houses
Or a few unlikely trees
Glimpsed on a back road
Will have one.

1919, 1920:
All over the country;
Maybe a band, slow march;
Mayors, shire councils;
Relatives for whom
Print was already
Only print; mates,
Come back, moving
Into unexpected days;

A ring of Fords and sulkies;
The toned-down bit
Of Billy Hughes from an
Ex-recruiting sergeant.
Unveiled;
Then seen each day –
Noticed once a year;
And then not always,
Everywhere.

The next bequeathed us
Parks and pools

But something in that first
Demanded stone.
West Wallsend Unveiling, 28 January 1922

Culcairn, NSW. ‘Our Soldiers Memorial’
Philip Salom

SEEING GALLIPOLI FROM THE SKY

To remember the veterans with my child-illusion: war had turned their faces white around the eyes, the skin had gone translucent. Or consider the days of Anzac in the streets not only those in suits come back on duty but the ghosts among their ritual ranks always in uniform. That or the shock in sepia of platoons just hours before they left. The shock that shifts across the brain from left to right from the hemisphere of fact to dream, like troopships that crossed the hemispheres and left men wondering: was it fact or nightmare? Without a template of history to hold on these images. They got one, and nothing could shake it. Like the enemy it was sudden and total and like nothing else in the army it fitted their bodies perfectly. It would become a kind of hair shirt that could be worn with bounce ...

You see them level and sealed in or splayed like asteroids among the dimmed star-shells or their centres gone like a ring of keys where they stalled on the slopes and were covered in. The blown end of a Lee Enfield makes the weapon seem a crossbow. There the isolated spine is curved as a bow the loose ribs are warped arrows the earth has kept them close in its grip and quiver, only sometimes loosing an arrow in slow and gentle course out into the daylight.

You begin to mend them. Firstly you give them back their bodies.
The Archibald Memorial

Ted Scarfield
You pick the rosette from a man’s chest
pluck each petal of blood and let it drop into obscurity
(there is no copy of it back at home).
His was the famous rush towards machine-gun pits
but his medals were put too deep, and by the wrong side.
The stem cannot be seen, nor the bullet that gave seed
passing through sternum, heart, lodging against the vertebrae.
And the uprush of bloom into the khaki.

Bruises, those coloured moulds, lessen and are gone.
Ignore the condition of his arteries, whether the joints
gave trouble – they were too young. Your miracles
are for the body and now its dreams,
for these have lapped his gaunt face
like the midnight waves of evacuation.
But there’s something arcane about the clay
when the fierce Turkish sunlight baked it round his body.
The particles became magnetic, but the magnet’s
pulling wrongly: you’ve stripped his oppressors
from him but he sprawls down facing East
the light jostling his body, its energetic tearing song
calling him to fight – this is where he is intense
this harsher light must be Australia.

He sits up, slowly, exactly as machinery into place
or like a fold-out cardboard shape with savage detail
the machine-gun straightening up, locking its steel legs.
The sudden racket as the shots begin, chronic and nervous ...
He will not return as one who went to die well,
coming home like a kind of migrant
strange and unaccustomed, to be made a boy again
– city boy to find his streets
or country boy finding the bright train back
as through the eye of a needle
unthreading his name from the obelisk not yet built.
To grind away Mondays at the office
or the callous-breaking afternoons on land
dreaming of food through the other war of Depression.
Beside the wireless, monument of the everyday,
strong again, voting conservative
as he mostly would, forgetting violence
until the next war, seeing that one through
or dying again.
Or being again returnee, to a time where the world view –
his slow meccano – would crumple, seem obsolete.
Carl August Bahnsen

As a result of the Danish defeat in the Danish-Prussian war 1864, the southern parts of Denmark, Schleswig and Holstein, were annexed to the German empire. When World War I broke out fifty years later, Denmark declared itself a neutral country. However, Danes living south of the new Danish-German border were now technically Germans. Despite their Danish allegiance, they were recruited by the German army and sent to the fronts.

Carl August Bahnsen, born 1 November 1887 in W. Langenhorn (Schleswig), was drafted and sent to the Western Front. He was killed in action in Flanders, 29 July 1917. He was just one of the 4140 Danes who died for a cause that was not theirs.

Jacob D. de la Cour
Private John Rutherford, member of the Australian Imperial Force, wounded in France, 1917.

Peter Kocan

PHOTOGRAPH

Sometimes in the homes of the elderly,
Among the shabby, cherished possessions
You will find a framed photograph
Of a young man in quaint uniform.

Slouch-hatted, posing with full gaze.
‘My brother Jim. He went to the War ...’
And something in the aged voice conveys
The unspoken ‘and didn’t come home’.
One sees a troopship thronged at the wharf;  
Jim's parents being cheerful, hugging their boy;  
Younger brothers vowing to follow soon;  
A little sister not understanding.

Tumultuous months follow, with excited  
Gatherings to hear Jim's letters read aloud,  
Until an official telegram  
Makes something die in all of them.

Yet life goes on. The family  
Faces the long future, strife, Depression,  
Accident, illness, another war,  
The casualty lists of the commonplace.

And Jim has acquired an aura  
Forever tragic and beautiful,  
Growing not old as those who remain  
Grow old ... Till gradually

The minds wherein he is enshrined  
As son, brother, neighbour, friend, grow fewer.  
Those brief, sliding minutes on the wharf  
Have become sixty years.

Now, in a musty room somewhere,  
An old person makes a cup of tea  
And a not-yet-anonymous soldier  
Stares out of the photograph.
By 1919 this was a received idea which had its source in the first dispatches from Gallipoli. During the war it was developed by newspaper editorials on Australian troops and popular books such as C.J. Dennis's *Moods of Ginger Mick* (1916); soon afterwards it was given its classic formulation by C.E.W. Bean in *The Story of Anzac: The First Phase* (1921). Subsequently its significance has been examined by many historians, including Inglis, Serle, Manning Clark, Robson, Horne, Souter and Gammage, and although it has been revised and qualified, it has never been denied. Sixty years or more after the events that inspired it, the idea was re-examined and upheld by W.F. Mandle in almost the same terms as it had been formulated by W.M. Hughes.  

By the time Bean developed his interpretation of the bravery, initiative, resilience and comradeship of Australian troops at Gallipoli, the military achievement had acquired the aura of a legend. This has several aspects, of which two are prominent: the idea that the Australian soldiers at Gallipoli exemplified in the highest degree the typical qualities of the Australian male, and the idea that their participation in the First World War, first and foremost at Gallipoli, but subsequently in the desert and on the Western Front, somehow transformed Australia into a nation. The nature of this transformation is generally left unclear, though it is sometimes regarded as a human sacrifice, or initiation by blood into nationhood, a barbaric idea exposed and firmly rejected in *The Boys Who Stole the Funeral* (1980) by Les Murray. However, it is not necessary to put this interpretation upon the events. All that need be suggested is that Australian troops, an unknown quantity until 1915, revealed a distinct quality as warriors and proved that they were equal to the best. The fact that the immediate recipients of this proof were the valiant Turks who were up against them is of no consequence for the legend. The significant point is that Australian troops proved their mettle in the company of British regiments with a heritage of battle honours, to British officers who were otherwise shocked by the disrespect and lack of discipline of the Australians when they were not actually fighting the enemy. C.E.W. Bean noted that the first to eulogise the Australians was the British
correspondent of *The Times*. The novelist Compton Mackenzie, who had been posted to Gallipoli on the staff of the British commander, General Sir Ian Hamilton, recalled his first encounter with the Australians in Homeric terms; the passage deserves to be quoted at length, because it suggests that several aspects of the legend were influenced by British perceptions.

Much has been written about the splendid appearance of those Australian troops; but splendid appearance seems to introduce somehow an atmosphere of the parade-ground. Such litheness and powerful grace did not want the parade ground; that was to take it from the jungle to the circus. Their beauty, for it really was heroic, should have been celebrated in hexameters, not headlines ... There was not one of those glorious young men I saw that day who might not himself have been Ajax or Diomed, Hector or Achilles. Their almost complete nudity, their tallness and majestic simplicity of line, their rose-brown flesh burnt by the sun and purged of all grossness by the ordeal through which they were passing, all these united to create something as near to absolute beauty as I shall hope ever to see in this world. The dark glossy green of the arbutus leaves made an incomparable background for these shapes of heroes, ...

I overtook Pollen, Sir Ian Hamilton’s Military Secretary, talking to three Australians, not one of whom was less than six feet four inches tall. Pollen, who had a soft, somewhat ecclesiastical voice, was saying:

‘Have you chaps heard that they’ve given General Bridges a posthumous K.C.M.G.?’

‘Have they?’ one of the giants replied. ‘Well, that won’t do him much good where he is now, will it, mate?’

Poor Pollen, who was longing to be sympathetic and not to mind the way these Australians would stare at his red tabs without saluting, walked on a little depressed by his effort at making conversation, ... He looked carefully at the ground when he met the next lot, whereupon they all gave him an elaborate salute, and then, because he looked up too late to acknowledge it one of them turned to the others and said:

‘I suppose that’s what they call breeding?’

They really were rather difficult; and so, no doubt, was Achilles. 4

Paradoxically, the idea that the war contributed to Australian nationhood places the country’s emergence as a nation firmly in the imperial context, and even though a strain of anti-Britishness pervades the evidence which supports the idea, this did not, at the time, weaken the spirit of imperial loyalty. 5

It is hardly necessary to suggest why there is nothing in the writing of Australian combatants quite like the passage from Compton Mackenzie’s *Gallipoli Memories*, but it is remarkable that no writing at all by Australian combatants is enshrined in the legend which stems from Gallipoli. If the manly business of war is somehow bound up with the idea of Australia, the heroes whose exploits made the nation seem to have been strangely silent about it. They are celebrated in a legend sustained by folk memory, rituals and institutions, but not in the hexameters which Compton Mackenzie suggested were appropriate to
their exploits. Whereas a handful of combatant writings have assumed a canonical place in English and American (as well as French and German) literature, in Australia, which is supposed to have gained a national identity through the war, there is no writing which has achieved the canonical status of the trench poetry of Owen, Sassoon and Rosenberg, the memoirs (sometimes fictionalised) of survivors such as Aldington, Graves, Sassoon and Blunden, or the war novels which appeared in the United States in the twenties. It seems that either Australia's heroic combatants were silent, or they were silenced by the legend they inspired, at least until the revival of the Anzac tradition which began around the time Inglis wrote his first articles about it.

This silence, of course, is only comparative. The extensive researches of John Laird brought to light a quantity of combatant writing, especially in verse, but his own survey articles demonstrated that much of it was like the ephemeral writing which the war evoked everywhere. Almost all of this dropped into oblivion, and even combatant writers such as Leon Gellert, Harley Matthews and Leonard Mann, who are well-represented in John Laird's anthology, are barely mentioned in histories of Australian literature. Their relative obscurity, and the general neglect of writings by combatants in the First World War, is not simply a matter of quality, for that is not the only, or even the essential, condition for canonical status. Rather, I would suggest, it is the outcome of a disjunction between the ideals enshrined in the Anzac legend and the experiences recorded or depicted in the writings of combatants. It is this which has inspired silence.

At first glance there seem to be some striking exceptions or counter-examples to these generalisations. The finest novel of the First World War, The Middle Parts of Fortune was written by an Australian-born author, but Frederic Manning, like Martin Boyd, enlisted and fought in an English regiment and his novel is one of the great literary documents of the Somme campaign (a turning point in British attitudes to the war) which took place over a year later than the Gallipoli landings. Unlike so many of the war novelists and memorists, Manning did not envisage the war in terms of something else, such as pastoral, farce or allegorical quest, or depict it in impersonal mechanistic terms. His novel insistently confronts the war as a human phenomenon, and depicts the way human beings are implicated in something of their own making. This is what gives the book depth and universal significance. Its relevance is general, not specific, whereas Australian specificness is at the heart of the Anzac legend.

Leonard Mann's Flesh in Armour, on the contrary, is pervaded with a sense of Australian distinction.

Since we had been in England, however, the feelings which had been instilled into him by his father had weakened more and more as those of his distinctive
Australian nationality were nurtured by his resentment towards the cold alien English.
He stared at a brass-hat, and insolently neglected to salute him.

The Australians – the Australians. Ah, if the five divisions had been there, company on company. But they were scattered into different corps. They should all be one – one corps, and one indivisible in body as they were in spirit. Were the Tommies afraid of the new nations?10

The novel which begins with these speculations ends with the Australians united in Monash’s offensive on 8 August 1918. In the penultimate paragraph the reader is admitted to Johnny Wright’s reflections on the war and its aftermath:

they would be going home soon to mingle again with their own people in their own land. Some effect that return would have. They were a people. The war had shown that. The A.I.F. – was it not the first sign that they were, the first manifestation that a spirit had begun to work in the material mass?11

and the novel ends with a celebration of Australia’s military achievement as recorded in the General’s dispatches.

Flesh in Armour certainly reflects one aspect of the Anzac tradition, but this is introduced schematically and discursively. It is asserted rather than built into the story, with the result that the passages recording the evolution of Australian consciousness often read more like uplifting essays than fiction. The story depicts the experience of Australians fighting in the trenches on the Western Front; Gallipoli, which is at the heart of the tradition, is only invoked at the end, as a recollection ‘which seemed centuries ago’.

Ion Idriess fought at Gallipoli, though he was not in the original landing, and the published version of his war diary, The Desert Column,12 begins in the Dardenelles on 18 May 1915. Although Gallipoli has an important place in the book its main subject is the Australian Light Horse in Palestine and Sinai, culminating in the magnificent charge which captured Beersheba.13 The book reveals that in these campaigns it was possible to preserve heroic attitudes to war as an occasion for glory, yet the focal image of the Anzac was not formed on the victorious heroes of Beersheba. When the Light Horseman was embraced by the Anzac legend it was in his dismounted role where he was distinguished only by the plumes on his hat.14

The accounts of the fighting at Gallipoli in Idriess’s book do not spare the horrors of war. At Lone Pine he recorded the way the bodies of soldiers killed in action remained half-buried underfoot or were built into the parapets of the trench system:

Of all the bastards of places this is the greatest bastard in the world. And a dead man’s boot in the firing possy has been dripping grease on my overcoat and the coat will stink forever.
Yet in the same passage he recorded how

We have just been chuckling over a bit of fun away up at Quinn's Post. The boys rigged up quite an inviting bull's-eye and waved it above the trench. Each time the Turks got a bull, the boys would mark a bull. For an outer they marked an outer, for a miss they yelled derision. The Turks laughed loudly and blazed away like sports.15

The ability to sustain this sporting attitude to war in the circumstances of Lone Pine is astonishing, yet it was one way of coping with the horror, and the constant problem of bare survival. It is the rough equivalent of the cavalier attitudes of such soldier-poets as Julian Grenfell, who considered war a big picnic where one could enjoy being dirty and never had to change one's clothes, and it suggests the persistence of the idealistic gallantry of the first months of the war which was exemplified in Rupert Brooke's war sonnets and Grenfell's 'Into Battle', written four days after the Anzac landing, on the faraway Ypres front.16

At the same time, on the Gallipoli peninsula, Leon Gellert, who had been in the Anzac landing, was composing verses which avoided uplifting sentiments and rejected the rhetoric of heroism and sacrifice.17 'Church Parade - Anzac, May 3rd, 1915', which alludes to what was presumably the first church service on the Australian front, a week after the landing, explicitly confronts noble sentiments with the experience of soldiers in combat, by juxtaposing the Padre's consoling words with the thoughts of his congregation.

'He giveth mercy for the taking
And the blessed Day is due,
With a brighter morning breaking
Lovelier than ye ever knew.'
('Nobby Clarke'll take some wakin',
So will Toby Mason, too!)

This poem, and others like 'The Jester in the Trench', deploy the bitter ironies which became a convention of war poetry, to which Yeats later objected, because they so turned easily to sentimentality. It is certainly true that as the war progressed the gap between the rhetoric behind the lines and the experience of the men in the trenches became increasingly noticeable, and the facile irony this engendered became a cliché, yet the way in which the circumstances of the war at the front exposed the hollowness of almost any words uttered in the rear was starkly apparent to the men in the trenches, and was part of their experience. It reinforced, if it did not inspire, the sense that what they were going through was incommunicable (except to each other) and it almost certainly gave rise to the relative silence of Australian combatants.

This silence was broken, of course, in poems which expressed this
frustrating barrier and thus transcended it, and Gellert’s were some of the earliest in this vein. They foreshadow the work of Sassoon, to whom Gellert has been compared, but Sassoon did not cross to France until 7 November 1915, and although his first front-line poem was written soon afterwards, his first disillusioned and critical poems were not written until after the opening of the battle of the Somme, on 1 June 1916.

Unlike Sassoon, Gellert did not establish a single characteristic voice as a war poet. He composed only a small number of poems, and these are varied in tone, but they include a few lyrics which convey the experience of the Anzacs at Gallipoli more intimately than any other Australian war writing. ‘These Men’ is quite different from ‘Church Parade ...’ and much finer in its control of syntax and rhythms, ideas and images.

*Men moving in a trench, in the clear noon,*  
Whetting their steel within the crumbling earth;  
*Men, moving in a trench ‘neath a new moon*  
That smiles with a slit mouth and has no mirth;  
*Men moving in a trench in the grey morn,*  
Lifting bodies on their clotted frames;  
*Men with narrow mouths thin-carved in scorn*  
That twist and fumble strangely at dead names.

*These men know life – know death a little more,*  
*These men see paths and ends, and see*  
Beyond some swinging open door  
Into eternity.

Mood and feeling are precisely evoked through the rhythms, as they modulate from the solemn regularity of the first six lines, defined by the adjacent strong accents at the beginning and end of the first line of each pair, to the lighter more informal movement of the second part of the poem, as the closing lines are curtailed towards ‘eternity’, the only polysyllabic rhyming word in the poem. The adjacent accents in the opening lines sound a muffled, funereal note, but any hint that this might be merely a conventional gesture is avoided by the irregularity of the close. This gives the poem a more authentic tone than Laurence Binyon’s ‘For The Fallen’ which is standardly recited on Anzac Day, or the lines from Kipling’s ‘Recessional’ which adorn most Australian War Memorials. However, ‘These Men’ embodies sentiments which the rituals of Anzac remembrance have subdued. These surface at the point where the tonal modulation begins, in the scorn of the men whose ‘mouths thin-carved’ suggest the image of the crescent moon, which is, of course, the Turkish emblem.

Gellert’s Gallipoli poems are barely remembered and have failed to find a place in the legends of Anzac. The same goes for the early prose
sketches of military life and the Gallipoli narratives in verse written long after the event, by Harley Matthews, the other combatant poet who was at Gallipoli. Matthews had some significance in the development of Australian poetry through his creation of an irregular kind of verse, based on variously accented decasyllabic lines, interspersed with shorter lines and occasional rhyme, which is appropriate to the vernacular tone of soldiers' stories. These make up the substance of Matthews' narratives, which attune the reader to the voices and sentiments of men at the front. 'Women are not Gentlemen', for example, recovered by Les Murray in The New Oxford Book of Australian Verse, concerns a dangerously unfashionable subject, the misogyny of soldiers and the frequently attested battlefield legend that a particularly deceptive and effective enemy sniper is actually a woman with a contempt for the codes of combat. This is hardly compatible with the ideals of the Anzac legend.

Matthews' poetry has an informality, and therefore conveys a sense of authenticity, which is completely opposite to the artificiality of William Baylebridge's An Anzac Muster, the most elaborate attempt to incorporate the Anzac legend in a literary work. It is not known precisely when the first edition of this book appeared but it was apparently published privately in 1921 or 1922, which would make it a relatively early example of First World War prose. Although Baylebridge revised it later, according to his usual practice, he did not, apparently, alter its underlying principles. These suggest that by the time the book was written, the Anzac legend had developed all its essential aspects: the idea that Australian troops had heroic virtues which set them apart; the idea that their slaughter was a national sacrifice, and quite explicitly, in a tale called 'Bill's Religion', as well as in the conclusion, the invocation of the spirit of Anzac as a substitute religion.

as the Squatter ... looked across the still, the illimitable miles of shining pastures, it became peopled with a multitude of heroic shapes - forms with calm eyes, and brows touched to splendour; the deep silence, too, as his heart listened, grew eloquent with tumultuous music; and a great voice, surely a divine voice, in exultation cried. Well done, ye good and faithful ones! Blessed are ye; for such is the Kingdom of Earth. (p. 257)

An Anzac Muster is pervasively flawed, indeed ruined, by the same faults which mar Baylebridge's poetry; insincerity and pretension. Even without the 'Author's Preface' and 'Protest', the form of the book, a cycle of tales with its sources in Boccaccio and explicitly in Chaucer, tempts the author into using the bridge-passages for self-regarding and superior observations on narrative style and moral point, thus alienating the reader. However, the 'Preface', a tutorial debate between the 'author' and a panegyrical essay on his own work,
undermines the reader's faith in his sincerity from the very beginning. The 'author' never denies the praise embodied in the panegyric, so that the debate proceeds on the assumption that it is well-deserved; his argument against it is simply a concern that it might have an adverse effect on the reader, and this is exactly the effect the 'Preface' produces. The reader who gets as far as the 'Protest' – and I doubt if many would – will only be more convinced than ever that the author doth protest too much.

Curiously, the panegyrist praises the 'author's' candour and simplicity of style, when it is the very absence of these qualities which ruin the book. Compared to almost any prose of the First World War, except perhaps e.e. cummings Enormous Room (1922) or David Jones In Parenthesis (1937), the style is far from simple. On the contrary, it is artificial and affected in the same way as the Georgian prose which Cyril Connolly characterized as 'mandarin' when contrasted with the prose of Hemingway, and the stilted effect is compounded by Baylebridge's avoidance of auxiliary verbs and preference for inversion. The dominant tone is derived from Norse sagas and Old English heroic poetry, or rather, the style in which these were translated in the nineteenth century.

Baylebridge perhaps had a further aim in employing this style. The sagas and Old English poetry are notable for their wry litotes, and Australian speech is supposed to have a similar terse quality. Baylebridge may have hoped to match the two, so that his Anzacs would seem to revive the Old Germanic heroic code. The attempt is a failure. The laboured repetition of formulae only adds to the contrived artificiality of the narrative, and individual speeches do not ring true;

This Black Mack lay stiff because of his wounds; he could not turn. Looking, with dull eyes, at the roof, he replied slowly: 'The luck was, and is not. Let the dead dog lie. The land I come out of will breed men enough'. (p. 76)

The effect is pretentious rather than candid.

This style also enables Baylebridge to be evasive. The opening tale 'Lone Pine' contains nothing that could not have been discovered from correspondents’ despatches, and the details of hand-to-hand fighting are in generalized form:

Many, with clubbed rifle, split out the brains of others, trodden soon to mud on the floor there. Bombs, knives, whatever came next to hand, both foe and friend brought into use enough. (p. 63)

This has a counterfeit tone when set beside the account of Lone Pine in Idriess's journal (as it is, in fact, in John Laird's anthology). The whole paragraph from which it is taken is made up on the pattern of battle scenes in Old English poetry or the sagas, and Baylebridge obviously wanted his Anzacs to be viewed as a comitatus (O.E. hyrd) - in the Old
Germanic heroic tradition, an elite fighting group held together by bonds of honour and obligations of service. However, as in his style and his general philosophy of life, Baylebridge did not draw directly on his sources, but on current vulgarizations of them. He invoked a romantic version of the Old Germanic code which associated it with race. An idea that the Australian race (whatever that is) is supreme over the individual pervades the book. It is explicit in titles such as ‘All Flesh Is One’ and it emerges strongly in Baylebridge’s view of death in battle:

Our comrade, having passed thus the confines of the flesh is not dead ... he is extended into and through that being indivisible and not to perish, that his race knows.

... Sacrifice, O ye living, to the resurrection! (pp.139 & 9)

We see here the implications of viewing the Anzac tradition as a blood sacrifice. Baylebridge makes it even clearer in a tale called ‘Bill’s Religion’, in which the tenth commandment is: ‘Thou shalt lay down thy life for more life’ (p. 124).

The writers I have considered are only incidentally mentioned in Australian literary histories, and the situation is the same for others, such as Frank Wilmot or J.P. McKinney, whose work I have been unable to include. The few literary treatments of the war which made Australia hardly broke the silence which reigned until recently and some surviving combatants, such as Bill Harney and Martin Boyd, did not write about their war experiences until near the end of their lives.

There is also a silence in some of the literature in which the war has only an incidental role. Stan Parker ‘would not be coaxed into telling the interminable boys’ adventure stories’ when he returned from the war, and Hurtle Duffield in Patrick White’s later novel, The Vivisector buries his war experience. In Kylie Tennant’s Foveaux, Jimmy Rolfe returns unobtrusively and divulges almost nothing.

This silence might be partly explained by the fact that the Anzac tradition sets the Australian (and New Zealand) experience apart from the common experience of war. Though it acquired other associations, the Anzac tradition is centred on events which took place on the Gallipoli peninsular in 1915, and these justify the celebrated reputation of Anzac troops. At this time, the heroic spirit and gallant attitudes to sacrifice which were released by the outbreak of war still prevailed. Action and words seemed to match, and the gap between front and rear was yet to appear.

Between the failure of the Gallipoli campaign and the battle of the Somme, which produced 60,000 casualties, a third of them killed on the first day alone, these attitudes were reversed. Heroic ideals became insupportable in a war of attrition, though they continued to be voiced...
from behind the lines and in propaganda. The outcome of the war, as a
turning point for European culture, was the change which occurred in
1916 from the heroic optimism which had prevailed until then, to the
bitterness and disillusion expressed by such poets as Sassoon, Owen
and Rosenberg, and in the post-war years by the memoirists and
novelists.\(^{28}\)

However, bitterness and disillusion are incompatible with the Anzac
tradition, in which heroic attitudes, including the ideal of sacrifice, are
fossilized, despite the fact that Australians fought in some of the
bloodiest battles on the Western Front. The Anzac legend about the
making of Australian nationality is centred on events which were
regarded elsewhere as marking the collapse of civilization. These had a
profound effect on European literature; they fostered a distrust of
rhetoric, an insistence on sincerity, a belief that it is safest to trust in
individual experience and a sense of the fragmentary nature of things.
These characteristics are apparent not only in the combatant writing,
where they are explained, but also in other works, such as The Waste
Land and Ezra Pound’s Hugh Selwyn Mauberley. The very idea that
death in battle is somehow a noble sacrifice for nationhood is called ‘the
old lie’ in Owen’s ironically titled Dulce Et Decorum Est\(^{29}\) and mocked
in Pound’s well-known lines:

Died some, pro patria,
non ‘dulce’ non ‘et decor’ ...
walked eye-deep in hell
believing in old men’s lies, then unbelieving
came home, home to a lie,
home to many deceits,
home to old lies and new infamy;\(^{30}\)

The Anzac tradition had to exclude this. It was concerned with
creating a rhetoric rather than exposing it. Where much of the
European and American literature of the war was de-mythologizing,
Anzac involved the making of a legend and a myth. If one lesson of the
war, after 1916, and even after a week on Gallipoli according to Gellert,
was to discover the dangerous delusions of the old rhetoric, then the
silent or subdued response of Australian combatant writers to the
evolving Anzac tradition is not surprising. To express the actual
individual experience of war, and especially of combat, would run
counter to it. Leonard Mann acknowledged part of the Anzac spirit;
William Baylebridge tried to exploit, but precisely because the war
made sincerity of language an issue, and Baylebridge insisted so
egregiously on his own, his book rings false.

After Leon Gellert, the disillusioned note was rarely sounded until
Bill Harney recorded his war experience for the ABC, and Martin Boyd
wrote about his war. In Boyd’s ironically titled novel When Blackbirds
Sing (1962), 31 Dominic Langton goes to war out of a sense of personal honour, believing that his own fight will also be a fight for country and Empire. When he returns ‘he does not want to think about anything to do with the army. All that cult of death was over for him’, and like Siegfried Sassoon, he throws away his medals. Bill Harney did not even bother to send for his medals. When he returned, he ‘got off at Melbourne and went straight through’ riding ‘eight hundred miles to Borroloola on a horse to forget all about it’. He remained silent for forty years:

I’d never crack on that I’d been to the war. I was somehow ashamed of the war ... I often get a message from the Ninth Infantry Battalion, where they ask after me and I think a lot of them because they were all good fellows. But I could never get away from the hatred I had for war and all it stood for. 32

A.B. Facey was in many ways a typical digger of the type admired by Compton Mackenzie. He was twenty years old when he enlisted in 1914, and a bushman exactly six feet tall. Just before he joined up, he had been working as a prize-fighter in a boxing troupe. His autobiography reaches its climax in a short but vivid account of the Gallipoli campaign, which he saw from the first day. It is completely lacking in heroics, but records the details of slaughter, fear and the terrible experience of killing in hand-to-hand combat which haunted him for the rest of his life. There is no sense of personal or national glory in his conclusion, which runs counter to the Anzac tradition:

People do terrible things in wars, in the name of their country and beliefs. It is something that I find very sad and frightening. 33

The response to war of two typical diggers, Harney and Facey, like the patrician response of Martin Boyd, reveals the ambivalence of the Anzac legend. It fixed the values of 1914-15 and mediated between the diggers and the patriotic hopes of Australians at home, thus bridging, or concealing, the gap between the values of the men at the front and the rhetoric behind the lines which is exposed in most war literature. Nothing which happened after 1915, including the appalling Australian casualty rate, could obscure the legend. On the contrary, subsequent events were seen to reinforce it. Yet at the same time it blocked the general lesson of the war; the disillusion with a civilization which could tolerate death and destruction on a scale unsurpassed in any other conflict, for a cause which seemed increasingly hard to justify. If this is how it seemed to Siegfried Sassoon, who was brought up a gentleman in the English shires, it must have seemed even less justifiable to diggers from the distance of Australia.

As the events upon which the tradition is based recede its mythic attributes become even more prominent. Asked how he felt when the America’s Cup challenge was tied with one race to go, the yachtsman
and financial wizard Mr Alan Bond invoked the spirit of Gallipoli. 'We had our backs to the wall then too' he is reported to have said,\textsuperscript{34} 'but we won that one'.

Actually, Alan, we lost.

NOTES.


2. See, e.g. Horne, op. cit.


5. The upsurge of Imperial loyalty and its persistence despite the antipathy of Australian soldiers to British command has been widely noticed. See, e.g. Manning Clark, loc. cit., and Gammage, op. cit.


8. First published anonymously (London: Piazza Press, 1929); an expurgated version was published pseudonymously under the title \textit{Her Privates We} (London: Peter Davies, 1930) by 'Private 19022'; the original version, under the author's name, Frederic Manning, appeared in 1977 (London: Peter Davies).

9. I have tried to suggest this novel's significance and qualities in an essay in \textit{Overland}, 75 (1979), pp. 45-49.


11. Ibid., p. 255.

12. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1932. All further references are to the Australian Classic edition (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1982).

13. The charge occurred on 31 October 1917. Frank Dalby Davidson depicted it movingly in \textit{The Wells of Beersheba} (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1933), though he had never been a member of the Australian Light Horse and had no
experience of desert war.


15. The Desert Column, pp. 42-41.


17. Leon Gellert, Songs of a Campaign, 3rd. enl. ed. (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1917).

18. Matthews’ sketch ‘The Best Policy’, and his verse narrative Two Brothers are included in John Laird’s Other Banners.

19. Details of publication and revision are given in P.R. Stephenson’s preface to the Memorial Edition (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1962). Hereafter all references will be to this edition and are included in the text. Much of the prose about the war did not appear until around 1930, though Henri Barbusse’s Le Feu came out in 1916.


28. This disillusion is also reflected in many of the private documents cited by Bill Gammage in The Broken Years (Ringwood: Penguin, 1975), pp. 163-70.


34. In Time magazine, 10 October 1983.
Norman Lindsay, 'Will you fight now or wait for this?'
Wars for the most part are men's wars, but they rarely, if ever, take place without the participation and involvement of women. Artists make images to show what happens in wartime, to portray who is involved and what they do. These images convey the artists' personal vision, and they reveal how society perceived these events and people. To this extent artists' visions of women at war reflect the society from which they come.

Some of the most enduring images of women in war are those which show them as innocent victims, fleeing from their homes as a result of devastation and grieving as a result of the loss of loved ones. This suffering was dramatized in the First World War recruiting posters which portrayed women as helpless and in need of being saved from the vile, marauding German brutes who might invade Australia. In 'The peril to Australia' Norman Lindsay depicted German troops conquering an Australian town and threatening its women residents and in 'Will you fight now or wait for this?' (See p. 182) he showed German soldiers aiming guns at an Australian farmer and his wife. Lindsay's images seem melodramatic because the scenes are located in a particular historic moment and because with the wisdom of hindsight viewers know that such events never happened and were never likely to have taken place. However, elsewhere, in Europe, women were vulnerable, the victims of war. Dyson showed this in his drawing, 'First bombardment of Hazebrouck' (1917), which conveys the suffering of women whose homes have been destroyed. Dyson portrayed these women's despair and dejection through their poses and expressions: one woman sits with hunched shoulders hugging herself for comfort, another rests her hand on her cheek and stares blankly outwards, another stands with her hands on her hips with her eyes on the ground, as if waiting for inspiration as to what she should do, and a fourth turns from the scene, taking a last look back. The scene is a wartime one, but it suggests any group of women who have lost their homes: these effects could have been caused by earthquake, fire and
flood. This image has a universal power and conveys not just the vulnerability of women, but of human beings in general. A. Henry Fullwood’s ‘Street in le Cateau’ (1919) also portrays a peasant woman deprived of her home in a bomb-damaged street. However, Fullwood juxtaposed the bent figure of a lonely woman and her barrowful of worldly possessions with uniformed men immersed in conversation. Through this contrast Fullwood suggested that the impact of war was different for citizen and soldier, that the old woman was defenceless in a way the men were not. Fullwood reminded the viewer that war is not an act of nature, but an intentional act, and that someone is responsible for the havoc wreaked upon hapless bystanders (who are often women).

The suffering of women as innocent victims has changed from war to war. In the Second World War women experienced hideous treatment in internment and prisoner of war camps. Alan Moore drew the civilian internees at Belsen in April 1945. He was one of the first Australians to visit this camp and his images were later received in Australia with bewilderment. His drawing, ‘Blind man in Belsen’ (1945), depicts women and men walking around a bleak landscape like wraiths among the dead and dying. He portrays the five living beings as isolated shapes, immersed in their grief.

The best known images of women as victims from the Vietnam War are those in posters such as ‘August mobilisation to end the war in Vietnam’ which focuses on the agonized face of a weeping Vietnamese woman. In the Vietnam War the tables were turned: in this war it was not the enemy who were depicted performing atrocities, but the Americans and Australians who were accused of being responsible for the misery of village women in Vietnam. These posters were only one aspect of Australia’s participation in the war, but they were a powerful emotional weapon for those campaigning for peace. Once again in the Gulf War, Kevin Connor portrays women as war victims in images such as ‘Old woman in the town square at Najaf’ (1991) and ‘Refugees’ (1991). In depicting the destructiveness of war and the suffering it brings, Connor does not just focus solely on the women; he also portrays a man whose family died when his house was bombed in a Basrah suburb. In ‘Refugees’, he depicts those who walked for miles through the desert under the stars, heading for the borders to the north. Like artists of previous wars, Connor’s drawings emphasize the effect of war on innocent bystanders. It is not necessary to know the details of the campaigns to feel for these women.

George Lambert’s ‘La croix de guerre’ (1922) is a poignant expression of the grief of women and old men when their sons and husbands die in war. Lambert depicted the wife, mother and father of a serviceman who has died. Their suffering is individual, the mother sobs into her handkerchief, the wife faints, and the father stares in bewilderment
and shock; but the family is interlocked through their linked arms, which suggests united strength and support. Lambert captured the way death can be felt among a closed group, with each person locked in their private emotions, but bound by a common sorrow. The context is one of war, but the events depicted are those with which most women and men who have lost someone close to them can identify. After the Second World War, Weaver Hawkins and Noel Kilgour, in ‘Two minutes silence’ (1953, see p. 191) and ‘War’s aftermath’, respectively, pay tribute to the sorrow of women left behind with fatherless children. And in his Gulf War etching, ‘Mother and child’ (1991), George Gittoes portrays a grieving woman, draped in black, with her dead child in her lap. Again, it does not matter whether these women are friend or foe, we feel for them in their suffering, for it is an experience which we can all understand, in which we are all one. Roslyn Evans, in ‘All the fine young men: In the middle of 1990 as Saddam and Bush rattled their sabres’ (1992, see p. 191) looks at this theme from a different vantage point of a woman’s perspective. Instead of recording events after the fact; women’s sorrow when a loved one has died in war, she creates an image which conveys women’s ongoing nightmare, that their sons will be asked to go to war and be killed. She writes on to the glass face of the work her heartfelt wish ‘that [her] sons will never have to undergo any war experience for any reason’. She engraved this prayer in the hope that she would never have to carve a tombstone for her sons.

While just as many suffered and grieved in the Second World War as in the first, women were not shown as sufferers in Second World War posters. This may have been because it was no longer thought appropriate to portray women as victims in a war in which they played an active role in the factories, farms and forces. In this war, posters, billboards and shop displays promoted a beautiful woman with a beatific smile, holding an infant to her chest. This nurturing mother, this woman with inner strength and confidence, was the woman the men were asked to fight for.

Even in the First World War, women were shown to have another presence, to have determination and resilience. Australian women’s participation in the First World War was severely restricted: on the home front they raised funds, helped in recruitment campaigns, kept family farms going while their men were away and provided comforts by packing parcels and knitting socks. Grace Cossington Smith’s ‘The sock knitter’ (1915) conveys the archetypal patient, meditative woman, absorbed in her work. The image draws much of its strength from its simplicity of line, as the woman’s lowered eyes lead directly down, through the white blouse to her active hands, the focus of the picture. The eyes, the hands, create a mood of intense concentration on the task at hand. Cossington Smith portrayed a woman (her sister Madge, seated in the garden studio at the family home) knitting socks to send
to soldiers in the trenches; but this painting is not generally thought of as a war picture because its theme of calm concentration is one which is timeless. Nonetheless it is a powerful image of the fortitude of women during war.

George Coates's 'Arrival of first Australian wounded from Gallipoli at Wandsworth Hospital, London' (1921, see p. 192) portrays the strength of women as saintly carers. Coates showed the devotion of the nurses by posing the women around the recumbent figure like guardian angels, and by placing them within the orbit of the ray of light which flows symbolically through the window on to the body of the wounded man. The nurses' static poses remove them from the everyday world, and dignify them by giving them an aura of calm endurance. The lofty hall gives the scene a sense of significance. The mood of reverence in this painting matches the tone of C. E. W. Bean's comments about Australian nurses in the *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18*, where he wrote that 'no womanhood has ever presented a richer association of feminine tenderness and sheer capacity'. Like Bean, Coates paid tribute to the nurses' ability and their dedication to the soldiers' care. In the Second World War artists again portrayed nurses as carers, performing a variety of tasks, but they portrayed these women without any saintly overtones.

In the Second World War artists painted women at work in many arenas, they showed members of the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) performing a variety of tasks, as well as workers in factories. Whether by chance or choice a number of women artists depicted the more traditionally regarded womanly activities: canteen workers, camouflage net and quilt makers, workers in clothing factories, as well as nursing. These women are shown as busy, active participants, as opposed to those from the First World War who quietly waited like the 'sock knitter'. They are portrayed as ordinary people in routine situations as opposed to Coates's rarefied saints.

Sybil Craig's images of munitions workers, such as 'No. 1 Projectile Shop, Maribyrnong' (1945, see p. 193), convey these factory women's commitment to their work, their involvement in their job. Craig was an official war artist during the Second World War and spent much of her time with the women at the Commonwealth Explosives Factory, Maribyrnong, getting to know them, watching them perform a wide variety of tasks and learning about their daily working lives. She provided over forty images of munitions workers, a detailed record of their exacting work and their mechanical environment. In her explanations of the activities she depicted, she recorded the output of the girls and their length of service, and she noted the strains placed on workers in the TNT room. In her use of vibrant colours and a thick paint surface she evoked a sense of lively activity and a feeling of spirited interaction among the women.
Nora Heysen’s images of women’s medical work likewise portray a commitment to regular work. Like Craig, Heysen was an official war artist during the Second World War. She spent part of her time with the women and men working in the blood and serum preparations unit of the Sydney hospital. ‘Separating blood’ (1944, see p. 194) shows Private Thorpe with an array of jars and tubes used for separating blood and ‘Typing blood’ (1944) depicts Lieutenant McNeil working with test tubes and glass plates. These images show women seriously undertaking complex tasks. There is a marked difference between these images and Roy Hodgkinson’s drawings, ‘Sister Joan Box’ (1944) and ‘Captain Constance Box’ (1944, see p. 195). Unlike Heysen, Hodgkinson does not show his women committed to their work, but rather as if they were modelling clothes: Hodgkinson does not depict what these nurses do, but what they wear. He portrayed Constance in tropical uniform after ‘scrubbing up’, looking at the mask in her hands, before putting it on, and he showed Joan at a later stage of dress, wearing her mask and gown and pulling on her rubber gloves. In these images the valuable work these women performed is reduced to a fashion parade. Hodgkinson’s drawings reveal his background as a newspaper illustrator. They seem today to be masculine trivializations and glamorizations of women’s work, although they may not have been intended to be, or been recognized as such, at the time.

If Hodgkinson was consciously or unconsciously sexist in his approach to women’s war work, Lyndon Dadswell, in ‘Munition workers’ (1942, see p. 196), paid tribute to women as partners in the workforce, and conveyed the strength of union among workers. Dadswell did not illustrate the practical details of the everyday activities of munition workers, but showed the solidarity of the woman and man by reducing their figures to simple forms, linking them together, and concentrating their gaze in a single direction. Dadswell turned these figures into heroes. He not only treated women as equals but symbolically paid homage to the importance of their work: their contribution to the defence of Australia. Dadswell realized in three-dimensional form, Curtin’s claim that the workers were fundamental to the war effort, that without them the nation would not have been able to continue to wage war.

In the imagery from the Vietnam and Gulf Wars women are rarely shown as active participants. Nurses and female entertainers went to Vietnam, but they were not depicted; nor were women on the home front. Kevin Connor drew Mother Teresa in Baghdad, when she visited this city to look after the refugees in the months immediately after the Gulf War, but, as others have done, Connor saw this woman as a guardian angel, devoting herself to the weak and needy. However, George Gittoes portrayed women as active participants in the peacekeeping forces sent to Somalia and Cambodia. In works such as
'Corporal Julie Baranowski, Military Police, searching Somali women' (1993, see p. 197) and 'Sergeant Jodie Clark' (1993), he showed these women as strong and assertive, playing a vital role in the field.

As well as showing women as innocent victims and as active workers, the imagery of war shows women as sexual beings. Will Dyson’s lithograph, 'Compensation' (1918, see p. 197) conveys the perennial courtship game, the exchanges between two people who are attracted to each other. Dyson portrayed a woman’s communication with a soldier in which the two protagonists stand apart in their separate worlds, and yet are visually drawn together through eye contact and physical stance. In 'Balcony, Troopers’ Ward, 14th Australian General Hospital' (1919) George Lambert likewise portrayed a woman’s liaison with a soldier. The setting and artistic approach are distinct, but in both lithograph and oil the relationship is similar: the woman and soldier stand apart, making shy, tentative approaches to each other.

Numerous wartime images focus on the relationships between men and women, and provide a range of complex attitudes towards women’s relationships with servicemen. There is a predominant trend towards coyness during the First World War and a developing sexual liberation in the Second. Cecil Hartt’s cartoon, 'The swank' (1917) conveys a woman’s satisfaction in ‘catching’ a soldier. The unsophisticated digger is the centre of attention, lounging in an armchair, with his young girlfriend beside him, wearing his badge, and her mother looking on with admiration. Hartt obtained humour from the paradox of the match, an incongruity which has become more absurd, and implausible, through time.

Noel Counihan’s ‘Woman and soldier (Pick-up)’ (1942) and Frances Lymburner’s ‘Soldier with girlfriend’ (1942-44, see p. 198) are Second World War presentations of the courtship game. They resemble First World War images like Hartt’s ‘Mary had a little lamb’ and Barker’s ‘A helping hand’ which also show a girl walking arm in arm with a soldier. In the First World War images the girl is pretty and the digger is a jovial larrikin and in Counihan’s drawing she is dwarfed by the American GI, so that the partnership seems unequal, but in Lymburner’s version they appear suited to each other. The rifle on Lymburner’s woman’s shoulder, suggests a proprietorial interest in the soldier who accompanies her. Lymburner’s expressive line gives the couple a breezy, carefree feeling which, apart from the menacing presence of the gun, detaches the couple from the harsh reality of war. Lymburner portrayed a couple comfortable in each other’s presence; in ‘Back home’ (1945) Sali Herman portrayed the joy of two people reunited. Unlike Dyson’s and Lambert’s representations of coy meetings, Herman’s image shows a couple warmly embracing at the Sydney docks after a troopship has arrived. He captured the unity of
the couple by portraying them fused into one whole, and emphasized their total absorption in each other by showing them bound together and isolated in space.

In 'One Sunday afternoon, in Townsville' (1942, see p. 199), Roy Hodgkinson provided an openly sensual depiction of the courtship game. This drawing shows the interchange between several couples attracted to each other in a public arena, the beach at Townsville. The women are close by the men, and have physical contact with them. They have a sensuality because Hodgkinson conveyed kinaesthetic values: he portrayed the tension in the buttocks and showed the taut muscles in the legs. But in their stylized poses these figures seem unreal: the stenographer lying on the sand could be a period pin-up, and the soldier standing on the right resembles a male model. This image is located in time: such an open image of sexuality would not have been drawn by an Australian artist in the First World War, and such a detached view would not have been created in later wars.

In these examples women are viewed as sexual beings, and their relations with men are looked upon with approval. In other images artists depicted women as sexual beings in a less favourable light. In 'The other virgin of Albert' (1918, see p. 200) Dyson portrayed the lady profiteers who flirted with the Germans. He depicted his 'virgin' as a plump figure in a closely fitting evening dress. This is the female equivalent of the fat men, the capitalists, whom Dyson represented as living in a world of advantage in his prewar Daily Herald cartoons. Dyson showed both women and men to be puffed out with swollen vanity and proud self-assertion. This woman's 'success' is a result of the war, but the parallel between her prosperity and that of the peacetime capitalists demonstrates that this image is about any woman or man involved in profiteering at any time. Dyson did not regard this woman as a sexual being, but as a profiteer, and it is not her sexuality that he condemned, but the use she made of it. However, in 'Victory Girls' (1943) Albert Tucker presented the sexuality of two women as if it were a demotic, primitive power. Tucker reported that he based this painting on a newspaper story about girls doing a strip-tease for soldiers in a back alley. He later admitted that he was then an outraged Edwardian puritan, and that the intense sense of personal indignation he expressed in the painting reflected Australian war-time fears and outrage at women's sexuality. Whereas Dyson was concerned with the profiteering aspect of the sexual activity, Tucker was more alarmed at the sexual liberation of the women. During the First World War no Australian artist portrayed the sexuality of women with such disgust as Tucker did in the second.

In the examples considered women are viewed on the one hand as weak and vulnerable and as innocent sufferers, and on the other hand as nurturers and partners in the workforce. They are seen as sexual
beings, but their sexuality is perceived by different artists with varying perspectives. These images of women emphasize that the place of women in war is multifaceted and goes beyond their role in the women's services. Because the artists portrayed subjects which had meaning for them as individuals, the images of women at war are highly selective, but they are important in obtaining a perspective of the time, for they emphasize what was seen and felt to matter.

NOTES

1. Goya showed peasants fleeing from their homes, families in despair and anguish as a result of famine and women being raped, in his 'Disasters of war' (1863). The scene is all too familiar from present day conflicts in Bosnia and Rwanda.

2. In composition this work can be related to an American poster, 'We need you' (V1070): in both works a nurse leans over a soldier and there is an upright figure on the left and, in both, light streams in from above onto the patient.

3. Wandsworth Hospital was a converted school. Coates worked as an orderly for almost four years in this hospital and painted this subject from personal experience.


5. A different view of nursing during the First World War was given by Jessie Traill, an Australian artist who paid her way to England to serve as a VAD and who illustrated step by step the details of her routine on night-duty in the hospital where she worked in England before going to France. Traill drew a cartoon of 'A day at Gifford House' where the VAD is depicted performing routine chores. Traill did not in any way see herself as a saint, nor particularly as an embodiment of tenderness or devotion, but as someone who went about her work, which happened to be helping sick soldiers to recover.


7. David Barker's 'A helping hand', drawn for a cover of Kia-ora Cooee, is reminiscent of Hartt's 'The swank'. Both show a pretty girl with an uncultured digger, and portray the Australian soldier laughing at himself and his circumstances.

8. During the Second World War there was tension between Australian and American servicemen because of reports and rumours that while Australians fought overseas, Americans seduced their wives and girlfriends. However, this drawing which portrays Australian soldiers on leave from New Guinea, members of the American Army Corps including black Americans, members of the WAAAF and AWAS, and stenographers with the Australian Army Intelligence and the American Provost Corps, shows little sign of friction or racism.


10. However, the German war artist Otto Dix did view women in this way in post-war images like 'Girl before a mirror' (1921).
Weaver Hawkins, ‘Two minutes silence’

Roslyn Evans, ‘All the fine young men: In the middle of 1990 as Saddam and Bush rattled their sabres’
George Coates, 'Arrival of first Australian wounded from Gallipoli at Wandsworth Hospital, London'
Sybil Craig, ‘No. 1 Projectile Shop, Maribyrnong’
Nora Heysen, ‘Separating blood’
Roy Hodgkinson, 'Captain Constance Box'
Lyndon Dadswell, 'Munition workers'
George Gittoes, 'Corporal Julie Baranowski, Military Police, Searching Somali women'

Will Dyson, 'Compensation (Back at the wagon lines)'
Frances Lymburner, 'Soldier with girlfriend'
and act as sources of relief in the box columns and individual pros-
cutual triumph. In this way, the outpouring of the consciousness who had conquered a dual, harsh, hostile land was
enriched with the legend and built into social instances of military
process of an unconventional but effective kind. The image of the
Australasian soldier of rugged, laconic, resourceful, independent
and anti-authoritarian - generated the term conventional sign of the
Digger’ which provided them the standard.topography of the
remembered version of the warrior mythology, which, in its turn further

Roy Hodgkinson, ‘One Sunday afternoon in Townsville’
Will Dyson, 'The other virgin of Albert'
Images of War in Australian Screen Drama

In common with many cultures, Australia has accorded warlike exploits privileged status among its national mythologies: military events in its history – as regrettable as the genocidal conflicts with its indigenous peoples – have a high and positive profile in the national consciousness. This is understandable in the light of the fact that the (relatively) young social democracy has been involved in five wars this century, for a total of over twenty years between 1900 and 1972: one indication of the significant part played by war in the experience of many Australians. However, the elevation of war to the mythic status it achieved entailed the interplay of more complex and subtle factors than such simple accounting suggests. The process begins with the institutionalisation of a natural if not entirely laudable pride in feats of arms (by ceremonial observance of the ‘sacrifice’ of the ‘fallen’, by the transformation of the ‘facts’ of military events into legend, etc.) and develops quickly to the point at which assertions of patriotism and national status are expressed frequently in terms of military prowess. Only international sporting achievements would seem to loom larger in their contribution to national self-image and self-esteem.¹

This being said, there is something special in the manner in which Australian military mythologies have been constructed, giving an indication of how and why they have become so deeply ingrained in the popular imagination. Most obviously, they have tapped and, indeed, appropriated several of the more favoured and potent myths (or ‘national fictions’)² by which the nascent nation sought to define and assert its sense of itself in the late colonial and immediate post-colonial periods. In this way, the overarching myth of the pioneer/bushman who had conquered a vast, harsh, hostile land was integrated with the legends built from actual instances of military prowess of an unconventional but effective kind. The image of the ‘bushman-become-soldier’ – tough, laconic, resourceful, independent and anti-authoritarian – generated the now conventional sign of the ‘Digger’ which provided then the standard iconography for the Australian version of the warrior mythology, which, in its turn, further elaborated the ‘Australian Legend’.³
It is, however, an interestingly paradoxical myth: on one hand it fitted well into the ‘ocker/macho’ mould of the dominant male mythologies of the culture in which physical prowess and skill were equated with status and even with moral worth and in which the exigencies of existence evinced cynical, iconoclastic and alienated attitudes. From this is derived the Australian version of the ‘code-hero’, which includes the Digger and Crocodile Dundee. On the other hand, juxtaposed with these elements in the character of this incorporating (or archetypal) figure is a certain sentimentality: it is evidenced in the emotional subscription to ‘mateship’, to a male camaraderie and an exclusive group loyalty based primarily on shared hardships and dangers, and to a patriotism that asserted both Australian nationalism and loyalty to the erstwhile colonial ‘mother country’. Further, the warrior code expressed in this mythology seems to share with certain other cultures (the Old Norse, the Japanese Bushido, etc.) a transcendent attitude to death in battle, one in which the term ‘supreme sacrifice’ not only takes on its usual quasi-religious overtones but is seen as an apotheosis for each warrior who dies an ‘honourable’ death: it is an heroic and a glorious act, to be enshrined in the national pantheon, and a rationale and an ameliorate for the suffering, the loss and sense of waste war brings.

The above brief account begs many questions but it provides a frame for the consideration of the ways in which the experiences of war by Australians have been presented in Australian screen drama, both the cinema and television. Broadly speaking, Australian screen product has tended to work in and with the mythic structures so far outlined in the treatment of war, reflecting, embodying and asserting the popular fictions upon which they draw. Very few have essayed the myths as problematics, accepting them as cultural ‘givens’ rather than engaging thoroughly in their critical interrogation. Note, for example, the acquiescence with the sexism inherent in the notion of mateship in virtually all Australian war films, while women – and positive presentations of female issues and values – are notable by their absence, exploitation or devaluation. Once again, the darker underside of the ‘Digger’ ethos, which has generated expressions of xenophobia, racial superiority and a reactionary social/political ideology, is largely ignored in the repertoire. Even so, one can cite a number of nationally popular and critically successful films and television programs that provide significant insights into war as a human experience and into Australians’ understanding of themselves and their relationship to world politics. At the same time, these works indicate, in their particular historical contexts, the prevailing social/cultural assumptions, and even neuroses. The themes that have emerged over the eighty or so years of the industry’s history range from assertions of Anglo/Australian patriotism, of national identity and of international
status as realised in and by warlike exploits, to reassessments that foreground the cost to the young nation of embroilment in foreign, mainly imperialistic wars, as well as pointing up the culpability of British – and lately American – strategists and politicians in the waste of Australian lives. 

The earliest of the oeuvre (setting aside for the moment Arthur Caldwell’s 1907 feature, *Eureka Stockade*) was Raymond Longford’s melodramatic propaganda *Australia Calls* (1913), posing the question: what if Asiatic hordes – the ‘yellow peril’ of popular (and persistent) prejudice – were to invade Australia? Crudely exploiting xenophobic patriotism its narrative techniques and special effects were, for its time, adventurous and apparently potent in audience terms. However, its main interest here is that not only did it deal with continuing Australian preoccupations (its vulnerable strategic position, its racism) but that the ingredients of narrative and character were to be repeated set-pieces – and sometimes stereotypes – in many later films about Australia at war. For example, the film presents the bush-bred hero figure, highlights the unique character of countryman-soldier ‘born in the saddle’ and connects self-image and moral standing with fighting ability and physical courage: that is, it launches, not only the embryonic ‘Anzacs’ but also the prototypical form in which the coalesced bush/war mythology is to operate.

Australia’s involvement in the Great War of 1914-18 led naturally and inevitably to a surge in the production of war films, with the Gallipoli landings of 1915 being, obviously, a favoured subject. The myth of ‘Anzac’ was born in the carnage and the film industry both reflected and promulgated it in films like Alfred Rolfe’s *The Hero of the Dardanelles*. Such was its efficacy that the infant industry was mobilised for the war effort, producing propaganda films that celebrated warlike exploits (eg. *How We Beat the Emden*, Rolfe, 1915) or sought to stimulate fear and loathing of ‘The Hun’. A recurring theme (echoing *Australia Calls*) was the infiltration of Australia by Germans as spies or invaders. (Cf. *If the Huns Come to Melbourne*, George Coates, 1916.) However, as the patriotic fervour of the early days of the war gave way to the realisation of its terrible human cost, the propaganda war on screen (as in other media) became more rabid, and the conscription controversy of 1916 and 1917 saw the cinema pressed into the service of the Government’s pro-conscription campaign. (Cf. *The Enemy Within*, Roland Stavely, 1917.) At the same time, such overt propagandizing was proving counter-productive, as war-weariness and the need for escapist entertainment led film makers in the direction of comedy and melodrama.

Despite the confirmation in the new media of newsreel and fiction film of the ‘Anzac’ hero, and the impact and import of the mystique of the Anzac and his legend in terms of national pride, national identity –
and the embodiment of all this in the notion that Australia had ‘come of age’ in international significance in the crucible of the war – this mythic ‘lode’ remained untouched by post-war film makers for a considerable time. In part, this was a reaction to the devastating consequences of the war for the nation, but it was also because its cinema had declined as a result of the dominance of the American industry and its stranglehold on exhibition in Australia. But two figures kept alive the ethos and image of the Digger: first, Pat Hanna in the 1930s, and then Chips Rafferty in the ‘40s and ‘50s.

Hanna’s case is interesting in the light of the ‘received’ version of the myth. He plays the character Chic Williams in a trilogy of films – *Diggers* (1931), *Diggers in Blighty* (1933), and *Waltzing Matilda* (1933) – in a way that exploits but transforms elements of the archetype of the Australian soldier to give an alternative view and an alternative image of the legendary heroic figure. Andrew Pike comments:

The first two films depicted Chic’s exploits in the army: trying to evade active service by malingering in the base hospital, attempting to steal rum from the army stores, and going on leave in England and encountering the social pretensions of the aristocracy. The third film, however, is set contemporaneously in the Depression, and almost in self-pity, depicts the hardships and loneliness of ex-diggers out of work in the cities, drifting into the country in search of labouring jobs, and growing too old to succeed in romance with younger women.7

This persona functions as a corrective to the icon of the Anzac: as ‘lag’, ‘con-man’ and ‘hard case’. He deals in expediency and sardonic humour as strategies for survival, exhibiting no conventional soldierly qualities; as a failure in a failed post-war world, he indicates a darker existential side to the figure. In his image, his attitudes and his action, he is a familiar Australian figure, the working-class anti-hero, alienated, a loser at the bottom of the pile who knows the irony of it all too well, but can still make a bitter joke about it.8

The character(s) portrayed by Chips Rafferty in Charles Chauvel’s *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (1940) and *The Rats of Tobruk* (1944) as well as in subsequent post-war ‘outback’ epics, owe much to the Hanna persona, but they are presented in a sanitised and more positive mode. As Andrew Pike says of *Forty Thousand Horsemen*:

Chauvel’s calculated myth-making saga of Anzac heroism cleaned up the digger image by matching the irreverence and mischievousness with loyalty to both mates and the national cause, and with a ferocious efficiency in battle ... Rafferty served a dual purpose of providing comic relief, and of showing the resilience and fighting spirit of an essentially lower-class Australian in the company of his more educated and better-bred mates in the army.9

Of course, the film had to perform the inevitable wartime patriotic and propagandistic functions: the heroics and the military triumphs had to
be foregrounded, and the national character had to be left unsullied by moral ambiguity or tendentious conduct. Nonetheless, it is not without its subtleties of observation of character and of social nuance and complex by-elements that prevent this tribute to a bellicose nationalistic mythology from becoming a two-dimensional action-adventure rendition of one of the nation’s favourite legends. Besides, the battle sequences – especially the (rightly) celebrated recreation of the famous charge of the Light Horse at Beersheba in 1917 – rank with the best of their time and by themselves are worth the price of admission.10 In any case, such is the temper of the work that the myth of ‘heroic failure’ beloved by Australian critics – and artists seems very much at arm’s length.

The Second World War – and Chauvel’s film-making – had taken a different direction by 1944 when The Rats of Tobruk was produced. In it he again celebrated a famous feat of Australian arms, another contribution to the Digger myth, showing that the new generation of Australian soldiers were worthy heirs to the Anzac legend. But the celebration is muted, the triumphs hollow and even the characteristic cocky humour is subdued. War is presented as grim, brutal and, ultimately unheroic, just as it had been in Damien Parer’s documentary, Kokoda Front Line (Academy Award Winner, 1942) and Movietone’s Jungle Patrol (1944). In the climactic scene of Chauvel’s film, the Australian protagonist and a Japanese soldier – no more than a youth – struggle savagely in hand to hand combat in the mud of the jungle of New Guinea, not for military honour or jingoistic national pride, nor yet to prevail over an ideological enemy, but to survive. One young man lives, another dies. There is no victory; and no apotheosis. This is what warfare boils down to. As the American General George S. Patton said: ‘No poor dumb bastard ever won a war by dying for his country – he won it by making the poor dumb bastard on the other side die for his country’. So Chauvel, who five years before had come close to glorifying war, can see by this time that in war there is no glory, no mythic pay-off worth the price.

American war movies of this period manifest much the same tendency, though almost always with more ambivalence. Even though the sophisticated industry in the U.S. was geared for propaganda as an instrument of national war policy and had developed a lot of product (from the late ’30s) directed to motivating anti-Nazi and anti-Japanese sentiments, the ‘war is hell’ theme came to be more frequently and forcefully expressed as the global conflict wore on and took its toll. Note, for example, the difference between Guadalcanal Diary (1943) and A Walk in the Sun (1945). Meanwhile, the British industry moved from ‘stiff upper lip’ responses to war, such as In Which We Serve (1942), to the bitter, ironic mode which can be found in an immediate post-war film like The Long, the Short and the Tall, (1951).
After its so-called 'renaissance' in the early '70s, the Australian film industry took some time to address the issue of war on any real scale, despite the U.S., British and (much more limited) Australian traditions and repertoire on which it could draw, despite the fact that it had been engaged in two major wars and an anti-insurgency campaign since World War Two and despite the persistence of the Anzac/Digger myth in the popular imagination. One of several reasons for this neglect, advanced by Jack Clancy, is that:

Australian cinema, like any other, is subject to the changing laws of trend and fashion, and the seventies were not the time for war films. The post-Vietnam period, with echoes of the peace movement, flower-power and 'make love not war' still in the air, saw the war-film go the way of the genre that was its companion in violence, the western.11

The article from which this quotation is taken is subtitled, interestingly, 'The Failure of Australian War Films Since 1970,' in which Clancy takes the view that the mythic structures – and the values and beliefs they encode – erected on the military events in Australia's history have been treated as cultural sacred cows and, as he says, 'have been subject to almost no serious examination'.12 The absence of critical scrutiny of these cultural elements is one of the paradoxical results of the resurgence of nationalism that was a feature of the late 1960s and the '70s. In asserting its cultural independence during this period, the country in general and the expressive arts in particular that voiced their attitudes tended to fall back on the certainties of identifiably Australian traditions. While this gave us the 'ocker' syndrome, exemplified by Paul Hogan and Sir Les Patterson, it also led to a confirmation of the favoured nationalistic warrior mythology as epitomised by the Anzac and the Digger.

Of the films considered by Clancy, two early and minor works, Between Wars (1974) and Break of Day (1976), attempt a corrective to this trend, presenting 'a clash between traditional militaristic attitudes and the nationalist, humanist ones which were seeking to combat them', and thereby 'raising questions about the Anzac tradition'.13 Of the three major examples he cites,

only one of them emerges with honour, and that a flawed honour, from the responsible undertaking of presenting war stories about Australians to Australian audiences. Two of them reinforce the dangerous myths that provide a supporting sub-structure for militarism, and none of them attempts the task of subverting or de glamorising those myths.14

The films in question are Breaker Morant (1980), Gallipoli (1981), and The Odd Angry Shot (1979), the first of which emerges 'with honour', albeit 'a flawed honour.' And this Boer War film certainly is packed with paradoxes, some of which are the basis of the ironies Clancy
considers the strongest positive feature of the powerful text,\textsuperscript{15} while others compromise its ideological integrity in terms of its stance in the presentation of militaristic mythologies. Despite the fact that the film stresses the paradox of Australian soldiers, after their nation’s political independence, being employed by Britain as colonial mercenaries to put down an insurrection of other colonials (with whom they would have seemed to have had more in common than with the British),\textsuperscript{16} the audience, at the end, is left with a sense of injustice and offended nationalism at the trial of three and execution of two Australian soldiers by British military authorities for reasons (the text asserts) of political expediency.\textsuperscript{17} The sentiment generated is anti-British and anti-authority but not anti-imperialistic or anti-militaristic. Indeed, the audience is meant to admire the three prisoners when they join their captors to fight off a Boer commando raid and, as with its ready recourse to the archetypal image of the tough, irreverent, cynical ‘larrikin’ bush-soldier of the myth, the film rests without great unease, on certain assumptions that, from a humanistic point of view, one might characterize as reprehensible: to kill Boer guerrillas is right and necessary; to use Boer women sexually is the natural privilege of the soldier; to deny by force the national aspirations of a people in the name of a third party – imperial Britain – is an accepted function of traditional loyalties. British military/political authorities can be morally wrong but this war – and war \textit{per se} – is not questioned to any great extent. As Stephen Croft comments:

\begin{quote}
Instead of examining or even broaching such issues, ... \textit{Breaker Morant} in effect invites one to view its representations of the Boer War from the political-cultural standpoint of the imperialists ... Our heroes may bitterly resent their treatment by the British, but insofar as they accept war as a job and articulate no critique of the imperialism they are fighting and dying for, they \textit{endorse} the political-cultural values of the British. \textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

In general terms these points apply also to Peter Weir’s \textit{Gallipoli} for, despite instances which point up the pity, the horror and the cruel human cost of war, (and the perceived culpability of arrogant, inept British leadership for the profligate waste of Australian lives in this futile, disastrous campaign) the film embodies, asserts and, in the final analysis, celebrates the grand nationalistic myth of ‘Anzac’, reinforcing it positively in the consciousness of 1980’s audiences. To be fair, the fact that it was an immense popular success in Australia (and elsewhere) suggests that its underlying sentiment and narrative/cinematic strategies were well-tuned to the psychic/emotional climate of the time, especially in Australia: the myth of ‘heroic failure’ would seem to have had renewed currency in 1981.\textsuperscript{19} Furthermore, the portrayal of the process by which boys become soldiers is detailed and psychologically individualised even more successfully than in \textit{Forty
Thousand Horsemen (to which Gallipoli pays not a little homage), while the theme of 'the pity of war, the pity war distils' is more effectively realised than in The Rats of Tobruk, despite that film's admitted emotional impact. As a consequence, audiences come to know and to care about the major figures, to identify with them, to understand their motives for fighting in this distant, foreign land and to respond appropriately to the cathartic events portrayed.

By working almost exclusively in the familiar, traditional terms of the Digger/Anzac legend, the film tends, however, to take a conservative ideological stance, privileging the more positive elements and playing down the problematics. In this way, the telling (if obvious) irony of the 'Trojan Horse' episode and other more bitter negations of war are overshadowed by instances that reassert the status of this historical event as a nationalistic symbol. For example, the group of 'typical' young Australian men upon whom attention is focused, soon to be thrown into the holocaust of war, display the sense of adventure, of youthful exuberance along with a naive patriotism that is at once attractive and touching, as this spirit is expressed in images of sports and games, juxtaposed with those of warfare in a nationalistic paradigm in which the one informs and validates the other. Further, the ethos of 'mateship', linked here to the Damon and Pithias legend, thereby adding a sense of mythic profundity, is once more a central thematic, while the grandeur of the imagery locating the raw, untried antipodean troops on the sites of historic campaigns and legendary feats of arms elevates their warlike enterprise by reference to this epic mythic framework. The cultural resonances generated by these images are potent but, in being so, they add to the dignification of warfare, in historic terms, as a valid human enterprise. Finally, the fact and the manner of the death of Archy, the film's central tragic figure, leaves us with the conclusion: 'even if the war was dubious, the sacrifice was good', which raises, on one hand, the point of the significance of such sacrifices to the Australian sense of nationhood and, on the other, the issue of the achievement of an apotheosis by heroic death in battle.

At this point, I must confess to an ambivalent response to the film and to its sources in history and mythology. Rational humanism might indicate that this war (and war as a human enterprise) was a futile, tragic waste of young lives and the cause (arguably) of a social and spiritual dislocation that inhibited the cultural maturation of the young nation, but along with this attitude – and the anger it engenders – is a certain admiration for the courage and spirit manifested and a stirring of national pride. Is this why Anzac Day ceremonials and renditions of 'The Last Post' still tug at the heartstrings?

Nonetheless, the ideological propositions implicit in Gallipoli are extremely tenuous, even though audiences and most critics apparently subscribed to them at the time of its first release and even though they
are still being expressed. This and other films that define patriotism and nationalism in terms of military exploits in foreign wars tread a morally questionable, even reactionary, path. The primary proposition they enact, the ‘coming of age’ on the international scene by means of heroic feats of arms, can be countered by the assertion that Australia more emphatically declared its independent nationhood by its rejection of military conscription in the referenda of 1916 and 1917 rather than in the bloodsoaked trenches of the Middle East and France. Gallipoli, along with the television ‘mini-series’, Anzacs (1985) and the 1987 film, The Lighthorsemen, however, confirm the conventional wisdom, as if, to paraphrase James Wieland’s comment on Anzacs, nothing new had been said, written or shown since 1915, that the critical reassessment of the history and the myth had not taken place. And the set of beliefs embodied in these rehearsals of the persistent myth has had its impact on new generations of Australians. Commenting on his reasons for going ‘willingly’ to fight in Vietnam, Don Tate says:

I took with me ... comic-book images of Tobruk, the Somme, Gallipoli and the Kokoda Trail. The spirit of Anzac forged on a thousand battlefields. Honourable war. Noble and splendid ... An overwhelming spirit of patriotism.

Perhaps more disquieting, though, is the recurring theme in Australian screen drama in which the warrior achieves apotheosis, a transcendent heroic nobility, by the ‘sacrifice’ of his life. Since Gallipoli, it has emerged in a number of television treatments of war, notably Anzacs, Sword of Honour, Vietnam and, to an extent, 1915, with some emphasis on its corollary, ‘only the worthy are worthy to die’. In reference to Gallipoli, Livio and Pat Dobrez comment:

The last scene of Gallipoli can come as no surprise. The entire film has prepared us for Archy’s apotheosis, which is his dying. Its aim is to elevate not an individual (like Frank), but the Hero, the Myth, the Smile. We all share in this mystique. Kill Frank and we kill one man, on one occasion. Kill Archy and we objectify Death itself, we evoke all the pathos of a death which is eternal. That last frozen shot of the movie is no aberration. Gallipoli really does glorify death, long before Archy actually dies.

While Jack Clancy notes that:

It is at first glance reasonable to argue that having Frank, the less idealistic, more sceptical character survive, while idealism, beauty and virtue are destroyed, is appropriate enough, since the Great War brutally dispelled naivety, idealism and illusion, while it endorsed and reinforced scepticism. But it remains true that the glory, the glow of pride, even the national achievement, rest with Archy, because it is in the idea of noble, heroic sacrifice that so much of the meaning of the Anzac legend rests. ‘Archy shall not grow old, as Frank who is left grows old’.

In addition, Wieland states, in his ironic reading of Anzacs:
Men acquire moral stature through war, and heroism is equated with inner integrity. After the fashion of chivalric texts, war is uplifting ... Martin’s death redeems ‘Pudden’, who dies heroically in both the book and the telescript. War had finally made a man of him! ... the war dead are heroic, immortal, immutable.30

In this ideological context, manhood – and, by association, nationhood – are to be validated not only by the demonstration of unconventional but effective fighting qualities but also by making the ‘supreme sacrifice’, the ultimate consecration of an ethos and a mystique by the shed blood of those pure ‘lambs’ fit for ritual slaughter.

This quasi-mystical concept, enshrined in Western culture and its dominant religion, does come, however, under some limited critical scrutiny in a number of Australian screen dramas. In 1915, the principle is partially subverted by the image of the physically and mentally maimed ‘survivor’, who, at the end, stands as a metaphor for the real human consequences of war. Indeed, the myth itself is brought into question: there is loss, suffering, real alienation but no glory. Once again, in Anzacs, with the horror and futility of it all as background, the ambiguities of character, motivation and relationship and the instances of radical personal and social dislocation in the mini-series point up its potential for a telling critique of the traditional thesis. However, as Wieland points out, the myth is rehabilitated by the complacent conclusion, and the value of ‘heroic sacrifice’ is once more confirmed.31

Of the three major treatments of the socially, politically and psychically traumatic Vietnam war, the mini-series, Sword of Honour (1986) purports to debate the issues of involvement in that ill-judged and ill-fated conflict, but it too ultimately succumbs to the emotional seductions of the nationalistic legend, even if with some residual bitterness. Vietnam (1987), a rival mini-series, strives to be more true to the unpalatable facts of that ‘dirty’ war even, unusually for programs sourced in Australia or the U.S., showing more of the Vietnamese people’s side of the story (and more problematically) than any other screen treatment up to that time. Furthermore, the portrayal of the moral and psychological impact of the war on Australian combatants and their families and on Australian society at large, is presented with considerable impact, not the least because of its innovative interplay of the ‘realia’ of archival material (from film and television of the period) and fictional drama.32 The growing sense of alienation of soldiers, the social dislocation in Australia and the problems of healing the psychic wounds of the war are powerfully delineated. Metaphors range from news clips and dramatisations showing the burgeoning anti-war movement to the wrenching image of a bitter, paraplegic young ex-soldier, so traumatised that he goes into hiding from his family. When found, he says to them: ‘Yes, it’s me. Sort of’. But even in this
treatment, the Australian soldier is idealised, especially in comparison with the Americans whose reputation for the brutal treatment of Vietnamese civilians is graphically illustrated, while the essential decency of the Australians remains largely unsullied. Once again we emerge as unfortunate pawns in the global power game, with 'Cold War' politics substituted for British imperialism.

An earlier film, *The Odd Angry Shot* (1979), had dealt with the Vietnam experience in similar terms. It foregrounds the difficulties faced by Australian soldiers fighting and returning from an unpopular and unwinnable war and restates some of the easier terms of the Digger mythology – the mateship, the rough humour, the anti-authoritarian cynicism, the pragmatism and resourcefulness of the archetypal bush soldier, but with a brusque stoicism replacing heroism in the face of inevitable defeat. In its presentation of the horrors and the ironies of war it exhibits the potential for black comedy along the lines of *M.A.S.H.* and *Catch 22*, but the generic territory opened up is not exploited effectively: the comedy (broad and 'blokey') is played mainly for laughs rather than as ironic commentary and this, along with a less than confident handling of the 'war/action' generic elements, contributes to the sense of the lack of a thematic centre – and of a moral centre – to the film. Nevertheless, these very factors may render it a useful social document, illustrating the country's uneasy, uncertain processing of the Vietnam experience.33

According to some readings of *Breaker Morant*, that film may well be the most effective treatment of the Vietnam war. A number of commentators have drawn the fairly obvious analogy between the Vietnam and Boer Wars, with some American critics relating it directly to the notorious My Lai massacre and the Calley trial, while others have seen it as an allegory about the Indo-Chinese Wars per se. These interpretations are plausible, of course, but even though the correspondences are many and pertinent, it is perhaps best construed in terms of the post-colonial Australian ambivalence about a still-dominating Britain. The most useful analogue with the Vietnam experience may be the use (or abuse) of 'colonial' soldiers (the Australians) as mercenaries by the Imperial Power (the U.S.), employed to put down a rebellious subject people – the Vietnamese. Indeed, the recurring theme of British 'perfidy' has been readily transferred to fit the Americans in a more direct way. The acrimony directed to the former by screenwriter David Williamson in *Gallipoli* was redirected by him to the latter in *The Last Bastion*, in which the arrogant General MacArthur was substituted for arrogant British leaders.34 Notwithstanding this, *Breaker Morant* can be read as a parable of the modern insurgent or guerrilla war, an all too prevalent phenomenon of our time. As Harry Morant says: 'It's a new kind of war, George. A new war for a new century' and perhaps the ironies of this text may be
the appropriate response to war in our era.

Taking this into account, along with the many ugly images of war and its consequences in a number of Australian screen dramas, however, the tendency has been towards the privileging of the romantic and the transcendental (on primary or on sub-textual levels). This has led to an idealisation of 'heroic sacrifice' that engenders an emotionally lugubrious catharsis, quite at odds with the horrific realities of modern warfare. In this light, even the best of the oeuvre lose something by comparison with the great works in the repertoire that have similar subject matter and thematic/narrative trajectories. For example, set the mythology and sentiment of *Gallipoli* against the unromantic moral passion of *All Quiet on the Western Front* (the 1930, but especially the 1976 version) or the studied interrogation of warfare as 'rite-of-passage' in *The Red Badge of Courage* (both the 1951 and the 1974 versions). Then again, compare the admirable *Breaker Morant*, potent in its interplay of ironies, with *Paths of Glory* (1957) and *King and Country* (1964), both of which attack political/military injustice with a more controlled but pungent anger while also pointing up the destructive futility of war *per se*. And consider again *The Odd Angry Shot* in relation to its progenitors – *M.A.S.H.* (1970), *Catch 22* (1970) and even *The Virgin Soldiers* (1969) – in which the absurdity of militarism and of war are highlighted by savage comic irony.

These latter texts enforce a critical interrogation of instances of warfare and the militaristic ethos (and the attendant myths) from the 'rationalist-humanist' viewpoint: and they are texts that also, by analogy, refer to other repressive and inhumane institutions and regimes. Given these implicit criteria, the 'Great Australian War Movie' is yet to be made. Jack Clancy doubts if it will in the foreseeable future in the light of the inability of the Australian cinema 'to come satisfactorily to terms with the needs of the Australia of the 1980s'.

This may be so, but I am less pessimistic about the possibilities: while the mainstream cinema is customarily committed to 'tried-and-true' mythic formulae in this and other subject areas, television docu-drama producers and independent film makers have manifested more critical vision and inventiveness in the past and may be the hope for the future in this as they have been in other genres.

NOTES

1. It is perhaps worth noticing that the most generally and enthusiastically observed celebrations in Australia are for a horse race – The Melbourne Cup – and the commemoration of a military campaign Gallipoli, 1915-16, both of which are contenders as the defacto National Day. 'Australia Day' – January 26th, marking the first British settlement in 1788 – runs a poor third!

4. See Jeni Thomley, ‘Where the Boys Are,’ Filmnews, February 1981. Note that an anti-war film made by women—*Two Minutes Silence*, by the McDonogh sisters (1933)—was a ‘failure’, and no print now exists.
5. An indication was seen in D.H. Lawrence’s novel *Kangaroo* (1922) but it was 64 years before it was taken up by the screen industry. (See Tim Burstall, *Kangaroo*, 1986) Note also that television current affairs programs had treated some of the policies and practices of the R.S.L. (The Returned Servicemen’s League) that could be said to reflect something of these ‘darker’ attitudes, but this area of thematics has not been taken up in screen fiction texts.
6. This last thematic element has been a factor not only in its overt treatment in the ‘war films’ discussed later, but also in screen drama dealing with colonial rebellion—*Ben Hall, Ned Kelly, Against the Wind* and *Eureka*—and even is manifested allegorically in *Bodyline*, the treatment of a controversial series of cricket matches which became tantamount to open war between Australia and England.
8. One can refer to many manifestations of this figure in Australian literature, especially in the works of Lawson, Richardson and White, for examples.
10. The intercutting of the frenetic images of the charge was a virtuoso piece in terms of editing praxis of the time. *The Lighthorsemen* (1986) emulated rather than updated the treatment of this historical episode, but its revisitation of it, with its *homage* to Chauvel’s filmic methodology, is the best thing in an overlong and too often dull text.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Both the South African Boers and the Australians were European colonial peoples who had shared a tough pioneer spirit in alien and inhospitable lands—and consequently, they both had a growing tradition of rough, irregular ‘bush’ soldiery. Ironically, they also shared the dubious distinction of having invaded their lands, and displaced and subjected the indigenous peoples in each case. In *Breaker Morant*, the lack of attention to the African Black population is one of the most striking absences and silences.
17. The action was intended to placate Germany’s reaction and prevent its possible intervention and, by demonstrating even-handed justice to the Boers, help prepare the climate for peace-talks. However, the film stresses the irony that the Australian soldiers were not only the scapegoats of British policy but were victimised for the ruthless execution of their ascribed military mission.
18. Stephen Crofts, ‘*Breaker Morant* Rethought or Eighty Years On The Culture Still Cringes’, *Cinema Papers*, Issue 30 (December-January 1980-81). See also Shirley Walker’s article in this volume.
19. In Australia, as in most of the western world, 1981 was a time of economic recession bordering on depression. One can understand, in this context, the appeal to a dispirited and pessimistic people of this celebration of pure, unsullied heroism—especially tragic heroism.
20. The allusion is to Wilfred Owen’s ‘Strange Meeting’.
21. An actual wooden horse is wheeled in to a recruiting drive for the Light Horse Brigade at a country fair.
22. This is a feature of most Australian war films, and is perhaps the major
element of *The Odd Angry Shot*.

23. The parallel is effectively - and blatantly - realised in the presentation of a
game of Australian national football in the Egyptian desert (with the Pyramids
as backdrop) just before the young men go into battle, as is the 'frame' symbol
of the running race which expresses a spiritual striving both in athletics and in
war.

24. Livio and Pat Dobrez, 'Old Myths and New Delusions: Peter Weir's Australia',
in *Kunapipi*, IV, 2 (1982), p. 70. Also reproduced in this collection.

would apply Wieland's comment also to the popular serial, *The Sullivans*
(1975+), a 'soap-opera' treatment rather than a saga of 'a family at war'. Its
recuperation of the values of an older, idealised Australia may be considered as
a conservative intervention at a moment of social, cultural and political change
and foment in Australian history.

26. Don Tate, quoted by Michael Cordell in 'Coming Home', *Sydney Morning

27. The advent of the television mini-series as a common form of treatment of
favoured subjects and themes in this most popular - and populist - of media,
has made available these extended examinations of young Australians at war.
Note that, as a result, there has been ten times as much screen time given to
this topic since the screening of 1915 in 1983 than in the ten preceding years.


29. Ibid., p. 9.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., p. 11.

32. See Stuart Cunningham, 'Textual Innovation in the Australian Historical Mini-
Serries', in John Tulloch and Graeme Turner eds., *Australian Television*

33. See comments on this film by Clancy, op. cit., pp. 6-7; Thornley, op. cit., p.10;
and Susan Demody in *The New Australian Cinema*, op. cit., p. 95. For a de-
tailed discussion of the Vietnam War see Helen Gilbert's article in this volume.

34. As in this case, most television mini-series dealing with war themes tend to
adopt the documentary drama mode. It is appropriate to the historical source
material, of course, and a staple of the medium, but by now it tends to be the
conventional, even conservative approach.

35. Clancy. Ibid., p. 10.

36. For examples: the independent films *Every Day, Every Night* (1983) and *Bluey
and Curley* (1986) both of which experiment with form and technique as well as
challenging conventional apprehensions about their subject matter -
respectively, the 'psychological casualties' of the Vietnam war, and the collision
of popular mythology and reality in the archetypal digger's experience in
World War Two; and the television docu-dramas *The Dunera Boys* and *Cowra
Breakout* (both 1985) which examine critically two moments in Australian World
War Two history; respectively, the treatment of Jewish refugees as enemy
aliens, and the attempted mass escape of Japanese prisoners of war, in both of
which Australian policies and conduct are presented in less than a favourable
light.
Old Myths and New Delusions: Peter Weir’s Australia

To the layman’s eye Gallipoli is technically flawless: superb shots of outback country, a convincing evocation of the period, thoroughly believable Gallipoli cliffs, fine acting (even in the minor roles), and something which is to say the least rare in the Australian film industry, a good script — thanks to David Williamson. Moreover the picture, unlike Picnic at Hanging Rock (an otherwise impressive film which was fumbled towards the end), is dramatically tight, completely under control from first to last. It is full of splendid touches, like the appearance of the wooden horse early in the piece, to which the audience immediately responds, recognizing the allusion to Troy. Then there is the perfect miniature, the scene with the camel driver in the desert. There is the parallelism of two wildernesses, the deserts of the new world and the old, and, even more striking, the link drawn between the lights and gaiety of the departure from Perth (and of the nurses’ ball in Egypt) and the Luna Park effects of the arrival at Gallipoli. There is the — nicely timed — moment of sheepish, ineffectual dawning of consciousness, when someone realizes the Diggers have carried out rough justice on the wrong Egyptian shopkeeper. There is the controlled pathos of all those sequences set in the shadow of the pyramids, particularly the one in which Archy and Frank race towards the tombs. Motifs of innocence and of death combine here — and of course the run for the pyramids ironically prefigures the last run at Gallipoli. There is the sensitive, lyrical effect of the swimming sequence on the beach. At this point the camera takes us under the water, distancing us from the fighting. Suspended in a dreamy fluid the naked Diggers seem remote from the reality above, temporarily freed. Then the illusion is broken, one of them is hurt, and we are returned to the real. Finally, there is the satisfyingly balanced shape of the film as a whole, first the treatment of Innocence, then of Experience, beginning with Western Australia and Egypt, ending with Turkey.

And yet there is a sentimentality about Gallipoli which is neither local nor incidental but structural, built into the bones of the drama. This becomes more and more apparent as we think systematically about what we have seen, resisting the soft lyricism of the camera whose
effect is quite simply to seduce. At this point the question arises: what does the film say? (Not: what is it intended to say, but: what, in fact, does it say?)

The structure of Gallipoli is built on an underlying metaphor: that of the race. The film opens with a scene in which Archy races against himself. Shortly after, Archy races against a doubtful character who, at this stage at least, functions as the villain. Then Archy races against Frank. In Egypt there is the race for the pyramids. Finally there are the runs at Gallipoli, Frank's backwards and forwards from HQ to the front, Archy's towards the Turkish lines. In this case Frank races against time to save the day and Archy races into the arms of death. Interestingly, the protagonists race against each other on three occasions. In the first Archy is handicapped (his feet are wounded), in the last he is killed. In the first and second the two are competing, in the last they are not, at any rate on the face of it. Inevitably Archy wins the race. He always wins, except in Egypt, when it does not really matter. In order to grasp the implications of this we have to examine the Archy-Frank pair much more closely. Archy is blond, blue-eyed; he comes from the country; he wants to enlist; he is innocent (and young too young to enlist, in fact). Frank, by comparison, is dark; he comes from the city; does not want to enlist; is not innocent but sceptical. (He is also of Irish origin. Why should he join the army, the film pertinently asks. The contradiction, once pointed out, is never examined.) What Weir and Williamson believe they are doing is crystal clear. They want
to balance the portrait of a naive boy, eager to serve the cause of Empire, with something more critical. But that is scarcely what emerges.

In fact, the mechanism is one convincingly exposed by Roland Barthes. It might be expressed as follows: *give a little, take a lot*. This works in small ways throughout the film, for example in the scene already referred to, that of the Egyptian shopkeeper. The Diggers discover they have been sold a fake antique, and they confront the dealer with this. To provide an illusion of justice and fair-mindedness, one of the Diggers is polite; to provide an illusion of realism, one is aggressive. The dealer, though, will not budge. He is not beaten, nor is his shop destroyed. The troops simply break a few items, and the result is a refund. As the Australians leave, we have the twist: one of them realizes it was the wrong dealer. On the face of it this *dénouement* should satisfy everyone. Even honest, well-meaning Australians can make a *mistake*. Even Egyptians can be *wrongly* accused. What could be fairer than this conclusion? The truth, of course, is that Australian troops behaved like brutal barbarians in Egypt. They did not make the odd mistake: they were — what else? — racist and violent. Once an Australian film might have shown them as good blokes teaching a depraved, shifty Egyptian the lesson of his life. But Australians have come a long way since then. In *Gallipoli* the troops *mean* to do the right thing, but they make an *error of judgement*. No one is to blame, it’s a *mistake*. We give a little, take a lot, showing Australians as fallible
in order to underline their overall virtue, telling a small, harmless truth in order to promote a whopper.

This mechanism of revealing small flaws in order to obscure sizeable ones recurs, but at this stage it suffices to stress that it underpins the sentimentality of the entire film. Naturally we are not supposed to examine any of this critically. The whole point of sentiment is that one should go no further than the surface, that is to say the enjoyment of a confused combination of sadness and exaltation. Unfortunately, sentiment has a logic and, in spite of Weir’s attempt to erase his tracks, this logic is there for anyone to analyse.

It is especially evident in the presentation of Archy, that blond, blue-eyed hero. Certainly the film acknowledges his naivety (one thinks of his exchange with the camel driver, where he argues the need to stop the enemy before they reach – Western Australia!) but only to endorse it. Because Archy is a hero, unashamedly, from first to last, though, not, of course, a flawless one. If we follow him into the desert, as Frank does, we are likely to become lost. But Weir’s parable does not stop there: Archy is lost, but also providentially rescued and therefore ultimately justified.

One quickly established characteristic of the hero involves the Aborigines. After a muster Archy and an Aborigine wash at the same trough. And in case we object that this is somewhat idealized, the two tussle and splash, that is, they behave aggressively, but in a context of play. At this stage the audience feels that it is at least plausible, since some people in 1915 must have been on familiar terms with Aborigines. Soon after this Archy races barefoot against a white man on horseback who has made a racist remark. He wins (providentially) when his opponent is thrown from his horse, and racism is nicely put in its place. Let us for a moment overlook the patronizing attitude towards the Aborigine revealed in it all. (Moreover Weir slips up badly throughout the scene in having his Aborigine act as eager servant to Archy, willing, for example, to prepare his bare feet for the race. And, incidentally, what a piece of nonsense that is, wallowing in bad faith! The black man mutters spells while rubbing herbs on Archy’s foot. The emotional content is clear: Aborigines have ‘knowledge’ of plants, a quasi-mystical ‘wisdom’ to be used in the service of virtuous whites. It may be true, but who in white Australian society believes in black wisdom, in an other-than-token, sentimental way? But it is safe to endorse a little magic here, given Weir’s larger mystification.) The real problem is not the small fib or even the patronizing of Aboriginal people. Much worse is the suggestion that X who fights at Gallipoli is a Friend of Aborigines. Now no one could possibly believe that the spirit which carried the Anzacs to Gallipoli to fight for the cause of Empire is a spirit favourable to the Australian Aborigine. It would be enough to ask Xavier Herbert or, better still, Kevin Gilbert or Kath Walker (since
this paper was written Kath Walker reverted to her aboriginal name of Oodgeroo). Weir is here supporting the worst kind of white self-congratulatory mystique. Let us state the objective truth: the spirit of Anzac, that is to say the spirit which took Australians half way round the globe to fight under an imperial flag, is the same spirit which, in their own country, fed black people flour laced with strychnine.

This is a hard truth to swallow, but there is no way of avoiding it. Of course it is not to say that most (or even any) of the men who fought in 1915 were motivated by other than confusedly admirable ideals. The same no doubt was true when colonial troops helped to subjugate a free people, the Boers, and in a way so brutal as to be comparable only to the abominations committed in Vietnam, of which Agent Orange is a discreet reminder. The point is not what Australian soldiers thought they were doing but what in fact they did. It is in that light that we must understand the shocking statement italicized above.

Naturally Archy is simply one man and it is quite possible that one man should have been like that in 1915, that is, anxious to enlist and friendly with Aborigines. But that line of argument is, as Americans would say, a cop out. Gallipoli contains an objective message and that message is a cynical (sentimentality usually turns out to be cynical), lazy, comfortable, destructive lie. Today Australians are no longer supposed to be racist. So we give a little, take a lot; we say the spirit of Anzac is favourable to Aborigines, we show Archy and his Aboriginal companion as intimately close – then we forget the racist content of the Anzac myth, the real history of Australia before and after 1915. It fools nobody, least of all Aboriginal Australians.

One other point needs to be made in this context. Before crossing the desert, Archy and Frank exchange a few words with a cheerful, confident, not-at-all-abashed Aborigine employed by the railway, and this seems harmless enough until we recognize the stereotype which is being invoked. It is that of Benson in the American TV series, Soap. Benson is a negro servant who pushes his masters around. He knows better than they do, and looks after them with amused, indulgent superiority. Williamson, obviously short of real Australian models, borrows Benson, or someone like him from the U.S. dream factory, for his portrait of an Aborigine in Celluloid Heroes. Now that is scandalous enough, but it is not the issue here. The sickening thing about the Benson mystique is its cruel inversion of the truth in the guise of ethnic tolerance. Whites patronize black people; black people have no chance of patronizing whites. To show them doing this, as in Celluloid Heroes or Gallipoli, even to a minute degree, through misguided goodwill, shamefully distorts reality. It's insufferable for white Australians to think that a pretence of this sort confers dignity on the Aborigine, since dignity comes from the truth, not from make-believe. One wonders how Williamson and Weir can have so little idea of the implications of
their own film. In the long run, OMO could not do a better job on the people who distributed funny flour.

To return to the hero. Archy is much more than an unlikely befriender of Aborigines; he is the archetypal Australian, solid as the Dog on the Tucker Box. The fact is signalled even in such trivial details as his bush hat (Frank generally wears a cap). Because Archy is a country boy, and it is a cherished cliché that the true Australian is a bushman, not a city dweller. Now there may be a lot of truth in that. Certainly if Australians ever acquire a genuine nationalism it will come from their understanding of the land. But Gallipoli is not concerned with a genuine nationalism, only with what passes for nationalism in this country.

This is the trouble with Archy. He conforms to the Australian legend. He crosses deserts (becoming lost only ties him more securely to the myth, in this case via Burke and Wills); rides horses as well as the Man from Snowy River; is honest, straightforward, innocent, but at the same time willing to Be in It and Do his Bit without too much soul-searching or premeditation. Above all he is a good mate – hence all those shots of the pair, in Western Australia, Egypt, Turkey. With all of this what else could he have on his head except a bush hat?

The difficulty is not that Archy is the type of the Australian. As far as that goes, we could have a worse image. The difficulty is that he wants to enlist, that he does in fact enlist, and that he fights at Gallipoli. In short Weir’s film reiterates the spurious myth: that the true Australian is a Gallipoli Digger, that the Digger is the spiritual descendant of the bushman, that Gallipoli must be set at the heart of the quest for nationhood.

Which is simply not true. If Anzac is a source of nationalism it can only be a source of a pseudo-nationalism. To say this is not to belittle the Anzacs, only to insist on a point of logic. Gallipoli was not fought for an Australian, but for an English cause. The Anzacs were not an Australian, but an imperial force: the AIF. They served under English, not Australian (or New Zealand) leaders: Hamilton and Birdwood. Gallipoli itself was (disastrously) conceived by a man who had no loyalty whatever to Australia, as his behaviour in the next war demonstrated: Churchill. Its aim was, among other things, to uphold not those (supposed) democratic principles associated with the Australian stereotype, but Tsarism in Russia. In short, Gallipoli can only be linked to the development of national sentiment in this country by ignoring every rule of common sense. You simply cannot foster nationalism in place A by fostering allegiance to place B. All this has been said, in different words, by Manning Clark in the penultimate volume of his History. Now we are not seeking to enlist volume five of the History, with its detailed examination of the phenomenon of the Australian-Briton, on the side of the present argument as a whole. As it
happens, volume five (which culminates in the story of Gallipoli) was released at much the same time as Peter Weir’s film. Its point is that Gallipoli, far from strengthening the search for a national identity, emasculated it. How could it be otherwise? By definition there could be nothing patriotic about Gallipoli, if by patriotism we mean (what else?) allegiance to one’s own country. That is Australia – isn’t it?

The film is not unaware of the problem, naturally. It introduces subtle references to Empire, the reading of Kipling’s *Jungle Book*, for example. It introduces the camel driver’s doubts (why is a European war our war?), not to mention Frank’s or his father’s (why fight for the English?). Give a little, take a lot. *Gallipoli* points to the contradiction only to dispose of it. In the end we are left with the overwhelming sense that people like Archy are quintessentially Australian and that people like Archy fight at Gallipoli. The best that Weir can do is to hint that Archy might be mistaken, and that suggestion is forgotten in the pathos and the glory of the finish. It is still the old myth, brought out of the cupboard, dusted and paraded every Anzac Day. Repetition will never resolve its inherent contradiction.

How does the end of Weir’s film comment on these problems? We conclude with two runs, one for life, one towards death. It should be noted, by the way, that, in the shorthand of the film, ‘running’ is equivalent to ‘integrity’. Archy’s run is the culmination of his entire life. As the bullets enter his chest and blood appears, movement is stopped. That signals a change in the nature of time as far as Archy is concerned. Archy, in fact, is no longer in time but in eternity, frozen in an image, that of death. The film ends with this image, about which more later. We could equally say that in this moment *sub specie aeternitatis* Archy is no longer an individual, but a myth – the myth: an ‘Anzac’, which is something timeless (*Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn*). The message was implicit in that run to the pyramids. There Archy runs, symbolically, not only towards a tomb, i.e. towards death, but towards a monument to immortality, to life-after-death. Life-after-death is life-in-myth, and Archy’s last run ensures that. So Archy’s life ends, appropriately, on the top of a high mountain. His last run is his apotheosis. What about Frank’s run, though, the one which loses?

Now at one level the tragedy hinges on Frank’s run. It is in fact a tragedy of the he-didn’t-make-it-in-time variety, a familiar enough device of melodrama. Even at this level it is sentimental: as if it could all be stopped, prevented, by a run! The film itself, having introduced it, cannot swallow this romanticism – and of course the run has to fail. But we toy sentimentally with the idea that it might have succeeded, which is meaningless. There is more to Frank’s failure, however, because it is this which gives Archy the crown, or at any rate the martyr’s wreath. Why should Frank be morally defeated by Archy? Let
us be clear about it: he *is*. Archy, as already observed, always wins the race, and the race is, ultimately, a moral one. Moreover, just as Archy deliberately handicapped himself in the first race against Frank (where he ran with wounded feet), so, in the last, he is also handicapped. After all, he *wills* to sacrifice himself, just as he wills to run with hurt feet. He could have taken the job of runner, but he gave it to an unsuspecting Frank. So he dies instead of Frank. At this point the Christ parallel is inescapable, though Weir does not press it. Archy, then, is *doubly* endorsed. He dies, and for someone else.

Absurdities abound here. A blond (read British) Australian lays down his life for a reluctant Irish Australian when, historically, people like Archy, serving causes like Archy’s have not *saved* Irish lives but *taken* them. Obviously Weir has not heard of Easter, 1916 (in the year following Gallipoli), or of Belfast, 1982. Of course one can generously *imagine* a possible reconciliation of the two sides of these conflicts. And that is all the parable at the end of the film is: *imaginary*. But this is only one mystification, as we ponder the *meaning* (the objective, not the intended, sentimental meaning) of Frank’s failure. Doesn’t Frank run fast enough, that is to say, *try* hard enough? Or is it just that the blond, blue-eyed Australians will not *listen* to people like him? This second possibility is effectively negated by the ending of the film, i.e. by the apotheosis of Archy. Had Frank had his way Archy would not have died – or even been there at Gallipoli. But Archy – and this is the essential message of the film – *has* to die. Dying is his supreme achievement, his glory, his fate. Only one conclusion is possible, then: that this film endorses Archy’s way as superior to Frank’s. Frank tries, but Archy makes it.

And yet Weir makes Frank the voice of reason. All the more damning that *Gallipoli* should in the end give itself wholly to the ecstatic contemplation of Archy’s sacrifice. Actually it was never a question of anything else. The pairing of Frank and Archy perfectly illustrates the mechanism of give a little, take a lot. Frank’s *caveat* serves only to *underline* the central message. Archy was, all along, the innocent, the spotless lamb, worthy of sacrifice. In the same way Weir’s film as a whole, for all its supposed open-mindedness, its up-to-dateness, its trendy tolerance – indeed *because* of all these things – *reinforces* the Gallipoli myth, and in the most uncritical way. The logic of giving in order to take leads to this conclusion: *even if the war was dubious, the sacrifice was good*.

Eighty years after the event, all Australians can do is to retell the self-same story, with the self-same moral. This myopia extends to detail after detail of the film. Weir introduces the wooden horse only to negate its implicit irony at the end. He shows us a confused general and an unpleasant colonel only to highlight the goodness of a major and of the troops themselves. In a crudely hammed scene he offers us a
caricature of English officers in Egypt, complete with monocle and moustache. Of course the democratic Anzacs show them up. This reveals the British as foolish in one minor stereotyped instance, only to obscure the fact that the Anzacs are fighting for them and so to endorse the larger military escapade. Later the massacre on the ridge will be blamed (inaccurately) on the British landing at Suvla Bay. Local criticism substitutes for a searching analysis of the social and political facts of the war. The invincible stupidity of Weir’s film consists precisely in this: that it points something out only to forget it promptly. Gallipoli is like a magician’s act: now you see it, now you don’t. In the end you don’t.

The film, as earlier stated, is structured around the opposition of Innocence and Experience. Of course this innocence is itself a myth which needs to be challenged. No doubt in 1915 Australians were naïve and a little provincial, just as they are today. But that is hardly the same thing as innocence. Subjectively, Gallipoli may have had the quality of a dream, or of a nightmare. Objectively, it was a real war, fought by real people against real people. That is to say it was a political, not a mythical, act. Interestingly, Weir’s film never looks closely at the fighting. Most of the time is spent in Western Australia and Egypt, and once at Gallipoli, we move very quickly to Archy’s death. This provides no time for the depiction of disillusionment at Anzac Cove. But the Diggers did become disillusioned, eventually. In the film we see them in high spirits, at least up to the point where they are being massacred on the ridge. However, this comes at the very end of the film, and everything is over before we have time to think. This is in contrast to the time lavished on establishing the motif of innocence.

Consequently Gallipoli offers its protagonists no possibility of learning from their experience. First Archy is innocent, then he is dead. Nor does it offer the audience this possibility. Because Weir only wants to do one thing, to focus attention on the legend, which in this context may be defined as an unexamined assumption. When the guide shows us the Mona Lisa in the Louvre, he does not encourage us to examine it, to actually look at it. It is a masterpiece, a myth. Enough to see the myth. Gallipoli is Australia’s enigmatic Mona Lisa. We are not supposed to look. Or rather, when we look, we are supposed to see only the stereotypes: youthful idealism, self-sacrifice, and so on. Of course Weir will object that he did not want to make a political film, just to see it all through the eyes of a simple soldier. There must have been people like Archy at Gallipoli. Unfortunately such ‘realism’ is anything but neutral. To present the Archy legend uncritically is not apolitical, far from it.

We now turn to a very different kind of objectivity, concentrating on Archy and Frank and especially that moment of glory at the top of the ridge at Gallipoli. Exactly like the heroine of Picnic at Hanging Rock,
Archy disappears at the summit of a rock. In each case the context is shrouded in mystery. This parallel points up other aspects of Gallipoli's hero.

Superficially Archy seems to choose his course of action whereas Frank seems to be carried along. This is totally misleading. In fact it is Archy who is passive. In the first scene we see him as a running machine, manipulated by an older man. Later he seems to know his own mind, but his enlisting is another expression of his passivity, since he is doing what everyone is expected to do. At the end he appears to choose when he changes places with Frank, but that too is passive, a submission to his own fate. Archy’s passivity, which the film does not recognize, is the source of his innocent simplicity. By contrast Frank is complex, problematical. It is important to see that what is implicit in this contrast is the kind of opposition of Subject and Object so persuasively analysed by Sartre. Archy has all the characteristics of the Object. He is presented as an image without depth, smiling that open, vulnerable smile which prefigures his final wound. The smile is Archy. It conveys his inarticulate, uncomplicated goodness, his status as Object - because Archy's smile represents an offering of himself to others, to Frank, to the audience. Just as he is passive in the eyes of his audience, Archy is passive before his fate: he is carried along to Gallipoli. We know he will die because his passivity anticipates that too. Archy is made for death. A corpse is the ultimate Object. It has no existence for itself. It exists only as Object of another's mind. The essential feature of Archy, then, is that he is there to be looked at. That, incidentally, is why he comes across as beautiful.

Frank on the other hand resists objectification. Where Archy is, Frank is conscious, he is active, he thinks. He is to Archy as mind is to body. Consequently he is not borne along, he seems to resist fate. In Sartrean terms he takes responsibility for his actions, no matter how confused these might be. All this explains why there is no mystery about him. Archy of course is mysterious, even to himself. We know why Frank enlists, more or less: he is pushed into it through opportunism (when he tries to join the Light Horse) and mateship (when he joins the infantry). But why does Archy enlist? To be like uncle Jack? The only answer is in that smile which seems to suggest that Archy knows, which he doesn’t. For Archy it is all so - inevitable.

Now the film pays lip service to Frank's reasonable point of view. Its affection, however, is reserved for Archy. One is reminded of those (homosexual) pairs in Jean Genet’s novels consisting of an outward, unthinking, attractive personality and a partner who is inward, keenly intelligent, aware. The first is the one on whom Genet lavishes attention, but only to demonstrate at last that this beautiful Object is hollow, that real power resides with thought, not with the Image, the Mask. Because the Object is by nature vulnerable, it collapses under the
weight of the adoring eyes fixed on it, like Marilyn Monroe.

The Subject survives, the Object dies: that is the rule and it is scrupulously observed in *Gallipoli*. We note at once a lack of distinct personal characteristics in Archy. One example: when the Diggers are confronted by sex in Egypt they respond either with coarse enthusiasm or puritanically (Barney and Billy enter the brothel; Snowy refuses). Archy, though, is kept well clear of a situation like this: he is untainted by whoring or by puritanism. This is necessary not simply to ensure the purity of his sacrifice but also to maintain his status as a *mask*, that is, something other than a real human being.

And this is the insidious fascination of the Object: that which attracts us is precisely the inhuman perfection of the statue, the work of art. The last scene of *Gallipoli* can come as no surprise. The entire film has prepared us for Archy’s apotheosis, which is his dying. Its aim is to elevate not an individual (like Frank), but the Hero, the Myth, the Smile. We all share in this mystique. Kill Frank and we kill one man, on one occasion. Kill Archy and we objectify Death itself, we evoke all the pathos of a death which is eternal. That last frozen shot of the movie is no aberration. *Gallipoli* really does glorify death, long before Archy actually dies. Weir does not intend this, of course. It simply happens, and it happens because the image of Archy is something Weir is unable to control. The fascination of Archy is the fascination of death or rather of life-in-death, which is life-in-myth. *They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old*. Archy lives on in death, and he never ages. Frank, who is alive, is mortal: he will age. Archy is immortal.

There are terrifying contradictions in all of this. Archy’s glory is a mask without a human face behind it. As preparation for death Archy repeats his uncle’s words of authority, the magical spell (it is nothing short of that) whose utterance has the power to transform him into an animal (a leopard, to be precise) or a machine. Archy *wills* himself to be something other than a human subject. He wills, in the end, that transformation which makes him timeless and therefore material for myth. What chance has Frank in this race? Sadly, it is a tragic vacuousness which is glorified in Archy, the victory of the non-thinking, the non-questioning: ours not to reason why. How on earth has a trendy, tolerant film maker of the 1980s got himself in this predicament?

In this context we are bound to return to the exaltation of sport in the film. (The fact that a football match between Western Australians and Victorians in Egypt reveals the *unsporting* side of the Diggers, merely points up the larger exaltation of sport in the character of Archy.) Running, like cricket or football, is a type of the national mystique. Life, however, is not comparable to a race or to a game. What is needed in this country is not athletics but thought. Of course Australians have traditionally glorified physical achievement and belittled intellectual
efforts. In so doing they have in another way put the Object first.

There is a further perspective on all of this. In our society the Object is quintessentially female. And, sure enough, the hero of *Gallipoli* is closer than one might have thought to the heroine of *Picnic*. He is not just boyishly beautiful: he has something of a girl about him. Actually his relationship with Frank is not without sexual overtones, and, to a degree, Weir and Williamson are probably aware of it. But, as usual, the material escapes their control. It is noteworthy that there are no real women in *Gallipoli*, only two classic types: the type of the chaste mother or wife (in Western Australia), and of the whore (in Egypt). The reason for this is clear: the myth of Gallipoli is a specifically *male* myth. We notice that Frank chases girls. He kisses his partner at the nurses’ ball (Archy does not), he performs a male display (complete with Light Horse feathers) for a group of women visiting the pyramids. Archy is eyed by a lass in Western Australia, but he initiates no moves.

In fact Archy is a virgin, a type of *feminine* purity – who dies. Traditionally, a girl ‘dies’ when she loses her innocence, that is to say when the maidenhead is broken. The sexual parable of *Gallipoli* is precisely that. Over and above the coy hints of a vaguely sexual bond between two males, *Gallipoli* produces an unintended message: that Archy’s sexual consummation comes in death. *Gallipoli* is, from one angle, a drama of virginity lost. When Archy is ravished, he *disappears* (a similar sexual pattern existed in *Picnic*), while Frank, the type of the male, is left to mourn. Anyone prepared to scoff at this line of argument should think very hard first.

Weir’s mystification of a vital episode in Australian history has a more sophisticated counterpart in Sidney Nolan’s pictures of Gallipoli. Nolan’s Gallipoli is a faint, evanescent landscape, peopled by ghostlike Diggers who bathe naked on the beaches, or rather who levitate like apparitions, weightless, drifting. Occasionally there is a suggestion of a uniform, a few strokes of paint, a slouch hat. On the whole, though, nakedness implies vulnerable, passive flesh, the body of someone who is going to die. Then again, Nolan’s Diggers are already dead. Like Archy, they are dead long before the bullets come. Their Gallipoli seems very far away. It is a Gallipoli which exists not in Turkey but in Australia. Moreover it exists in the mind, it is strictly timeless, archetypal – if there had not been a Gallipoli, Australians would have *invented* it. In this context there is no difficulty in seeing a connection with the Homeric epic and, indeed, Nolan’s soldiers, in their nakedness, hint at a realm of myth in which Australians fuse with ancient Greeks, re-enacting the siege of Troy. That siege is the archetypal war of the European imagination. Of course, as everyone knows, Gallipoli is not so far from the site of Troy. Weir too cannot resist drawing the parallel in his film. The difference is that Nolan *knows* that he is painting the myth, whereas Weir is not quite sure
what he is doing. Nolan is interested not in the real Gallipoli, but in Gallipoli as it lives on in the Australian psyche. That accounts for the fuzziness of the image: it is all like that dreamy swim in the film, an underwater Gallipoli, deliberately ahistorical.

In the end, though, Nolan’s failure is as spectacular as Weir’s. What objective meaning is there in the parallel with Troy, except a misleading one? Nolan’s earlier myth-making actually taught us something about, for example, the archetypal Ned Kelly, the rebel inside us all. That series was both visually and intellectually analytic: it had something to say. The Gallipoli pictures, like Weir’s film, pre-empt analysis, they insist on a surface reading only. Instead of revealing Gallipoli, they conceal it, they pickle it in a dense amniotic fluid.

Of course Nolan’s Gallipoli paintings are in the Australian War Memorial in Canberra – and they belong there. Canberra’s neo-Egyptian mausoleum looks down and across the lake to Old Parliament House. Not one tree is permitted to interfere with the flow of air between these two sites. The two stand in a relation which is broadly that of Archy and Frank. The Memorial is Object to Parliament’s Subject. Again, it is to Parliament as Body is to Mind. Across the lake, a lot of mental activity is carried out. At the Memorial, everything is still. Time, in Parliament, feeds on the timelessness of the Memorial. All our allegiance, all our reverence, is for the myth enshrined in the Memorial. For what goes on in the other place, we have nothing but contempt. And yet the other place is where things can be done. Because there can be no action, only the silent perfection of death, in the Memorial.

Ironically, Old Parliament House, that colonial replica of the Raffles Hotel in Singapore, looks to the Memorial for inspiration. That is the whole point of the axis. It is ironic because, like Weir’s film or Nolan’s pictures, the Memorial can only offer a contradictory oracle. The Anzac myth cannot be made to yield an unambiguously patriotic content, no matter how hard we try. On the contrary the Memorial speaks, for the most part, of wars fought for other-than-Australian causes. Like Gallipoli, it negates nationalism rather than affirming it. And yet it is a place of pilgrimage. Thousands visit it every year.

Thousands will see Peter Weir’s film. They will walk away just a little more confused than they went in. The question arises: why are Australians so loathe to see themselves as they are? If after all these years they cannot focus on 1915, when will they focus on the present?
Canberra: Anzac Parade, view from Mount Ainslie
The screening of the television mini-series, Anzacs, took place in Australia in November, 1985. Admired by the popular press and successful in the ratings, it was ridiculed by most of the ‘quality’ press as a melodramatic exercise in ‘Pommy-bashing’ which played fast and loose with the true history of World War I.1 Anything but a low-key docu-drama, Anzacs is full of action, peopled with a rich cast of fictional characters, and, despite an episodic structure, a narrative in the tradition of the ‘ripping yarn’. Its use and deployment of history, however, is not to be easily dismissed: firstly, because it is both deliberate and polemical, and, secondly, because it plays a crucial role in the program’s objective of contributing not just to television ratings but to Australia’s sense of itself.

The cultural context in which Anzacs was screened is an interesting one. Its first transmission followed hot on the heels of a rash of Whitlam retrospectives (it was the completion of a decade since the dismissal), recording either a key example of the insidiousness of colonial ties, or the fortunate survival of checks and balances to unbridled Australian nationalism—depending upon one’s political point of view. A further element in the cultural context—if more arcane—is the Maralinga Royal Commission, the judicial enquiry into the conduct of atomic tests in Australia by the British in the 1950s. As cultural productions, Anzacs and the Royal Commission may seem miles apart, but both have been attacked as cynical exercises in Pommy-bashing. Neither are simply that, but they do occupy similar places in a more widespread revision of Australian entanglement within colonial ties. Importantly, both events offer new narratives of Australian history, and thus of the Australian character, in opposition to British versions. Both see Australian history as overwhelmingly and regrettablly the product of British discourses, and attempt to decontaminate the national identity from such discourses.

Although Anzacs has not attracted much attention as anything other than a television ‘event’, Maralinga has repeatedly been seen within this wider cultural context. A relatively affectionate parody of the Commission in the satirical Gillies Report on ABC TV depicted Justice

GRAEME TURNER

ANZACS: Putting the Story Back in History
McClelland reviewing a parade of Australian casualties of British power: the convicts, the Anzacs, the Labor Party. For the sketch to be understood, this view of Britain as the imperialist villain must have had substantial currency amongst the audience. A contemporary newspaper cartoon represented the judge in convict garb, confronting a British redcoat in the dock, and the ABC’s *Four Corners* report on the Commission’s findings, screened in December 1985, saw it as a case of ‘the empire strikes back’ and titled the program ‘Atomic Bodyline’.

*Four Corners* reference to bodyline reminds us of another important context in which cultural production must be placed – that of other representations, of other ‘text’. Intertextual links are at least as important as those proposed between the representation and the real, the text and history. The *Four Corners* reference invokes more than the history of that notorious Test series; it also invokes its representation in the Kennedy-Miller mini-series, *Bodyline*. *Bodyline* bashed the Poms as well, although its villains were more specific: the Lords of the MCC not only schemed against the despised Australians but also exploited and discarded their demon bowler, Larwood, who gave the legend its symmetry by migrating to Australia. The history enacted in *Bodyline*, though, is a familiar one and the pleasure it provided was in seeing it recreated convincingly. Although similar in its nationalist ideology, there are important differences between *Anzacs* and *Bodyline*. With the exception of the Gallipoli episode, *Anzacs*’ history is not familiar at all. Gallipoli has become the metonym for our involvement in World War I, and the vast majority of Australian experience in the war – on the Western Front and in the Desert – is buried in soldiers’ memoirs or the imperialistic official histories in which Australians are simply another arm of the Empire. It is a measure of the silence about the bulk of Australian participation in World War I that while many critics attacked *Anzacs* for misrepresentation, few would be in a position to prove their claims; the history has simply not circulated. *Anzacs* intervenes in this situation, constructing a history itself and for this reason is of greater potential interest than *Bodyline*, or the more critically respected explorations of this area, *1915* and *Gallipoli*.

*Gallipoli*, the most natural point of comparison, did little but recycle the standard accounts and mythologize them through beautiful but uninteresting heroes. Although it was visually arresting, and fashionably unresolved, *Gallipoli*’s narrative was organized around myths and images so familiar as to be cliché. Boy met boy, boys became mates; the bush was seen as the core of the Australian character; the Poms were revealed as the real enemy; and the iconic beauty of the two leads became the visual equivalent of C.E.W. Bean’s reports from the front. Thematically, the depiction of the heroes as indices of Australian male innocence carried the argument of the film.² War was naturalized as a necessary and inevitable rite of passage from innocence to
experience, both for the characters and their country. *Gallipoli’s* use of history was respectful but this did not make for compelling narrative, so that what now emerges as notable about the film is its conventionality, its helpless dependence upon the conventions which have governed the representation of Gallipoli and the Anzacs to date. These conventions are produced by the history, not in spite of it, and they control both story and discourse in order to generate the meaning usually attributed to Gallipoli – the thesis of lost innocence.

In poetry and fiction as well as film, the bulk of Australian involvement in the Great War is collapsed into the ‘death of a primal innocence’, located on the cliffs of Gallipoli. A central meaning is generated as history is transformed into a myth in which the digger and Gallipoli are participants in a national ‘coming of age’. Through the digger at Gallipoli, the myth tells us, Australia learned what it is to be a nation. This meaning organizes texts across the full range of cultural production – from elite forms such as poetry and painting, to more populist forms such as film and television.

It is a myth which is anything but radical. It celebrates the catastrophe as the product of nature rather than man, implicitly and paradoxically justifying the British Army’s apparent sense of the need for ‘blooding’ the Australian troops in order to educate and civilize them. The Gallipoli myth is complacent and imperialistic; it enshrines defeat and calls it maturity while the cultural values of the mother country are accepted with its praise.

Ironically, this myth has become part of the construction of the Australian character. The components are familiar. In representations of the Anzacs it expressed itself through the naive volunteers, emphasizing (against the grain of historical evidence) their rural backgrounds, their carrying the tradition of mateship from the bush to the battlefield, and their embodiment of the Australian virtues – practicality, endurance, and a dry, irreverent humour. As in other constructions of the Australian character, representations of Gallipoli usually have a class dimension, produced by the focus on the ranks rather than on the officers, and by ridiculing the British.

*Anzacs* can provisionally be placed within this paradigm. Mateship is the thematic centre of the third episode, ‘The Devil’s Arithmetic’, and is continually seen as the cement which binds the group together in the face of fear, frustration and death. The opening of the first episode, ‘The Great Adventure’, has the bush mates happily working their cattle, unaware that their lives are about to be disrupted by the call to the great adventure. Largely, *Anzacs*’ recruits are from the bush, and the essential Australian character is located there – through TV comic Paul Hogan’s Cleary, among others. The first episode crosses the same terrain as *Gallipoli* and *1915*, the raw country boys confronting the horrors of war with a mixture of good humour, the manly lust for
battle, and a naive disillusionment at the ultimate insignificance of their achievements.

That said, it is also true that *Anzacs* is not wholly determined by these conventions; the version of Australian-ness it advances, its history of Australians at war, differs importantly from that of *Gallipoli* or *1915*. In fact, *Anzacs'* individuality lies in its active attempt to rewrite our myths of the war and of the Australian character, and thus in the attempt to alter their meaning.

The most obvious difference between *Anzacs* and the sub-genre to which it belongs is that it deals with new material, for which there are no strong cultural myths, no specifically Australian history. More importantly, *Anzacs* not only locates the national and individual 'death of innocence' at the Somme rather than Gallipoli, but it also questions its traditional importance. The familiar gung-ho innocent, embodied at its clearest in Dick Baker, may be set up in the Gallipoli episode, but it is relentlessly ground down by the four episodes which follow Baker's death. As the hero, Martin Barrington, says, 'it's not the same' after Dick dies. The blooding of the troops at the Somme is the 'last day of our innocence', as Rolly puts it, but the series does not end there; this occurs early in the second episode. A symbolic and consoling loss of innocence is not the achievement the narrative is examining. Subsequently, there is no single 'innocent' whose course we follow, no single definition of the Australian character on whom the narrative rests its interest. The scale available to the television mini-series, the size of the cast it must use to fill ten hours of air-time, and the strategy of rotating the focus of episodes amongst a number of central characters, means that any conventional view of the 'six-bob-a-day tourists' is at least complicated by the variety of individualized characters and by their attitudes to the war - a primary means of differentiating one from another.

*Anzacs* is representative of most Australian narrative in that it is interested in the group rather than the individual; the hero dies half an hour before the end of the last episode and his girlfriend is rather unceremoniously paired off with Flanagan five minutes after being devastated by Martin's death. The survival of the 'originals' as a group identity matters more than the survival of any one of their number, and while individual acts of heroism are valorized, they tend not to elevate the individual out of the group. Martin is the exception to this, but in addition to his traditional heroics the series recommends Max Earnshaw's modest decency, Pud's blind loyalty, Blue's speechless devotion to his Lewis gun, and Kaiser's ability to see the enemy as human beings. The proliferation of individual manifestations of worthwhile values - shrewdness and scepticism as well as bravery, loyalty and comradeship - reduces the importance of the individual responsible and constructs the group as the author of the full repertoire
of admirable behaviour. Most important are those acts which speak of the distinctiveness of the group and its repertoire, and which therefore have the potential for particular definitions of heroism. Cleary’s raid on the German-held barn is an example here. It may be the product of bravery and resourcefulness but it has little to do with the war. Although it has an oblique relation to national honour, Cleary’s raid has all the ‘wrong’ motivations: he needs some souvenirs to finance his revenge on the Yanks at two-up. This apotheosis of Cleary’s scrounging, conning and petty theft, however, enacts Australian virtues that may be just as important for the viewer as those in operation in storming a machine gun post. Significantly, they are important not because they serve the war effort but because they are signifiers of intrinsically and distinctively Australian characteristics.

Cleary is a delinquent; he is the scrounger, the holder of the double-headed penny, the shrewd operator whom, therefore, the Australians admire. In Cleary the heroic and the delinquent are conflated in ways that are familiar in Australian mythology; in this series it surfaces in conventional incidents demonstrating an Australian contempt for the Army and for discipline, and in the wider cultural context we see it embodied in the legend of Ned Kelly or modern popular heroes such as Dennis Lillee, the bad boy of cricket. Delinquent, even criminal, acts are frequent amongst the Australians in Anzacs. Robbing the British is seen as a nationalist mission, cheating the Yanks is irresistible, and the most extraordinary example, the killing of Dingo for executing German prisoners and deserting, is left with no recriminations, no repercussions, and apparently without need of justification or remorse.

Paul Hogan’s Cleary is an important discursive element here; the mixture of the shrewd, the worldly and the affable is signified in his face. Paul Hogan, of course, brings a history with him onto the screen which makes characterization almost superfluous because he is serving the same iconic function in representing the nation in Anzacs as he does in his QANTAS commercials. As an icon of the Australian character Hogan has a different meaning to Gallipoli’s Mel Gibson or Mark Lee. In Weir’s film, beauty was equated with virtue; we know Archy and Frank are heroes because they are beautiful. They are like Bean’s Greek Gods, although, as Amanda Lohrey has pointed out, Bean’s description of the faces of Australian soldiers ‘ran more to the Chips Rafferty or Doug Walters mould’. The faces of the stars are primary determinants of meaning in film and television narrative, and in Anzacs the semiotics are very different. As Lohrey goes on, ‘it is impossible to look into the Chips Rafferty or Doug Walters face (or Bryan Brown’s for that matter) and see an iconic image of either good or evil, innocence or experience’. Hogan’s face, too, is in the Chips Rafferty mould, and his signification of Australian-ness is that of the canny rather than the innocent, the pragmatic rather than the idealist,
Stills from 'Anzacs'
the wily survivor rather than the heroic victim.

The signification of Australian larrikinism in Cleary is also a signifier of class position. Class considerations structure personal relationships in the series – the affair between Martin and Kate is most clearly seen as one between separate class backgrounds – as well as the treatment of the various social contexts, at home and on the battlefield. Typically, the working class is preferred and privilege attacked. The failure of the British generals, for instance, is sheeted home to class. ‘It’s a pity about the British’, says Monash, going on to deplore their dependence upon a ‘narrow social class’ for their officers. As happens so often in our narratives, the problems of dealing with class, privilege, or authority is displaced onto a problem of dealing with the British – represented by a series of stage Poms saluting, posing and expressing contempt for the expendable Australians. Rules, regulations, callousness, lack of flexibility, lack of experience or useful knowledge – all of which threaten the troops of all the participating nations – are seen to emanate from the British upper class. Even Lloyd George confesses his helplessness before the ‘closed shop’ of the English upper class in his attempt to restrain Field Marshal Haig. Australian staff officers are a different matter. Monash is accessible, reasonable, almost avuncular, while the division’s treatment of Flanagan’s act of mutiny is implausibly sympathetic to the needs of the troops. Harris, the British deserter who killed his officer during a ‘Pathan ambush’, is clearly better off in the egalitarian Australian army.

The series goes to some pains to exclude the working class Englishmen, the infantry, from its condemnation of the race. Stragglers commanded by Barrington are ‘some of the finest men’ he’s ever fought with, and the British lower ranks express the same disgust with their generals as their Australian counterparts. There is some class solidarity here. Upper class officers instructing the Australians in bayonet practice are ridiculed, while officers with regional accents and battle experience briefing the Australians on German machine gun methods are respected. In Anzacs, criticism of rank and of the British are attacks on the same evil – a non-egalitarian social system where birth rather than ability determines one’s position. The English in Anzacs, however, are not simply class enemies, nor are they simply the opposition against which the Australian is traditionally defined – as they are in Gallipoli or, to a lesser extent, Breaker Morant. Criticism of the English is a thematic and ideological principle in the series which is produced by, and is used as a justification for, the view of history the narrative constructs.

The promotional program on the making of Anzacs took a rather belligerent stance towards Australian war history and the work of the ‘academics and intellectuals’ it was setting out to revise. It is true that Australian military history is a neglected field and that our versions of
Australians at war tend to come from official and Anglophile sources. *Anzacs* does not set out to correct this through a scholarly alternative version. Instead, its narrative appropriates history, using it to redefine the Australian character through the renovation of its myths and the ideology which motivates them.

More than any other medium, television constructs our social myths. Even ‘objective’ treatments of history and science are unable to avoid doing this; a signal example would be the Darwinian myth of deliberate evolution which had fish deciding to leave the sea and wander up the beach as salamanders in David Attenborough’s *Life on Earth.* Often television constructs its myths as a by-product of trying to get the history right – as in *The Last Bastion* or *Bodyline* – but in at least the former case the cultural impact was affected by its relative dullness as television. *Anzacs’* producers, Geoff Burrowes and John Dixon, seem to have decided to maximize their cultural impact by making their myths in the most deliberate and entertaining of manners. An example occurs in the fourth episode where the fleeing French citizenry is halted by the Australian correlative of John Wayne and the cavalry – complete with brass band. Delighted it is an *Australian* division coming to their aid (‘you Australians will stand and fight’ – unlike, presumably, the French army) the refugees all turn around and go home. Familiar as we are with the experience of scoffing at such scenes in British and American movies, it comes as a surprise to find the same techniques being used to exploit our own chauvinism. The producers seem aware of this reaction, and the scene is both cheeky in its blatant nationalism, and entertaining in its self-conscious cheekiness. Having absorbed images of British and American superiority for so many years, the audience is invited to retaliate by applauding this nationalist excess; such moments are a frequent source of viewers’ pleasure in *Anzacs*.

Understanding the relationship between cultural myth and history better than some of its critics, *Anzacs* does not bother to appear objective or detached; it rewrites history as mythic, even epic, narrative. Implicitly rejecting historians’ views that Australian troops were important but not decisive on the Western Front, *Anzacs* tells the viewer that neither the British nor the Americans won the war – we did. Through the unfolding of this view, a history of failure – Gallipoli – is replaced with a history of success, acknowledgement of which has hitherto, and churlishly, been withheld.

This new history has a number of components. First, and most conventional, is the depiction of Australian troops as different from those of other nationalities. Second, is the sustained attack on British generalship, British estimates of Australians and their contributions to the victory, and Field Marshal Haig. Haig’s famous ‘back to the wall’ directive, traditionally the object of respect, is treated with scorn as Cleary dispenses the orders to his mates for use as toilet paper. As
Peter Pierce has noted in a literary context, the enemy here is not the Hun, but the British staff. Finally – and centrally – is the substitution of the unification of the five Australian divisions under their own commander, General Monash, for Gallipoli as the apex of Australia’s achievement in the Great War. This moment opens the last episode, has been foreshadowed ever since the landing of Gallipoli, and is seen to magically result in the end of the war. In contrast to all the previous battles, Monash’s first engagement ‘runs like clockwork’ and initiates a series of short engagements in which the platoon is apparently responsible for its own battle plans. In a parallel with Flanagan’s attack on his incompetent officer, and Harris’s murder of his cowardly officer, Anzacs’ Australianization of the war wrests control from the British in order to survive, and thus wins.

In Anzacs, Australia’s ‘coming of age’ is the achievement of military and thus ideological independence. This is not the maturity of youth admitting the superiority of older values, but the demonstration of their irrelevance – a rejection of the cultural cringe which placed Australian troops under British control in the first place. Structurally, the narrative is homologous with the myths surrounding Federation – a republican and egalitarian movement away from the colonial power, an assertion of the superiority of Australian values, and the need for independence. In its specific application to the politics of Australians at war, it challenges an orthodoxy which has the Australian nation at Gallipoli learning what it is like in the ‘real world’, demonstrating its potential, and returning home to implement the new ways. Anzacs inverts this view and its meaning in order to propose an alternative in which Australian attempts to deal with this real world are hamstrung only by the prejudices and values of others – the British. As far as Anzacs is concerned, the Australians would have done better without the wisdom of the old world. Instead of being initiated into the real world, the Australians are offered it as their inheritance.

This view of the Australian soldier in the Great War may or may not be true; I am in a similar position to most of the audience in that I do not have the knowledge to judge. For the function of television in the culture, this matters little as long as it is convincing. And it is judged as convincing not as history but as story: as a narrative which incorporates sufficiently familiar myths and values, which constructs models of resolution for conflicts and contradictions symbolized within the narrative that are ideologically acceptable, and which offers the pleasures of story telling. The success of Anzacs does not depend upon its faithfulness to its sources – although it must be said that there is plenty of evidence that it did go to the same sources as the historians it challenges – but upon its discursive and ideological work: the degree to which the meanings it constructs for Australians are, or are made, acceptable or negotiable for its audience. This means that its confident
myth-making should not be seen as manipulative; its final ritual confirmation of the nation inscribes its audience into the text, rather than seduces or misleads them. In its inscription of a nationalist confidence in the Australian character into the final scenes around the memorial, it invokes an existing national audience, self-consciously but nonetheless gratefully endorsing the principles which make the narrative pleasurable – not its plausibility.

*Anzacs* is an attempt to buy back the mythological farm, but its nationalism could be criticized for being as consensual and complacent as the version it aims to supersede. That should not obscure the fact that it is a serious and well made television series. More importantly, as an intervention in cultural history it is probably more aggressive than anything that has preceded it on Australian television. In its attempt to rewrite history through offering a more satisfying, because more Australian, story, it employs the kind of confidence in the power of the medium that is rare in television production in Australia. Love it or hate it, *Anzacs* assumes that television has a positive role to play in Australian popular culture. While it can entertain us and divert us from our work, it is also, importantly, an active participant in the construction of a cultural identity. In this mini-series we have a hint of the potential effect of this participation.

**NOTES**

1. Examples of such reviews include Richard Coleman’s piece in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 November 1985, entitled ‘How Hoges Heroes Cleaned up the Fritz – no thanks to the Poms’; or Marion MacDonald’s review in *The National Times*, 8-14 November 1985, ‘They picked clean every cliche in the drama of warfare’. The titles are representative.


4. Lohrey, p. 32.

5. Ibid.


This essay was written in 1986 and while it could now be revised and updated to account for development in film and television since then, I have preferred to let it stand in its original form.
Responses to war in Australian fiction have not been confined to military conflict, to so-called war novels. Much of the work of David Malouf, of his poetry and fiction, and Les Murray's verse novel, *The Boys Who Stole the Funeral*, show in different ways how war has indirectly affected the shaping of Australian experience. In these works war is used more as metaphor and analogy than as fact. In this paper, then, I shall concentrate not on literature about warfare but on the ways in which the chosen writers use war as a means of exploring the divisiveness they see within both the individual and society.

Roger McDonald's novel, *1915*, was the first of a crop of works, of film (Gallipoli) and literature (including poetry), to reassess World War I and it provides some of the basic patterns for them, whether or not they were influenced by it. By devoting half of *1915* to civilian life, half to the Gallipoli action, McDonald dealt not simply with combatant experience but with the ways in which attitudes to war can heighten the divisiveness inherent in civilian life. And war provides some equivalent of these divisions. Malouf and Murray make similar connections.

Broadly speaking these three writers offer different and typical embodiments of questions raised by war: how do we reconcile ourselves to the violence which war expresses in extreme form and which is also found in society and the individual psyche? Malouf believes that Australians have been 'sheltered from history', where history means European history and its regular upheavals. Hence to achieve the vision of completeness central to Malouf's work Australian experience needs to be complemented by the European 'nightmare'. On the other hand Les Murray, in *The Boys who Stole the Funeral*, while not seeing Australian life in complete isolation, implies that its divisiveness is of a distinct kind, the product of a community shaped by its own special history and physical circumstances of place, and
hence requiring that Australians reach a reconciliation in their own way. ‘The Day of our peace will need a native/ herb that out-savours rosemary’. In what might seem to be a ‘reply’ to Malouf, one of Murray’s characters comments ironically in The Boys: ‘Suffering’s a migrant’s game ... Who would believe/in Australians’ suffering (unless they were black)?’ (p. 22).

Malouf’s major theme involves a breakthrough into a new dimension of awareness. This may be seen in the key poem, ‘The Year of the Foxes’ which on his own testimony opened the way for his first novel Johnno and which typically links war with change. Here the G.I.’s transform the Brisbane of the 1940s. Their purchase of fox furs in their pursuit of the local women provokes the ten year old persona to a discovery that this mutual predatoriness of the sexes links all human beings, including himself in his fascination and recoil, with the primitive and often violent forces of the natural world: ‘I dreamed the dangerous spark of their eyes, brushes aflame ... the dark fox stink of them/cornered in their holes’. This glimpse beneath the surface reassures the persona that his nightmares, including his own inner violence, are real and natural, not manufactured and aberrant, and that the nightmares have their counterpart in social reality where they are muffled like ‘the cry of the hounds ... behind mirrored glass’, i.e. the show pieces in his mother’s glass-fronted cabinet. The persona is reassured to find that life is not as ordered and stable as society pretends, for the new vision of his suburban home as a ‘far-hung, nomadic tent’ is both a foretaste of the openness of life and of the possibility of change.

These basic motifs are again linked with war in Johnno in episodes paralleled in the poem ‘Episode form an Early War’. Though Dante’s home becomes ‘a miniature war museum’ and his world is filled with talk and other echoes of war, such as newsreels, the world of ‘daylight reality’ was something he knew only with ‘one half of himself’. It is his childhood nightmares of fear and violence, where ‘giant staghorns’ leap through the window and the fernery outside becomes a ‘jungle’, which confirms the reality of the war for him by connecting it with inside knowledge. Thus Dante moves towards an integration of what is called in Child’s Play ‘the fresh, cruel, innocent, destructive beginnings’ of childhood and also of the social changes war brings to Brisbane.

On the other hand, Johnno (the character) is a ‘war child’ in that his ‘wildness’ is simplistically and complacently attributed to the absence at war of a controlling father and not to his anger and frustration at the seeming irreconcilability of inner and outer worlds. In turn he simplistically blames the misunderstanding and pretence of his family and of society on Brisbane, not realizing, as Dante is to do, that provincialism and colonialism can, like war, throw into relief an
underlying problem, not create it.

In the European section of the novel, an episode in Paris where Dante and Johnno are frisked and assaulted by gun-men, brings home to Dante the reality of terrorism, one of World War II’s legacies: ‘What flashed into my head were those moonlit newsreels that had also made up for a time my childhood nightmares’ (p. 120). He realizes that but for an accident of time a Jewish grandmother would have been enough to make him a war victim, and now such victims take on a new meaning: ‘I had broken through into my own consciousness and ... Europe was a different place’ (p. 120). Again inner and outer worlds are connected and Johnno’s violence (and implicitly Dante’s own) is seen no longer as a ‘private disorder’ but part of ‘a whole society’s public nightmare’ (p. 120). Dante believes that this reassurance, echoing his own earlier one, ‘cures’ Johnno of himself, but this is not altogether so. Europe and expatriatism cannot ‘cure’ Johnno who, back in Australia, later commits the ultimate violence against himself, suicide. This may be partly a failure in reconciling inner divisions but for Dante it offers a kind of assertion, apparently representing a facing up to issues, a playing out of possibilities, which most others comfortably put aside. This is also the theme of a poem about the original of the character Johnno, ‘With the Earlier Deaths’ (NIAT, p. 16).

Much of Malouf’s poetry is concerned with European wars and upheavals, seeing this recurrent violence as answering to the ‘real’ nightmares of the self. In Europe ‘bad dreams have monuments’ and the Turks are always at the Gate’ (‘Bad Dreams in Vienna’, NIAT, p. 35). Here ‘brutal illusions are not done with yet’, for ‘peace is illusory’ and ‘the old divisions persist’ (‘Report from the Champagne Country’, NIAT p. 41). History, as it is ‘written and rewritten’ enacts ‘terrible prophecies’, but it is ‘our daily lives’ which ‘make them happen’ (‘Theologica Germanica’, SP, p. 100). But destruction is offset by a sense of continuity and renewal, by being ‘closer to the earth’ which is ‘seeded with death’. The ‘unkillable grass seeds’ are the equivalent of the words of the poet Mandelstam, victim of political persecution.8 In An Imaginary Life words are also the means of creation, the seeds of Ovid’s new life.9 But words can also be destructive. They are to the father of the painter, Frank Harland,10 and, in the earlier poem ‘News from the Dark Ages’, about Ezra Pound’s Pisan captivity, when the poet, like Dante, descends into the ‘Inferno’ of himself, he learns ‘black news’: ‘The Inferno/is real and men have made it. Words/too are of the process’ (NIAT, p. 34). This message again connects inner and outer life, thought (or words) and action.

As with Murray, in Malouf’s work violence can be rooted in family experience. Not dissimilar from the war poems is Malouf’s early work, ‘At My Grandmothers’, set in Brisbane and dealing with the unspoken divisions of personal relationships. In this poem which has links with
violence in the terrorist novel, *Child's Play* and with war and women in *Harland's Half Acre*, a small boy is the 'prisoner' of a destructive grandmother and he sits in her room in speechless terror, just as 'the parrot screeches soundless in its dome of glass' (*SP*, p. 4). Here glass is again associated with stifled feeling which is part of the violence.

Another key poem, 'Asphodel' (*NIAT*, p. 1), is linked with both *An Imaginary Life* and *Fly Away Peter*. Here the persona descends to an underworld in a violent struggle against drowning in a Brisbane mudhole. But the outcome is positive: he develops 'a lifelong taste for earth', a sense of being part of life's ecological and evolutionary unity. The poem has links with Ovid's enforced exile in *An Imaginary Life*, where this violence breeds positive results and where the Roumanian delta is a counterpart of the mudflats of some Brisbane poems. There are also links with *Fly Away Peter* where the anti-world, or Hades-like underworld of the French trenches of World War I, with their corpses, rats and mud, is offset by the harmonious world of a bird-filled Queensland swamp. The poem 'The [mud] Crab Feast' also celebrates through ritual the cycle of death and renewal, the containment of death and violence. 

Malouf, then, in his poetry and fiction sees European life more as complementary to Australian life rather than as co-extensive with it. *Harland's Half Acre*, however, suggests the latter. The novel is about possession, asking the question of what, if anything, can we 'possess' in life when so much is lost or destroyed, for instance by possessiveness. Three of the novel's four sections centre on violence. Part I shows the possessiveness of a father who dominates his sons' lives. Part II climaxes with a startling eruption of aggression by a grandmother who vents her hatred on her daughter-in-law for having supposedly dispossessed her of her son. This anger is 'a kind of violence for which [even her son Gil, a victim of World War II nerves] had no terms' (p. 102) and which leaves the rest of the family fearful and impotent victims. Part III raises, through a Polish refugee called Knack, Malouf's question of whether Australian experience, even including the widespread suffering of the depression years, is by comparison with Europe innocent and incomplete. Knack's Australian lover Edna, learns from him that there's 'a lot of darkness' in everyone. She shares her knowledge with Frank who is frightened of the darkness in himself. In another climactic scene, this time a suicide pact, Knack shoots Edna and blows off the back of his own head, smearing a wall with blood. This leads to a 'breakthrough' in Frank's consciousness, for through the resulting wall 'painting', which 'dares' more than Frank's Australian landscape that has hung there, he sees Knack's action as not simply destructive. 'Searingly alive', Knack's 'painting' reconciles 'terror and beauty', because as well as involving 'sickening loss' it asserts or possesses, with some sense of triumph, the
complete whole which many people disown (p. 126).

But Frank in turn becomes possessive of a nephew Gerald and helps to drive him to suicide in the dark ‘underworld’ beneath Frank’s Brisbane house. Built on stilts on a steep slope it straddles a darkness Gerald has always been afraid of. The novel apparently suggests that one does not have to endure ‘the civil wars, revolutions and ... war [between nations]’ (p. 120) to experience the darkness in ourselves and others and the suffering it can cause. Frank struggles to reach his reconciliation but in the end a realization of the ‘mess’ of his life is needed to complement his paintings if its unity is to be understood.

Like Malouf’s work, Les Murray’s The Boys connects inner and outer worlds of violence, and while European history is not involved, Australia’s participation in Gallipoli is used as a central point of reference. Again like Malouf, Murray brings out into the open the violence which individuals and society hide and rationalize. As Geoffrey Lehmann has pointed out, the ‘other worlds’ in Murray embrace not only a vision of wholeness, one that is given a religious dimension, but its anti-world of the inhuman forces in modern society. These both have their counterparts in Malouf’s work, but a further ‘other world’ in Murray is social justice, the ideal or belief which sustains the ‘common’ people, and is related to a religious dimension. In fact, while Malouf extends his social range in Harland’s Half Acre, Murray is much more concerned with Australian society, in criticizing its strengths and weaknesses in The Boys through an extraordinary range of voices and experiences. These subtle and highly condensed checks and balances call for tentativeness in interpreting it, especially when it uses extremes and invites ideological disagreement by attacking fashionable causes.

The unifying idea behind The Boys is that a society supposedly at peace is really torn by inner divisions, a kind of undeclared civil war. Accordingly, while Murray has acknowledged some technical influence by an unnamed contemporary American poet, an unlikely analogy for The Boys is the early Victorian verse novel, Tennyson’s Maud. Here the inner violence of the protagonist, which leads to madness and eventual reintegration, both mirrors the exploitive conflicts of society and is fuelled by it. Maud, however, is a ‘monodrama’ with more emphasis on the internal self. Its many voices or moods originate in what Matthew Arnold called the modern mind’s ‘dialogue with itself’. The Boys is more of a social dialogue and is full of conversational exchange.

Briefly, the story is concerned with two young men, Kevin Forbutt and Cameron Reeby who steal the corpse of Kevin’s ‘Digger’ uncle, Clarrie, from the anonymity of a Sydney funeral parlour so as to honour his wish to be buried in the country town of his origins. The enterprise is successful but it focuses family and social rifts and it leads
to climactic violent actions. A feminist, Noeline Kampff, pours a bucket of ox blood over Reeby only to have her face scalded in revenge. Reeby, after attacking a policeman, is shot by him.

The novel is explicitly a story of the 1970s. The youthful 'thieves' are social rebels, representing the dispossessed who are both economically and spiritually deprived. They are 'resurrection men', not simply in the sense of thieves of dead bodies but because they are seeking psychic and social rebirth. And they are not simply 'at the age of soldiers', they are soldiers in that their positive protest represents a taking up of arms. They are, however, no unblemished heroes, nor is the war a matter of simple right and wrong.

The divisiveness Murray sees takes several main forms. These are not exclusive to the 1970s and have counterparts in the strife Malouf sees as recurrent in Europe. First there is economic exploitation, both rural and urban, resulting in widespread unemployment and poverty. Murray himself comes from and represents the rural poor, the small landholders and the country workers who figure in Australian literature much less frequently than those better off than themselves. They are also represented in McDonald's 1915. They are depicted in Murray's poems (e.g. 'Saw Mill Towns', 'Country Widower', 'The Mitchells') and in the moving group from The People's Otherworld about his mother's death. She haemorrhaged in a miscarriage and died partly as a result of the local doctor's disregard for poor patients, partly because of mistreatment at an earlier confinement where forceps were misapplied.

In The Boys Kevin is unemployed, Reeby a student drop-out. Sydney is 'a building site now', 'gobbled' by ambition (as in pictures of the city in The People's Otherworld), and while rural life retains some dignity and meaning, it is also under threat. Struggling farmers are exploited by one of their fellows, and workers 'grieve, sorely injured in their music', providing an example of the equivalents of 'war casualties' who are to be found in the novel. This is the 'New World', an ironic and ambiguous term Murray uses to attack the false ambitions of modern society and, at other times, to suggest a version of the Utopian dream traditional in Australia's history both of which take a social and spiritual form.

Another cause of divisiveness is an ideological one, the undermining of sound Australian values by the false liberation of the 1970s, a pernicious 'import' the novel challengingly suggests. Out of their frustrations people turn with 'ferocity' and 'loud' cruelty to fashionable causes which express self-interest and frustration rather than compassion. Kevin's father displays an ideological trendiness and his lover, Noelene Kampff, represents militant feminism. Other negative causes include abortion, a key metaphor and fact linked with the killing of war, and with the rejection of life (including family life) for death.
Social debate is really a battle because understanding has become 'conquest'. Trivializing trendiness and cause-seeking is illustrated by a journalist's anticipation of Kevin's motives for stealing the funeral. 'But what's the strength of the rural consciousness demo?/A back-to-roots ritual?' (The Boys, p. 23). Kevin's alienation from his parents is part of his social alienation.

Through Clarrie, Gallipoli along with other wars which Australia has involved itself in, is a recurrent motif, but actual battle scenes are rare and brief, and instead warfare imagery, including some of the most violent (e.g. machine guns and snipers), is reserved for the social divisiveness, especially that of the ideologues. Indeed Murray apparently agrees with Yeats' chauvinist view that some, especially women, 'by opinions are accurst' and that 'an intellectual hatred is the worst'. In The Boys, 'Literature' is perjoratively associated with what he refers to in Persistence in Folly as 'repeated attempts by man to force meaning on the world and seal it with literal human sacrifice'.

Gallipoli is viewed ambiguously. The novel de glamorizes Clarrie's reasons for enlisting (they include 'Literature' and adventure) and also his return to civilian life when he succumbs 'to a virus that war and the New World both [modern Europe and Australia] had nourished:/I spent my life looking for my platoon' (p. 56). In other words he becomes rootless and nostalgic for male mateship, never marrying or farming the block of land intended for him. The young Reeby promises to follow the path but is killed in his prime. A penetrating criticism of the war, and of the internecine social conflicts of the 1970s, is that 'by putting their trust in what they died fighting' for these soldiers 'ruined their singleness' (p. 35), their concentration of purpose. It is interesting that war victims in The Boys embrace those of the Pacific action of World War II which is not as significant as European wars in Malouf, with the notable exception of The Great World, even though closer to home. Beryl Murchison's husband is a life-long invalid after working on the Thailand railway, and Beryl herself, now a widow, has had to sacrifice much of her life to nursing him in near penury which is their 'depression'.

On the other hand Clarrie's experience involved some self-sacrifice. For him and other 'battlers' war was 'their only proud employment ever' (p. 47). The necessity of dignified, significant labour, of a 'place' in society for every person, is a key issue in the novel. Hence for Kevin, Clarrie's life offers some guidance. If Clarrie was 'partly ruined by a war ... he had dignity' (p. 48), whereas Kevin's father is fighting an 'antiwar', not against war as he believes, and what he has gained for his efforts is 'white levis', that is, the uniform of fashionability.

In a dream sequence some of the mysteries of life are revealed to Kevin by two Aboriginal wise men. He is given an embracing vision, like an aerial map of the whole Australian continent and of its 'blood
history' (p. 65, cf. the enveloping vision before Jim's death in *Fly Away Peter*). In Murray's poetry blood is associated with sacrifice of self and others and the baffling moral problems these raise (as in 'Blood', 'The Abomination', 'SMLE', 'Lament for Country Soldiers' and 'Visiting Anzac in the Year of Metrication', in *VP*, pp. 21, 22, 54, 47, 138). In *The Boys* the 'blood history' embraces wars between whites and Aborigines as well as overseas wars, although Murray is again unfashionable in suggesting that the 'blood theologies' of the Aborigines could be destructive. It is interesting that McDonald and Malouf also link mistreatment of Aborigines with overseas wars.

If we look at the novels considered here the visions of possible harmony, individual and social, in *1915* Walter's experience in the Cairo mosque or Billy's hopes of domestic happiness, are aborted dreams, and not the 'realities' they are in Murray and Malouf. Murray's vision is a striking one, seen more in terms of common human experience and bonds than Malouf's sense of the individual's oneness with the natural world. In *The Boys* the main images of wholeness, of a unifying 'centre', is that of 'the common dish' which Clarrie reveals to Kevin apropos of talk about war. The 'dish' is important in suggesting both something that can contain and the essential food it contains. The contents are what is available to everyone. They comprise the contrarities, 'work, agony and laughter'. The flavour varies for individuals and it can be 'difficult food' (p. 46). There are those who refuse to eat, like Kevin's parents who avoid commitment. Tasting involves unhappiness and 'blood', but if you refuse 'the depths of your happiness may be spared you'. If a poor family at their dinner is 'the holiest thing in the Universe' it is because it is a ritual image of the harmonized human family.

The outcome of *The Boys* is a balancing of possibilities. Kevin reconciles his inner divisions, Reeby does not. While the latter gives in to disillusion and is killed, his life 'aborted', Kevin, who is himself tempted towards death and to 'smash his gift of action', is finally 'reborn beyond abortion', finding a 'place' in life, in farming the property intended for Clarrie. While Noeline Kampff is softened by tears, her attacker Jennie is hardened by bitterness. There is no 'human solution', however, only a religious one beyond earthly life, as suggested by the sacramental significance of the 'common dish': 'Jesus blessed it and devoured it whole' (p. 46).

*The Boys* received a mixed critical reception. Rural life is idealized and conversely, in this version of pastoral, feminism is demonized. It might be argued that such extreme depictions are strategies which suit Murray's imaginative polemic, but in literature effective exaggeration can be distinguished from falsity and in this case *The Boys* imposes distortion, though elsewhere it relies on imaginative realism. Feminism may have had its excesses, and no other writer of Murray's calibre has
dared to say so, but so have most other movements for change, whether of the right or the left, and excesses should not blot out the real gains, or the need for them. Noeline Kampff is meant to be a monster but she is a contrived one. As with feminism, urban life is seen too negatively. It is not integrated into Murray's synthesising view as in 'The Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle' or in The People's Otherworld. But, as Peter Porter has suggested, aggressive-defensive aspects of The Boys should be seen in the Australian social context of Murray's origins and audience and in the context of Murray's whole contribution:

Nobody should read The Boys who has not first absorbed Murray's other poetry, since its aggressive tone is directed at his Australian readership, and is part of a long-lasting, small-print argument about values for the forthcoming republic. Overseas readers may find the poem otiose in its harangues and even, at times, morally disturbing. Yet it is full of brilliant writing and provides the fullest evidence so far in Murray's career of his tendency to the baroque - a tendency which I believe makes him the most accomplished and inventive poet in Australia today, and among the half dozen most successful poets in the English language world wide.  

In contrast to the visions in Malouf and Murray of the way violence can be contained, McDonald in 1915 is compassionately pessimistic. Here human beings fail to break out of the prison of self, and human relationships, beginning in kindness and curiosity, suddenly burst into a crescendo of 'cruelty and destruction' (p. 423). In this respect the 'distant world' of Europe is 'no different from this one' (Australia). Murray and Malouf, however, see both the problem and the means of dealing with it in Australian terms, that is as modified by Australian life. Towards the end of 1915 a Latin quotation is used ironically, apropos of war: 'Quod omnes tangit, ab omnibus approbetur' ('Let that which touches everyone be approved by everyone'). Some characters approve or disapprove out of self-interest, socially identifying with the war effort or resenting dislocations of personal life. But 1915, like the works of Malouf and Murray, suggests that the violence of war, and the analogous divisiveness found in ordinary living and in all places, does 'touch all' and accordingly should be 'approved' in the sense of faced and contained. Frederic Manning, expatriate Australian author of the classic war novel of World War I, Her Privates We, wrote in the 'Prefatory Note': 'War is waged by men; not by beasts or gods. It is a peculiarly human activity'. If for Manning war is tragic but inescapable, Malouf and Murray express similar but individual views, even if they see the destructiveness of war as part of a larger, positive pattern. While one could not for a moment say that any of these novels condone war, their attitudes might be seen in the 1980s as the kind of views which, even if unintentionally, help to make further wars inevitable. Australian writers of the future will surely continue to
engage with this issue in their long-standing literary dialogue about war.

NOTES

1. Roger McDonald, 1915 (St. Lucia, Brisbane: UQP, 1979; Fontana/Collins, 1980).
2. Les A. Murray, The Boys Who Stole the Funeral (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1980). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
4. David Malouf, 'The Year of the Foxes', in Selected Poems (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1981), p. 9. Further quotations in this paragraph are from this poem. Hereafter, SP, and all further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
5. David Malouf, 'Episode from an Early War', in Neighbours in a Thicket (St. Lucia, Brisbane: UQP, 1974), p. 13. Hereafter, NIAT, and all further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
6. David Malouf, johnno (St. Lucia, Brisbane: UQP, 1975), p. 25. Further quotations in this paragraph are from p. 25. Hereafter, all further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
8. For a continuation of this theme in David Malouf's work see, 'Off the Highway' and 'A Poet Among Others', in NIAT, pp. 39, 36.
10. David Malouf, Harland's Half Acre (London: Chatto & Windus, the Hogarth Press, 1984). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
Languages of War, Class and National History: David Malouf’s *Fly Away Peter*

In an historical analysis of language and the ideologies which underwrite it, Michel Pêcheux argues that all perception and value arise from a relationship of contradictions between and within various discourses, since ‘thought exists only within a determination which imposes edges, separations and limits on it, in other words ... “thought” is determined in its “forms” and its “contents” by the unthought ... [In any discourse] the unasserted precedes and dominates the assertion’.¹ In other words, various discourses can be identified not only by what is said but also by what is unsaid within them, and so ‘culture’ itself becomes ‘a complex of competing narratives of which one or other is, for the time being, dominant’.²

These are, of course, familiar ideas: in what might be called this post-colonial age in Western history, the supposedly once-secure belief in centres of knowledge or ‘fullness of presence’ (was it really ever so secure?) is perpetually thrown into relief against its antithesis; that is, suspicion of metaphysical centres and scrutiny of their role in the construction of cultural and national hierarchies, and those hierarchies’ exercises of power. As post-colonial writers and critics have variously argued, moreover, understandings of ‘nation’ and ‘culture’ are particularly provisional in ex-settler societies, like Australia, where any act of mapping out historical space³ is always subject to the competing perceptions of the various groups who are implicated in such acts: not only the governing imperial body and the colonial settlers, of course, but also the indigenous dispossessed.⁴ In Australia, then (as in other ex-settler societies), understandings of culture and nation have arisen out of frictions between different understandings of historical space: images of independence rub up against the codes of empire which are present in the very systems of language and knowledge which are basic to Australia’s post-colonized society.

In its focus on Australia’s participation in World War I (amongst other things), David Malouf’s 1982 novel *Fly Away Peter* ⁵ addresses some of these ‘frictions’ and the national myths to which they give rise.
Dealing as it does with the close relation between the rhetorics of war, class and national identity, *Fly Away Peter* has a great deal to say about the various codes of knowledge through which a nation and its mythic history are read. War, of course, is the active instrument of cultural, political and economic power, and in setting this novel during World War I, Malouf takes up the national myth of this war in particular as a turning point in Australia’s history. According to this myth, Australia’s participation in World War I marked a loss of innocence, an ‘arrival’ to a world of violence, international ‘experience’, and post-Edenic self-awareness. In one sense, then, Australia’s participation in a largely European war became a claim to a new form of independence, a landmark of its own place within the international arena of History. Yet ironically World War I also held mythic relevance, not so much as Australia’s independence from Britain, as Australia’s re-acceptance by ancestral Britain: an invitation, as Malouf has put it, to play with ‘the big boys in the playground’. 6

Another irony in the mythologizing of this war is that although Australia’s participation certainly gave rise to a new kind of national heroism, it was not until well after the war that the experience could be incorporated into a distinct legend of cohesive national character. Although the Anzac legend could borrow from the character of the Battler, Australian society 1914-18 had been irrevocably altered in ways which allowed for no language to express the changes. Speaking of his own childhood in a time of war, for instance, Malouf writes:

> I had a powerful sense of my storytellers’ telling me nothing in the end of what they had really seen and felt ... they were expressing themselves out of my world. Or perhaps they had reduced the thing, even in their own minds, to the purely conventional terms in which they could most acceptably relate their experiences to themselves. (*Australian Literature and War*, p. 226)

Rather than rounding out an established national image, then, the experience of war might even have accentuated the already-existent tensions within Australian society, at least until taken up by the imagination of following generations and reworked into the pattern of a shared history. In effect, as a whole generation of historians have argued, Australia’s involvement was perhaps not so much a mark of new-found independence as it was the sign of an ongoing and ambivalent connection to Britain: a connection which Australians still both rejected and nurtured.

The extent of Australia’s dependence on inherited (English) social codes is apparent in *Fly Away Peter* in the dynamics of pre-war Queensland society. Malouf depicts a community which, despite its ‘grass-roots’ community, is invisibly bound to the conventions of class. In depicting this community, Malouf implicitly addresses another national mythology about the ‘coming into being’ of Australia: that is,
of course, that the social hierarchy of empire was replaced by a principle of egalitarianism, in which each man (used advisedly) enjoys equal status under a shared sky. Yet even within the natural and idyllic world of the Sanctuary – the haven for birdlife which is owned by Ashley Crowther, the young landowner freshly returned from Cambridge, and managed by Jim Saddler, the local farmer’s son – the boundaries of class still prevail. Seeing Ashley for the first time, Jim recognizes him instantly as a kind of soulmate, as someone familiar because intrinsically similar to himself. But for all that, he cannot approach Ashley because ‘[i]t wasn’t his place to make an opening’ (p. 4). The responsibility for making contact falls to Ashley who, despite his natural sensitivity and his scepticism about the value and rights of land-ownership, is nonetheless bound to the responsibility of social power. Ashley is introduced in contrasting images of childish helplessness and imperial authority: he stoops under the weight of his grandfather’s watch-chain and stumbles over his words as well as over his boots. Nevertheless, ‘he had said “Well then, you’re my man,” having that sort of power, and Jim was made’ (p. 5). Indeed it is his own awareness of ‘having that sort of power’, an awareness which pervades his whole presence, that makes Ashley passable ‘on that side of the world for an English gentleman’.

He spoke like one; he wore the clothes – he was much addicted to waistcoats and watch-chains, an affectation he might have to give up, he saw, in the new climate; he knew how to handle waiters, porters, commissionaires etc. with just the right mixture of authority, condescension and jolly good humour. He was in all ways cultivated, and his idleness, which is what people here would call it, gave him no qualms. (p. 8)

Their roles are only reversed during a boating expedition for Ashley and his wealthy friends on the swamp. Here, Jim is in control; his power lies in his knowledge of the birds and particularly in his capacity to name them. Although Ashley is seen to appreciate and respect the landscape, Jim’s affinity with it is perceived by both young men to be natural and innate. His claims to the land, the novel suggests, are ‘ancient and deep’. They lie ‘in his having a vision of the place and the power to give that vision breath; in his having, most of all, the names for things and in that way possessing them. It went beyond mere convention or the law’ (p. 7). The visitors from the big house would be ‘subdued, tense ... held on Jim’s breath’ as he would whisper the names of the birds in a way that ‘wrapped the bird in mystery, beyond even the brilliance of its colouring and the strange light the place touched it with’ (pp. 29-30). As soon as the group leaves the swamp to picnic on hard ground, however, things revert ‘back to reality’ (p. 32). Jim sits apart beneath a tree to eat his home-brought sandwich while the others consume their picnic spread, and at
the end of the afternoon the gentlemen tip him, Jim accepting the shillings in respect to an established set of social rules. Jim's acceptance of his place within a defined social hierarchy is not shared by his father, who struggles against an order which he cannot define but which has moulded the pattern of his life. His struggle, however, is portrayed as futile, giving way as it does only to a kind of aggressive passivity of which even the source is eventually forgotten. His father's social hostility is regarded by Jim as being 'of a kind that could blast the world. It allowed nothing to exist under its breath without being blackened, torn up by the roots, slashed at, and shown when ripped apart to have a centre as rotten as itself' (p. 6).

The arrival of war, with its firm sense of hierarchy, does nothing to dissolve the passively received pre-war class structure. Indeed the war, as an extension of imperial power, affirms the boundaries with added authority. When Jim and Ashley join up, Jim enters the army as a private while Ashley enters 'as an officer, and in another division' (p.57). Within the hierarchy of the military machine, the soldiers fulfil their given roles despite deep instincts which struggle against them. Huddled in an abandoned trench, for instance, Jim's division finds itself under the command of a young officer. Like Ashley, the officer is described in terms which are naturally incongruent with his authority. A picture of youthful innocence, he is scarcely more than a boy: round-faced, blue-eyed and, despite the mud, freshly-scrubbed. However when he orders the men forward into battle, they obey: 'It's a mistake', Jim thought, whose own youth lay so far back now that he could barely recall it. 'This kid can't be more than twelve years old'. But when the voice said 'Right men, now!' he rose up out of the ditch and followed (p. 94). The officer, of course, is as much subject to the authority he wields as the soldiers. His place in the pattern of things is predetermined and he fills it completely, 'as he had learned from the stories in Chums' (p. 94).

In this sense, the impact of imperial power seems all-pervasive; war, as the instrument of this power and despite its inevitable chaos, seems to confirm the exercises of power which had long been naturalized in the social structures of the colonial world. Yet war also alters those structures through its various effects. One of those effects is the transforming and flattening out, in language, of human life. The language of war articulates 'the logistics of battle and the precise breaking point of men' (p. 109); it turns 'farmer's sons' into "troops" who were about to be "thrown in" ... re-enforcements [who] would soon be "casualties"" (p. 112). Ironically, then, the hierarchy of the war machine is smoothed out in the process of finding a language in which to smooth over war's repercussions.

But language, always double-edged, has another effect here; the language which diminishes value is countered by a language of re-
evaluation, in which identities and their positions in space and in history are re-defined. For instance, grappling with a 'new' landscape (which of course is the blasted 'old' world of Europe) as well as a new identity within the war machine, the soldiers invent new definitions for things which are meaningful in terms of their shifting experience. In effect their environment, which includes themselves, is in constant process of being remapped and renamed:

Crossing Half-past Eleven Square (it was called that because the Town Hall clock had stopped at that hour during an early bombardment; everything here had been renamed and then named again, as places and streets, a copse, a farmhouse, yielded up their old history and entered the new) you turned left and went on across Barbedwire Square ... and from there, via Lunatic Lane, into the lines. (pp. 76-77)

In a surreal world without dimension and outside of time, the soldiers enter into a process of perpetual re-definition, not only of the tilting world, but also of each one's own place within it. Accordingly each soldier possesses a nickname in addition to an army title. Ashley, surprised to find himself also endowed with a nickname, is given a new identity which is suitable to his strange circumstances. He considers that they all may have been 're-enforcements' and 'casualties', but

[they] were also Spud, Snow, Skeeter, Blue, Tommo. Even he had a nickname. It had emerged to surprise him with its correspondence to something deep within that he hadn't known was there till some wit, endowed with native cheek and a rare folk wisdom, had offered it to him as a gift. He was grateful. It was like a new identity. The war had remade him as it had remade these others. (p. 112)

The naming of 'Parapet Joe', a German sniper from the other side of the trenches, is an act which breaks through the boundaries of conflict to affirm the humanity of even the unseen enemy, and which establishes a ground of common circumstance that runs deeper than national conscience. The process of naming also serves as a means of reassurance for men about to go into battle. Language here takes on a magical, ritualistic quality which is located in the words of prayers or nursery rhymes drawn out of memory, and it works to hold off death, which is 'that other form of words, the anti-breath of a backward-spelled charm, the no-name of extinction' (pp. 114-15).

In effect, then, the different languages which arise from the war indicate that the assertion of any sustaining narrative is dependent upon the non-assertion of others (such as 'that other form of words'). Of course what such a reading of Australian history suggests is that the national myth of pre-war innocence (an innocence which is shattered by the intervention of empire as authoritative power and creator of
war) is sustainable only through the necessary suppression of its other; that is, the uncomfortable memory of violence and colonization in pre-war Australia. At the same time as it revives the national mythology of Australia at war, then, *Fly Away Peter* explores the underbelly of that mythology in its glimpses of 'our other history'; that is, the social events and fractures which history misses. In this sense, Jim's initial innocence is, though guileless enough, offered up as being always, already suspect. The novel opens with a self-reflexive description of Jim's landscape, in which the Sanctuary – a harmonious, sanctified world, with its borders of trees and rings of colour – is artfully created: the 'light was dulled by cloud shadows, then, as if an unseen hand were rubbing it with a cloth, it brightened, flared, and the silver shone through' (p. 1). The Sanctuary, in fact, is more a source of security for Jim than for the birds. After all, the birds themselves do not seem to require the protection of the Sanctuary, adapting as they do to any environment and repeating their patterns of migration in a way that is utterly indifferent to the zones of war. Like the war, the birds are one of the text's pervasive metaphors for change but, unlike the war, their role is an apolitical one; indeed in their movement between polarized worlds they are 'quite unconscious that [they have] broken some barrier' (p. 48). Most importantly, the birds have the capacity to hold more than one kind of map in their heads at any one time: not only do they move 'horizontally' between the northern and southern hemispheres, but they also see 'vertically' between 'the flat world of individual grassblades' and 'the long view' from the sky (p. 2). Unlike the south – and earth-bound Jim Saddler, each bird retains, in that small eye, some image of the larger world ... seeing clearly the space between the two points, and knowing that the distance, however great, could quite certainly be covered a second time in the opposite direction because the further side was still visible, either there in its head or in the long memory of its kind. (p. 20)

In contrast to the birds, Jim can initially imagine only one kind of map. Bert's bi-plane in particular, the 'clumsy shape' of the novel's opening lines, is regarded by Jim with suspicion and dislike. It represents a threat to the static world of the Sanctuary, and in his eyes it is a 'big shadow' which dulls the otherwise untempered brightness of the sky. But like the different languages of war, which can either disintegrate or remake the world as it is known, the bi-plane has a double effect. On the one hand, it signals a negative tension between the post-industrial, imperialistic world of human ambition and the apparently eternally-unaffected landscape, between the potential of war and a natural harmony: 'The bi-plane appeared again, climbing steeply against the sun. Birds scattered and flew up in all directions. It flopped down among them, so big, so awkward, so noisy. Did they wonder what it
ate?’ (p. 3). On the other hand, the plane signals the sorts of changes which, as Philip Neilsen puts it, are naturalized in the terms of time’s inevitable cycles; the question which then forms itself is this: is Jim’s place within an apparently timeless landscape any more or less ‘natural’ than the movements of capitalist imperialism?

In fact, despite his innocence and his ‘natural’ connection to the land, Jim is as much a participant in the colonizing culture of Australia as Ashley. In particular, his possession of ‘the names for things’ places Jim in a position of power in terms of that most systemic apparatus of colonialism: language. Jim’s appropriation of the birds through words endows them with a quality ‘that [is] really in himself’ (p. 15). This act is formalized by Jim’s recording of the birds into The Book. Jim regards this activity in terms of his sense that the written word captures the spoken signification in a permanent form. (To write, Derrida suggests, is to have the sense of replacing a ‘present and concrete existence’ with ‘the ideality of truth and value’.) Jim’s weekly ritual of writing the birds into The Book, using his best handwriting with all the proper flourishes, gives credence not only to their named identities, but also, in a ritualistic and therefore seemingly natural way, to his own place within the world as he sees it: ‘Out of air and water [the birds] passed through their name, and his hand as he carefully formed its letters, into The Book. Making a place for them there was giving them existence in another form, recognising their place in the landscape, or his stretch of it ...’ (p. 44). The Book is written in the language of the empire, learned painfully at school ‘without at all knowing what it was to be for’ (p. 45), and then passed on each week to Ashley, the land’s owner, for approval. Before the writing of The Book, in fact, Ashley is predetermined as its owner; when Ashley and Julia Bell are married, Jim ‘presented them with the first of the Books; not exactly as a wedding gift, since that would have been presumptuous, and anyway, the Book was Ashley’s already, but as a mark of the occasion’ (p. 45).

Jim’s state of innocence, then, can only be partial (in both senses). Just as writing is the ‘dangerous supplement’ to speech, both less than and in excess of what it claims to be, so Jim’s innocence is ‘dangerous’ (p. 103), complicitous as it is with the invisible exercise of cultural power. Ultimately, too, it is not sustainable, as the intrusion of the war indicates. Until this moment Jim sees himself at the centre of a world which radiated out and away from him in endless continuity. As Jim shakes hands with Ashley on his employment as the Sanctuary’s bird-keeper, the two appear ‘at the centre, if they could have seen themselves, of a vast circle of grass and low greyish scrub, with beyond them on one side tea-trees then paddocks, and on the other tea-trees then swamp then surf’ (p. 18). But with the announcement of war, Jim ‘felt panicky. It was as if the ground before him, that had only minutes ago stretched away to a clear future, had suddenly tilted in the
direction of Europe, in the direction of events, and they were all now on a dangerous slope. That was the impression people gave him. That they were sliding' (p. 36). And as with its repercussions for language, war here has both a diminishing and a rejuvenating import; parallel to Jim’s slide into European events is Australia’s mythologized acceptance by ‘the big boys in the playground’. Walking along Queen Street after the announcement of war, Jim reflects that ‘the streets did feel different. As if they had finally come into the real world at last’ (p.39).

As his image of his own world slides (as well as expands), Jim prepares to ‘join up’. He fears that his progress down the ‘dangerous slope’ is inevitable, for ‘[the] time would come when he wouldn’t be able any longer to resist. He would slide with the rest. Down into the pit’ (p. 35). If he resists the change, he will never have a place within the social order of his generation, will never share in the new discourse of national consciousness: ‘If he didn’t go, he would never understand ... why his life and everything he had known were so changed, and nobody would be able to tell him’ (p. 55). The next day Jim leaves for the war, and for another side of the world, a strange and terrible landscape ‘newly developed for the promotion of the war’ (p. 67). Jim’s arrival in this landscape affirms the violences and divisions which were already present, but repressed, in the protected society of pre-war Australia. The night before he leaves for the war, as he goes home with a girl from the pub, Jim witnesses a disturbance among a group of Aboriginal men. The girl’s indifference to the scene – indeed, the absence of Aboriginal presence, until this point, in either the urban or the ‘sanctified’ landscape – indicates the naturalizing of the settler culture’s own violences: “‘Abos’, the girl said with cool disgust, as if the rituals beings enacted, however violent, and in whatever degenerate form, were ordinary and not to be taken note of’ (pp. 39-40). The disturbance is played out in the darkness of the fig trees; it has no impact upon the festivities in honour of war, and no-one intervenes.

In turn Jim uncovers a dark side to his own character which had always been unrecognized, and which now frightens him with its violence. Up against another soldier in a fist fight and surprised by the ‘black anger he was possessed by’, Jim finds that he ‘needed this sudden, unexpected confrontation to see who he was and what he had to defend’ (p. 63). The war, clearly, operates on more than one level: ‘There were several wars going on here, and different areas of hostility, not all of them official’ (p. 71). The full implications of the war, however, do not touch Jim until a visit to the military hospital to see Eric, a ‘pale, sad youth’ (p. 72) whose legs have both been blown away by a wayward shell. Eric’s plaintive statement, ‘I’m an orfing. Who’s gunna look after me, back there?’ (p. 85) opens up, for the first time, an aspect of war that extends beyond the immediate horror of muddy trenches and barbed wire. Eric’s fate ‘back there’ in Australia raises
larger, even more muddy questions about the power of imperial
authority in determining the relationship between patriotic and
individual identity, and about the toll that relationship exacts:

The question was monstrous. Its largeness ... put Jim into a panic. He didn't
know the answer any more than Eric did and the question scared him. Faced
with his losses, Eric had hit upon something fundamental. It was a question
about the structure of the world they lived in and where they belonged in it,
about who had power over them and what responsibilities those agencies could
be expected to assume. (p. 85)

The irreducibility of Eric's position makes Jim weep 'for the first time
since he was a kid' (p. 87). His innocence of the days of the Sanctuary
is now lost; yet it is an innocence, of course, that was always
shadowed by its opposite. Looking back on his past life, Jim sees that
the world 'when you looked from both sides was quite other than a
placid, slow-moving dream, without change of climate or colour and
with time and place for all. He had been blind' (p. 103). Looking 'from
both sides', Jim only now recalls the violent death of his younger
brother in a harvesting accident, the image of which can 'never be
fitted in any language' (p. 103); and of the kestrel who had been a
victim of mindless violence, which had made him weep 'with rage and
pain at the cruelty of the thing, the mean and senseless cruelty'
(p.104): 'That was how it was, even in sunlight. Even there' (p. 104).

This recognition, however, does not take its form in a vision of
hopelessness or despair. The concluding section of the novel suggests
that acceptance of the fragmentary and often contradictory nature of
things is a process allowing for, if not a vision of completion, at least a
wider and adaptable world view. This is something already understood
by Ashley who, despite his sheltered social position, adapts readily to
change. Travelling through an upturned French landscape in which
scenes of war and civilian farming life are intermingled, Ashley senses
that 'there were so many worlds. They were all continuous with one
another and went on simultaneously: [the farmer's] world, intent on
his ancient business with the hoe; his own world, committed to
bringing these men up to a battle; their worlds, each one, about which
he could only guess' (p. 110). And later, launching himself into the
battle in which he will be killed, Jim feels that '[perhaps] he had, in
some part of himself, taken on the nature of a bird; though it was with
a human eye that he saw ... he moved in one place and saw things
from another, and saw too, from up there, in a grand sweep, the whole
landscape through which he was moving' (p. 106). Jim's recognition
just before death of relative worlds held in balance is simple but as far-
reaching as one person's vision can ever be:

He saw it all, and himself as a distant, slow-moving figure within it: the long
view of all their lives, including his own - all those who were running, half-
crouched, towards the guns, and the men who were firing them ... his own life
neither more nor less important than the rest, even in his own vision of the
thing, but unique because it was his head that contained it and in his view that
all these balanced lives for a moment existed ... He continued to run.
Astonished that he could hold all this in his head at the same time and how the
map he carried there had so immensely expanded. (p. 117)

Jim’s apprehension of balance between any moment’s various
possibilities stands as a prelude to Imogen Harcourt’s apprehension
after his death that there can be no answer to her own question ‘What
am I doing here?’ (p. 130), whether she is in her adopted Australia or
her native England. Her question is one which, in denying an answer,
empties of meaning that ideal of ‘fullness of presence’ and
simultaneously affirms ‘the flux of things’ (p. 131). Even so, Imogen
Harcourt’s recognition of flux is underwritten by an implicit tension
with its opposite, and this is a tension which is sustained to the text’s
close. Her vision in the last pages of a young surfer held on the crest of
a wave brings together in delicate balance the seemingly opposing
elements of change and continuity, motion and immobility. Struck by
the unfamiliar image, she admires ‘the balance, the still dancing on the
surface, the brief etching of his body against the sky at the very
moment, on the wave’s lip, when he would slide into its hollows and
fall’ (p. 133). Watching the surfer’s fragile dance, she decides:

So many things were new. Everything changed. The past could not hold and
could not be held. One day soon, she might make a photograph of this new
thing. To catch its moment, its brilliant balance up there, of movement and
stillness, of tense energy and ease – that would be something. (pp. 133-34)

Even in this acknowledgement of change, though, there is a nostalgia
for – even idealization of – unchanging permanence. Within her
insight that ‘[the] past could not hold and could not be held’ lies
Imogen Harcourt’s desire to photograph the image of the surfer; yet to
‘catch [the] moment’ would be to arrest that moment in a permanent
form; to photograph movement and tense energy would be to render
those elements immobile and fixed. To accept a world in which
knowledge is without centre is, then, not necessarily to discard the
desire for such a centre. Desire, after all, is located in that which will
always elude its fulfilment.

This same tension between provisional and essentialist readings of
world and consciousness informs Malouf’s other novels,¹⁰ and can be
traced to the presence in Malouf’s work in general of both a post-
colonial relativism and a romantic aesthetic. One reading of this
inherent tension in the novel might suggest that Malouf, following the
conventions of national mythology, aligns the war with cyclical change
which signals Australia’s movement towards maturity; but such a
reading would not allow for the ways in which Fly Away Peter does
review the narratives of our national history: in its unravelling of the mythic thread between European ‘centre’ and Australian ‘periphery’; in its scrutiny of Australia’s mythic egalitarianism; in its depiction of language itself as the means by which such myths are naturalized. These considerations give a certain weight to the novel’s final lines, which allow for a turning both to the future and to the past. And in focusing here upon the figure of Imogen Harcourt – who with her given English past and her chosen Australian future can envisage divergent horizons – the text maintains those tensions which, in refusing to relax, suggest that the enduring and the provisional precede and determine each other. As such, *Fly Away Peter*’s closing scene – be it an affirmation of continuity and universals or of fragmentation and relativities – is one in which the potential of its opposite is already contained, in which the asserted is inevitably shadowed by the unasserted:

One day soon, she might make a photograph of this new thing. To catch its moment, its brilliant balance up there, of movement and stillness, of tense energy and ease – that would be something. This eager turning, for a moment, to the future, surprised and hurt her ... There was in there a mourning woman who rocked eternally back and forth; who would not be seen and was herself. But before she fell below the crest of the dunes, while the ocean was still in view, she turned and looked again. (p. 134)

NOTES

4. This is not to suggest that there are only three ‘edges’ of contact between governors, settlers and Aborigines, nor that such edges are not subject to overlap; rather, the effects of the ‘contact zone’, as the Australian historian Henry Reynolds has made familiar, are multiple.
5. David Malouf, *Fly Away Peter* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1983). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
10. For instance, *Johnno*’s conclusion depends upon the ambiguity of the character’s life and death, but it also allows for a return to his source; *Child’s
*Play* is a self-reflexive challenge to literary tradition but it is one which ends with a circular return to its idealised beginning of childhood innocence; *An Imaginary Life* is an exploration of the arbitrary nature of that most imperial language, Latin, but it concludes with the affirmation of a 'true language' whose 'every syllable is a gesture of reconciliation'. (*Remembering Babylon* is another example. ed., AR.)

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John Romeril's Wars: The Dissenting View

A variety of major works treating the experience of war have emerged in Australia. Usually they have been concerned with the experience of going to war, with the existential realities encountered there. Or, alternatively, with the decision to go to war.¹

John Romeril’s plays dealing with war are unique in that their concerns have not been primarily with the existential experience of conflict, but rather with its socio-political consequences for the individual Australian, for Australian society at large and for the future relations of Australians with the world outside. This statement may seem odd to those familiar with Romeril’s best-known work, The Floating World,² which, at one level at least, seems strongly concerned with the existential consequences of the Second World War on its ‘hero’ Les. The climax of the play is the destructive outbreak against the crew of the cruise-ship taking him and his wife on their Women’s Weekly ‘Cherry-blossom Cruise’ to Japan and the catatonic state into which his inability to reconcile his memories of his past imprisonment under the Japanese with the changing relations between Australia and Japan in the post-war world finally drives him. Nevertheless I want to argue that this element is not the only, or even the major, concern of even this work, and that, when The Floating World is set against the rest of Romeril’s works dealing with war, most of which have not been published in script form, the central concern of this writer can be clearly seen to be with the vision of war as the product of the economic forces of capitalism, and with the cost of this in human terms on those who experience the social and political pressures of wartime, on the home-front as well as in the front-line. Only when read in the light of these larger concerns can we make sense of the framing device of the opening scene of The Floating World and understand why the play constructs the scenes of Les’s breakdown (interior monologues) in a style which externalises and objectifies their cause, refusing the escape into an existential epistemology and embracing a social and political context for the personal crisis of the protagonist.

It is useful to list the main works in which Romeril has dealt with the issue of war, since the general absence of available editions of many of
them has seriously hampered attempts to place the work of this very important playwright in any serious context. Apart from the collaboration in the APG devised street plays during the sixties, the earliest work is also the most available, the only one of Romeril’s war-pieces to be published to date – that is, *The Floating World* (1974). But the next major foray into this area has never been published and, indeed exists only as a successive series of scripts worked in different formats and on different occasions. The origin of this piece is in the work listed in bibliographies as *The Dudders* and dated by Peter Fitzpatrick in *After the Doll* as 1976. The script I have, entitled *The Dud War*, was obtained from Newcastle University drama department where it was part of the material collected for a new show devised for students during a writer in residency by Romeril. I shall be looking at *The Dud War* in detail and the notes contain a fuller history of the evolution of this show from its inception.3 The next major work concerned with war is the section dealing with women munition workers of the show Romeril devised for the centenary of the South Australian Union movement in 1983 under the title *The Centenary Dance*. This comprised about a quarter of the show and explored the concern, first exhibited in *The Dud War* (using that title as a convenient catch-all for the complex of scripts referred to above) for the effects of the war on those left behind, especially on the families of the soldiers and the vast social changes they experienced as a result of the conflict which so altered their lives. Later on, the musical play *Jonah Jones*, performed in Sydney in 1985 and representing the beginning of Romeril’s recent return to working with mainstream subsidized companies, in this case the Sydney Theatre Company, and finally *Top End*, Romeril’s play dealing with Australian reactions to the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, also deal substantially with war-related issues.

With regard to *Jonah Jones*, it might be noted that the source novel, Louis Stone’s *Jonah*, deals exclusively with the period immediately before the First World War and that the play Romeril developed from it consciously extends its coverage from 1911, when the novel was published, to 1914 and the outbreak of war, a war which it represents as an extension of the violence and competition of the worlds of the street-push and cut-throat entrepreneurial capitalism through which the hero has already successfully passed. To *Jonah*, the war opens up fresh markets; it is an opportunity to sell thousands of pairs of army boots:

*Jonah:* I got a hunch that war is in my biz
what’ll put me through the roof

*Chorus:* Cos armies march in armies march in
armies march in armies march in boots.

*Jonah:* It’s horses for courses
Let’s call a spade a spade
When nations clash
There’s a lot of cash
To be made
Talk all you like about the balance of forces
Me I’ll think about the balance of trade!

PLAYERS OPERATE AS A CHORUS
INTO THIS VIRTUALLY EMPTY SPACE LARGE WHEELED
CRATES PILED WITH ARMY BOOTS ARE PUSHED CRATE
AFTER CRATE

Chorus/
Jonah: armies march in bomp stomp clomp bomp
so stitch the thread and punch the holes
armies march in bomp stomp clomp bomp
so build the heels and shape the soles ‘cos

All: armies march in
armies march in
armies march in
bomp stomp clomp bomp
BOOTS!

Romeril’s texts form a crucial if dissenting coda to the usual
Australian representations of the theme of war. Often his texts do not
seem to be overtly concerned with war at all. So, for example, the
ending of the script of The Dud War (as presented at Newcastle
University in 1977) raises a problem in the light of the play’s overt
concerns. On the surface the play deals in a light-hearted way with the
wartime world of black-marketeering, good-time girls spending the
inflated wages produced by the munitions factories, and the clash
between local petty criminals and the Americans over duty-free goods,
avy goods-scams and the local women. Yet the final moment of the
play is explicitly an anti-war moment. The 1977 Newcastle text reads:

Apocalypse when? Apocalypse then?
Apocalypse now?
Apocalypse apocolypse
Apocalypse NEVER

The final stage-direction which follows reads, ‘A fist in the air/Fade
(it is an anti-war play)’. This last overt statement of intent is puzzling.
Who is it directed towards? The young actors (students from the Drama
department) who staged the piece had worked with Romeril for about
six weeks prior to the staging and must have been aware of his
intentions. This final stage-direction suggests a certain worry on the
author’s part about the effect of the material. When the whole piece is
read this is understandable, because much of the material The Dud
War deals with is not ‘anti-war’ in the conventional sense, and might
be open to misinterpretation. There is a celebratory quality which in the
hands of exuberant and undisciplined actors could swamp the subtler message in a life-enhancing ‘survival of the little people amid the horrors of war’ style (not unlike the kind of worry provoked in Brecht by the initial reactions of post-war German audiences to *Mother Courage*, which they read as a play in praise of the endurance of the ordinary man and woman in the street). Nevertheless, despite these worries, which the ending of the existing script reflects, there is a subversive quality to Romeril’s presentation of the lumpenproletariat world of wartime Newcastle, and in the hands of a subtle cast this subversive quality could be easily sustained. The final stage-direction is like an admonishment, a guiding reminder to the young cast who helped create the piece to anchor their exuberance to the larger rhetorical purpose, to the presentation of the scams, the sexual manoeuvrings and the calculated cowardice, as a realistic portrait of the process of a people’s war and the response of many of those people to the political pressures engendered by war as well as to the liberating economic opportunities which it produces, the opportunities to feed on the crumbs dropped from the table of capital’s wartime expansion. Romeril’s concern to strengthen the message of the play in the final moments is also much more comprehensible if one goes back to the scripts and performances from which this version was generated. The 1975 version, *The Dudders*, which was only produced once, is far less overt in its message. To contrast the ending, *The Dudders* finishes on a political note, but one which stresses the post-war disillusion of Australians with the neo-colonial dominance of America in Australian economic life (a theme which echoes the opening sequence of the earlier *The Floating World*). *The Dudders*’ final chorus is as follows:

They took our sheilas so  
We took their bloody dough  
Half the time a dollar wasn’t worth a bloody dime  
But thirty years later  
We’re sitting in a bloody crater  
And Uncle Sam’s the one who’s doing fine  
Did we dud em – did we ever  
We thought we were so flaming clever  
Did we dud did we what  
Did we win in the end  
I’m afraid we did not  
Did we dud em did we ever  
We thought we were so flaming clever  
They’ve got burgers they’ve got fries  
They’ve got hot apple pies  
At McDonald’s  
They’ve got it all.

The final stage-direction in the 1975-6 version is simply ‘Repeat etc ... Circling Clapping’; there is no mention of Apocalypse or of an anti-war
gesture with raised fists.

To further illustrate the conscious politicization of the script between 1976 and the new version in 1977 one can examine this McDonald's image, transposed in *The Dud War* to an earlier position in the piece and expanded to include a denunciation of multi-national capitalism and an explicit linking of its methods with those of international organized crime. In the final scene of *The Dud War* the Americans 'reveal' themselves as secret agents on a mission to rid Newcastle of its criminal elements, but the sub-text tells a different story. Fudd, the crooked Australian officer deeply involved in the local black market, introduces the Americans.

Fudd: Perhaps some introductions would not go amiss
Mars: Marshall B. Dexter – graduate Harvard School of Business – company director – witnessed the fall of Wall St. – managed to cushion the blows.
Hank: Hank the Yank – real name Dwight graduate Harvard School of Business – company director – witnessed the fall of Wall Street – managed to cushion the blows.
Fudd: Prohibition was kind to them.
Hank: The war’s been kinder.
Bob: Bobby
Fudd: What’s life if you can’t have a laugh
Bob: Sox. Real name Angela Ford-Browne with an e, company director.
Fudd: Beautiful but bribable.
Bob: And definitely not to be trusted.
Sago: You administer prices – same game as me
Bob: So we noticed
Fudd: Very fastidious about the company he keeps.
Brad: Bradley Fischeti – I’m a very religious man.
Fudd: All currently doing time in the United States army

There follows a long list of the activities they are involved in from copper to coal, from ice-cream to lingerie, from slot-machines to steel. What is significant about the list, which takes up about a page and a half of the script and which, in the live sound recording of the Newcastle performance held by the Drama department, seems to evolve into a sort of swinging chant, is that it explicitly mixes together the commodities traditionally associated with organized crime and the interests of big multi-national business corporations. The link with the earlier version is provided in the item which concludes the list:

Fudd: Chickens, Coop – working on an idea. Nothing much to it. Your chickens your mouths only with our know-how.
Coop: Eh?
Fudd: Mind like something coming out of the wrong side of a sieve.
Hank: We see your fascinating country as one with limitless horizons.
Thus there is clear evidence of a conscious intent on Romeril’s part to strengthen the political and anti-war element of the piece within the special sense of the term in his work. And this is clearly related to the opportunities provided once Romeril had released the initial script from the commercial, clubland management’s demand for populist and non-ideological dialogue (the night-club show version was entitled *Over Here, Over There*). Nevertheless there is an issue raised by the rhetoric of the work and it is that Romeril’s idea of presenting anti-war material is not the usual anti-violence, ‘war-is-hell’, account. For him to write a play against war is to write a play against the underlying causes and consequences of war in relation to the global economic systems which generate conflict for their own profit. The manipulation of people and the power afforded to governments over their lives is as much a feature of his writing on war as the horror of combat and the waste and futility of front-line deaths which has occupied much of the literature of war in this and earlier times. In an interview with me in 1986 used to prepare this article he said:

one does anti-war material or does war-material rather, fairly carefully, I think. The great danger is, of course, the pornography of violence, that in attempting to develop anti-militarist material you end up not really achieving your end.

In response to a question as to whether *The Dud War* was an anti-war play he responded:

it’s anti-war in terms of war as a process of economic and political manipulation of people ... not focused on blood and guts ... apart from simple first-base aims, to create a show that would celebrate a locale and the people and stories of that place in a fairly value-free way, some attempt was made to look at social relations in war-time.

It is this sense of treating war as part of a continuity with causes in and consequences for the society at large which characterizes Romeril’s view of war in his plays, and the radical nature of his analysis of society clearly affects his reading of war.

No other Australian playwright has shown an interest in the theme of war and the social conflicts it generates over such an extended period. Significant, too, is the continuing preoccupation in the work with the idea that war is to be seen as the extreme form of a socio-economic process in which Australia’s involvement has to be seen within the paradigms of her colonial and neo-colonial relationship with first Britain and, subsequently, America, and of the network of political relationships which Australia, through her defence system and commitments, is locked into by virtue of the economic pressures exerted by such trading partners as America and Japan and by the multi-national companies who have been deemed necessary by successive governments of both parties to the effective economic
development of Australian natural resources. It is in the light of this preoccupation that I want to look at these plays and at John Romeril’s dissenting view from the usual concerns of the Australian theatre and media when it handles the theme of war, its meaning and effects. I also want to establish the degree to which Romeril’s view represents a real and successful break from these preoccupations, through his willingness to embrace an overt radical political stance; he has achieved this without losing the potential for popular acceptance of the plays, since they address many of the concerns of the ordinary Australian with war and do not eschew a certain nostalgic quality which softens and popularizes the hard edges of the political message.

In an even more significant way than in this general shift towards a portrayal of war in its full economic and social context the political emphasis on the social consequences of war rather than on its existential horrors is shown by the concern in Romeril’s work from The Dudders (1975-6) through The Dud War (1977), Top End (written 1979 but not produced until 1989), Centenary Dance (1983), and finally Jonah Jones (1985), with the social effects of war on women. In particular each of these scripts is concerned to explore the dialectic created by the economic conditions which prevail on the homefront during wartime. In writing The Dudders and the subsequent version, The Dud War, Romeril has demonstrated a central concern with this issue. In the 1986 interview, he commented that in these scripts he was interested in:

the whole effect of the man-power act, for young girls in particular, on wage-rates, things of that sort ... where, if you had the luck to be in some strategic industry then your wage-levels were sort of bumped-up to that of male rates; but if you were stuck in traditionally badly-paid areas, like textiles and so on ... you continued to suffer these appalling disparities ... labour legislation in wartime was, of course, especially harsh, amounting to dragooning of the workforce ... one presumably can understand that when a society is attempting to fight a people’s war ... but the harshness of all that, the consequence of that for someone who’s perhaps into having a good time ... there’s an interesting dialectic occurs in those circumstances where you have the strictures of a highly sectionalised and planned economy and at the same time a social psychology of ‘live now, tomorrow, it may never happen’—it’s quite an interesting dialectic in its way.

This dialectic Romeril sees as having its roots in the effect of war on women’s roles. In the early work this is associated with such effects as the ‘swing era’ and the post-war demand during the fifties for consumer goods and the earned ‘good life’, a theme which The Centenary Dance takes up by tracing the effects of the struggles of the women workers within trade unionism through the lives of young people in the fifties in South Australia. In Romeril’s own description on the interview tape:
It's an account of, essentially, the politicisation of a young girl who got into munitions in SA (during the Second World War) and became a union organiser and remained one basically in [the] Iron Workers [Union] until 1949 ... when the number of organisers dwindled and got down to two for the state and she relinquished the post in favour of the man after a lot of pressure from union leadership and so on...and shifted her industry to eggs ... [laughs]. It was part of the Centenary Celebrations of the South Australian Union movement ... It started with ... it had four biographies ... hers, that took us from the second world war into the fifties ... that was her story ... then one for a kid growing up in the fifties ... one for a child of migrants who arrived in the fifties ... it was essentially a fifties show ... basically, as a spectrum it went from big-band swing to the arrival of rock and roll ... and a little social history I guess of post-war Australia and the economic development of SA as a state ... it was done by Troupe [an Adelaide based theatre company] in 1983, and the munition workers and the munition workers' club in Hindley Street, Adelaide figured largely in that ... the same kind of material handled in Dudders and The Dud War.

As Romeril indicates here, much of the material of both The Dudders and The Dud War is concerned with these social effects of war on women: here, from the earlier version of The Dudders is Coral describing her attitude during the war and the consequences afterwards for her life ...


Lights widen to take in the scene.

Cackie: Jesus! Do I need a glass of Vegemite. What happened. 

Delma: We danced the night away.

Cackie seeks a coke

Coral: You had a choice. Eight hours a day at a lathe - and two hours afterwards getting the muck and grime out of your hands and hair. Or you could do what I did: drift from party to party, from champagne glass to champagne glass: a damned whore.

Delma: You got your certificate

Cackie: I did

Delma finds it for him. He reads

Coral: Everyone had a pass. You were all supposed to work. I only got picked up once. A compulsory VD check at the hands of some bum who read me the Bible. I told him to stick it up his Sodom and Gomorrah.

Coral: Homer went down at Iwo Jima

Cackie: Like in the old days

Coral: Delma got married

Cackie: Remember the Roxy

Coral: Had seven kids

Cackie: Coral wasn’t in it

Coral: Enough said

Cackie: Just like the old days
THEY STOP. LOOK FRIGHTENED. WILL RUN ONE WAY THEN ANOTHER.
Coral: Me? My old man turned up in 1946 – after being reported missing. There wasn’t much to say. We tried. He’d go bananas every now and then. Health foods. Encyclopaedias. A fish bait business. We went our separate ways.

The same theme is more fully developed in the subsequent version *The Dud War*. Here Delma addresses the AWOL Australian soldier Cackie (the nominal ‘hero’ or ‘good soldier Cack’ of the show). The scene opens with a cross-fade to Delma – in overalls and seemingly pregnant – in a spot (in more ways than one).

Delma Two days ago I’d have said Sunday June the 7th would be just another Sunday. I’d go to my job as a bolt-grinder and work until 4. Then I’d go to the canteen and work until 10. Then I’d go roof-spotting and scan the night-skies until six, knitting socks to give my eyes a rest ...

OTHER CHARACTERS ARE HURRYING TO WORK ...

... If you don’t tire yourself out by staying up late on the last day of a seven day 56 hour day-shift you’re not in the groove for the five-day night shift that starts on Monday and when you’re fighting fascism being alert on the job really matters. Just another Sunday? It wasn’t shaping up that way. Six months and you’ve written once.

Cack: Thanks for turning up.

THE LIGHTS HAVE WIDENED ALREADY – DEL IS WAITING BY A LARGE MOVIE POSTER. ITS (sic) OUTSIDE A CINEMA. EDI IS CROSSING.

Del: I dunno why I’m doing this .. what’s it for .. what’s it all about ..

Edi: Whatcha doing?

Del: Checking what’s on at the fliks

Edi: Babes on Broadway

Del: Yeah. Judy Garland sings: Chin Up, Cheerio, Carry On – that oughta help the war-effort; and Mickey Rooney impersonates Carmen Miranda. Dunno what they’ll do but its the biggest song and dance show of all time.

Edi: Yeah sure and life’s a bowl of cherries. We should be making the instruments of death.

Del: I’ll catch up with you Edi.

Edi: Goddam bike [pencil addition to script].

Goddam overalls. Goddam iron filings that get in your hands. Goddam grease that gets in your hair. Goddam life – it’s a case of rotten tomatoes

CACK STICKS HIS HEAD OUT; HANDING DEL SOME MORE CLOTHES [he is disguising himself having gone AWOL with Del’s help]

Cack: What’s her grouch?

Del: She’s pregnant.

Cack: No kidding.

These latter texts can be seen also to deepen and extend the presentation of the effects of war on women, an issue only marginally
present in the much less sympathetic early portrait of Irene in *The Floating World*. But *The Dudders* and *The Dud War* have a wider level of concern. The central image of both is the war within the war, the economic struggle of ordinary people to survive the manipulations of the rich and powerful. This is a theme developed in both scripts (but especially in *The Dud War*), where a clear indictment of capitalism emerges and a Brechtian-style parallel between big business and organized crime is made explicit. The stress in this later version, as I have said, falls on the incursion into wartime Newcastle of an advance guard for American organized crime, who find the army a useful cover for their activities, as this 1977 version plays with the multiple vernacular meanings of the word ‘dud’, which in Australian usage can mean variously to cause someone to fail or to misinform someone deliberately (‘to dud someone up’) or a thing or person that proves a failure (‘a real dud’). The war as viewed from Newcastle’s perspective is a ‘dud’ in both senses – the only shell fired at the town in anger, from an off-shore Japanese submarine, proved to be a dud, while the real conflict between the home-grown crims and the invading American mafiosi leaves the Novocastrians (as they grandiosely term themselves) duded indeed.

Thus, in these later texts, just as in the earliest of the texts dealing with war, *The Floating World*, the stress is on the need to view the past not as a series of distant historical events but as a continuing force shaping the attitudes and policies of contemporary Australia. Read and produced in this way even *The Floating World*’s centre is not the final moment of existential despair, but the dialectic between that moment of personal agony and the play’s opening, with the ‘boardroom cowboys’ busily selling Queensland to the international businessmen (who happen ironically to be Japanese, but who might just as well be American, Singaporean or West German). So in these later texts there is powerful evidence of Romeril’s essentially political reading of the war tradition of Australians. For these texts war is a post-colonial and neo-colonial phenomenon nurtured deceptively within a nationalist concern with culture and identity which can disguise how the rulers of these societies are manipulated and ‘dudded’ by international economic and social forces beyond their control. Such a politicized reading of war places Romeril squarely in opposition to the more Romantic and nationalist visions of even the consciously anti-war tradition in Australian writing. The existence of this powerful dissenting view has been obscured by the lack of interest shown in gathering and publishing the scripts of this neglected writer, a lack of interest reflected in the relative absence of productions of his work outside university campuses. Unfortunately there seems little chance that such work as the complex of scripts surrounding *The Dud War* will be published in the immediate future, so that they join the many scripts
from the less-well-known Louis Esson early pieces, through those of writers such as Mona Brand, Oriel Grey and many others, to have been ignored by recent accounts of our theatre.° Playscripts suffer in this respect far more than even prose-fiction and poems, being deemed less marketable to a general public. As a result our history is the poorer and our perceptions of ourselves the less.°

NOTES

1. Australia was unique in having a volunteer army for all of its conflicts up to the time of its involvement in the Vietnam War, with conscripted militia troops used only for Home Defence and, briefly, in the extension of this during the defence of New Guinea, itself then an Australian territory, during the Second World War.


3. The show was based loosely on this material, revised and altered to form a substantially different play which the students at Newcastle Drama Department performed during the writer-in-residency period Romeril spent there in 1977. The earlier version, The Dudders (written in collaboration with APG administrator John Timlin), a copy of which I also obtained from Newcastle Drama Department, was only performed in its entirety in Melbourne in December 1976 in association with the APG. They used the same theatre restaurant style they had developed with Jack Hibberd’s Dimboola and designed it like that show, to be popular and raise money. A shortened version under the title of Overpaid, Oversexed and Overhere had received an unpaid-for club performance in Sydney in late 1975-6, in a club owned, as Timlin suggests, by Geoffrey Edelsten (and which, Romeril gleefully relates in my 1986 interview with him, subsequently burned down; though not as a direct result of the show). As Timlin’s essay in the collection referred to in Note 6 makes clear, this was the first piece to deal with this material. Though Timlin recalls it as being titled Over Here, Over There, it is almost certainly the same piece to which Romeril refers in his 1986 interview.

4. War features in at least four of his major works (five if one counts the significant series of texts called The Dud War as a neglected major work, which I feel it is).

5. Evidence is increasingly emerging of the suppression of the extensive tradition of radical writing in Australian theatre during the pre-war period, especially in the thirties and forties. This is only part of the general neglect of the extensive body of texts for theatre produced during this period which the overworked emphasis on the New Wave of the 1960’s has obscured. Recent attention to such major collections as the Campbell Howard collection at the University of New England has questioned the assumption that the thirties and forties were fallow periods for Australian playwriting. In addition, the revival of the fortunes of the New Theatre in Sydney, the oldest theatre in Australia and one founded in a conscious program of political and committed theatre, has fostered an awareness of the neglected tradition of committed writing in the inter-war period. A pioneer study of the dissenting tradition in Australian cultural history such as David Walker’s Dream and Disillusion: A Search for Australian Cultural Identity (Canberra: ANU Press, 1976) sets the scene for this revision. Recent collections and articles on theatre have begun the necessary
process of re-assessment. See, eg., *Australian Drama 1920-1955*; Papers presented to the Campbell Howard Conference at UNE, Armidale, 1984; Dept. of Continuing Education; University of New England, Armidale, 1986; Ken Harper *The Useful Theatre: The New Theatre Movement in Sydney and Melbourne 1935-1983* in *Meanjin*, 43, 1 (March 1984), pp. 57-73. But a great deal of recovery and reassessment has still to take place if a full account of this period is to emerge.

6. This piece was originally commissioned in 1986 for this collection of essays. Due to unavoidable delays in issuing this volume, permission was given to print the piece in the collection of essays *John Romeril* which I edited and which was published as No. 5 in the Australian Playwrights Monograph Series, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993).
When the Australian Aborigines first saw the white newcomers to their lands just over two hundred years ago, many of them believed that these pale strangers were in fact ghosts, the spirits of the dead returning to their native country and to their relations. Later a more secular view prevailed, that the whites were only men, and frequently murderous and rapacious ones at that. In Louis Nowra’s play Inside the Island, premiered at Nimrod in August 1980, images of whiteness, and of the haunting of white Australia by its past, are given vivid metaphorical treatment. The play is in many ways itself a ghost story, illustrating the irruption of the past into the present. It is set on a remote wheat property in western New South Wales in the summer of 1912. In the second act a picnic/cricket-match is held amongst raw recruit soldiers sent to this isolated spot on peacetime manoeuvres. The cricket ground itself had previously been an Aboriginal campsite, and was granted as a ‘gift’ to the government by the dead father of the property’s matriarch, Mrs Lillian Dawson:

He was a great man. When he first came here it was just bush – a huge plain of Aboriginals and gum trees. He got rid of the blacks, except for those whom he converted; removed the gum trees. His picture is on the wall. Painted by a very talented Aboriginal youth who died soon after.

In the course of this match, horror and chaos erupt: the soldiers, covered in flour from the wheat bins, run mad in an orgy of violence and self-mutilation, resembling the ‘angry, gleeful ghosts’ which Edward Bond speaks of in the preface to his play Lear. A bushfire breaks out and devastates the property. As a dramatic image the cricket match enacts not the class-based ‘sportsman-like’ rituals so often associated with the game but the return of the repressed: a haunting. As bloodied, whitened figures dance and rave in the firelight the truths obscured behind the bland pastoral myth of settlement (‘he got rid of the blacks’) are dramatized in a nightmare vision. The soldiers themselves, victors and victims both, become the tormented maddened ghosts which haunt the ancient site – and the national consciousness.
Inside the Island is a notable contribution to the list of distinguished works of recent years which have sought to come to terms with the psychic problems of national forgetfulness of history. As Bernard Smith points out in his 1980 Boyer Lectures this task is firmly on the nation’s agenda, and by its very nature is likely to remain so for some time, possibly until some concrete reparation, again in the form of another ‘gift’ of land, is made to the Aboriginal people. He concludes by quoting Peter Berger on the subject of the beginnings of societies:

All men are vultures in that they live off the agonies of the past. At the foundation of every historical society there are vast piles of corpses, victims of the murderous acts that, directly or indirectly, led to the establishment of that society. There is no getting away from this fact, and there is nothing to be done about it. It is an inevitable burden of the human condition.5

Smith goes on to place our own history in this context:

Our special Australian problem is the recency of our historical society. Between our history and our prehistory, between our Eden and the expulsion of 1788, lies a lawless terrain in which our courts stumble. ‘Primitive accumulation’, Marx once wrote, ‘plays in political economy about the same part as original sin in theology’. And this for us has been so recent.6

Nowra, for his part, believes that the drug of forgetfulness too often obscures our sense of where we have been and hence where we can go in future. His theatre addresses itself to the national psychic predicament outlined by Smith, and never more precisely – and to some observers never more confrontationally – than in Inside the Island. As he has said of the play in a subsequent interview, ‘Considering the irrational events that go on there, it is, perversely, my most lucid and logical play in its writing; and it has to be or else you lose that play’.7 Nowra speaks in the same interview of the interest he shares with Stephen Sewell in the ‘dubious and immoral’ Australian involvement in the Vietnam war, in terms which could easily be applied to Inside the Island: ‘If a writer has value, it is to remind us of our past, because if a nation practises forgetfulness then that nation is in trouble and unfortunately Australians have a tendency towards amnesia. We are at an age now when we should be able to have the courage to remember and question’.8

The ‘irrational events’ of Inside the Island turn out to have a totally rational cause. The flour graciously donated by Mrs Dawson to the troops for their picnic lunch is, as she is aware, off-white; second-class, in fact. Still, as their captain agrees, it is only for the non-coms, and ‘They won’t know the difference’. Mrs Dawson calls it, with prophetic irony, ‘a gift like the land my father gave the government’ (p. 34). The greyness of the wheat, it transpires, is due to its being infected with ergot – the fungus Claviceps purpurea. The soldiers’ violent ordeal
Sergeant Collins, Captain Henry, Private Higgs, Lillian Dawson

Lillian Dawson, Captain Henry, Susan Dawson
276 Veronica Kelly

thus displays the symptoms of the medieval 'Holy Fire', with its epileptic convulsions, delirium and hallucinations. In his 'Author's preface' to the published text Nowra goes to some trouble to cite his sources for the scientific accuracy of his dramatization of the ergot poisoning, and where for reasons of narrative condensation he has deviated from the clinical symptoms. He appears to be combating with his documentation the literalness of some observers of the Nimrod production, who said in various ways 'It couldn't happen here'. The ergotism scenes in the play do function metaphorically, with not one but many levels of reference captured and enmeshed in the texture of the dramatization, but as a central image the poisoning does not work for some. Leonard Radic finds it 'contrived and forced ... simply not strong enough to bear the weight of meaning thrust upon it'. But surely the phrase 'poisoned flour' does have specific historical connotations in the Australian context. The bag of poison, along with the gun and the axe, was a standard tool of settlement and clearance of the land. As Eric Rolls states, 'The first settlers were enthusiastic poisoners. Everything that seemed at all likely to be troublesome was poisoned ...'. Strychnine was used for animals, arsenic for people. In the light of this, it is evident that the poisoned-flour image of Inside the Island is neither exotic nor forced: not only could it happen here, it has happened here.

Despite its carefully researched realistic level, the play is, as previously stated, a species of ghost story, one which realises through dramatic imagery the suppressed, the interior, the past and potential realities. The character of Rose Draper in Sewell's The Blind Giant is Dancing (1983) seems to be also a kind of ghost-figure, exteriorizing as she does the central character's encroaching moral death; a death which she has already undergone, being for the duration of the action effectively a tormented ghost. Earlier theatrical traditions had various conventions for visualizing death-in-life or demonic characters such as Rose Draper, but the largely realistic writing and performing styles of recent Australian theatre - generally very effective communicative devices - become something of an obstacle, or a challenge, to dramatists with a strong symbolist or expressionist streak. The achievement of Inside the Island consists of its careful exposition of the realistic groundwork in the play's first half, thus authenticating the realistic as well as the 'irrational' or symbolic elements of madness and destruction, and the apocalyptic bushfire which eventually subsumes both these meanings. Nowra's ghosts are prepared for such so that an audience can clearly understand their meanings. The soldiers become victims; but, as the captain finally realizes, 'the terrible things were inside of them, like when people go crazy on drink' (p. 90). But many a good ghost story has a final horrific twist in store: when the haunting turns out to be not a repressed memory of a horrible past but an
oblique and terrifying premonition of an even more dreadful future. So too in this case. The author's citation of Gavin Souter's *Lion and Kangaroo* in his 'Author's Preface' (p. 11) as one of the play's inspirations is a reminder that, as John McCallum has observed, *Inside the Island* is also Nowra's Gallipoli play.12

A close reading of the 'Pozieres' chapter of Souter's book reveals numerous connections in theme and even imagery with the play, which bears out the specificity with which the dramatist has gone about his picture of a not quite innocent nation undergoing its 'baptism of fire'. Souter starts by citing C. E. W. Bean's impressions of war-devastated Picardy in which an Australian landscape is the dominant referent; he is 'reminded of a dry creek-bed in central Australia' (p. 231). But before the bombardment this country was, like the setting of *Inside the Island*, a wheatfield. After the grim 'harvest' of war, it presents another aspect which Bean describes in what appears to have been for him pre-existing imagery for utter desolation:

Imagine a gigantic ash heap ... a place where dust and rubbish have been cast for years outside some dry, derelict, godforsaken up-country township. Imagine some broken-down creek-bed in the driest of our dry central Australian districts, abandoned for a generation to the goats, in which the hens have been scratching as long as men can remember. Then take away the hens and the goats and all traces of any living or moving thing. You must not even leave a spider. Put here, in evidence of some old tumbled roof, a few roof beams and tiles sticking edgeways from the ground, and the low faded ochre stump of the windmill peeping over the top of the hill, and there you have Pozieres.14

Nowra too identifies wheat country as the epitome of eerie desolation:

The cruel loneliness of the Australian country seems to be everywhere. I cannot forget the abrupt darkness that comes with a bush night and the bleak feeling of being alone and engulfed by an insidious and infinite blackness; nor can I forget the time when, in northwestern Victoria, on a day so hot even the crows refused to fly, I saw fields of rust-brown wheat stretching to the nebulous horizon, unbroken by a tree, harvester or human being, a scene that was frighteningly desolate and as mysterious as a drawing by Escher. (p. 11)

Yet Australians, it appears, have really little need to draw upon the imagery of European cultures for landscapes of death-in-life, for even when these are encountered in the metropolitan countries they are merely a recognition, a memory even, of what has long been known. The wheatfield scenes of *Inside the Island* present a challenge to a designer in suggesting the vast straight horizons and immense space, as the brown wheat, paradoxically fertile yet sterile, stretches away, dwarfing the human figure.

The perception of Australian nature as mournful and hostile was a colonial cliché, where, as Bernard Smith points out, it is reasonable to
suspect that European fear and guilt at the displacement of the 'natural' inhabitants were projected onto nature itself. But the wheat country of this play is not 'natural' in this sense of being indigenous: a wheat property is a monoculture of imported vegetation and is itself a displacement of the original landscape. The play’s characters are the victims, not of 'nature' but of their own creation: a landscape ruthlessly imposed to serve a colonialist primary-export economy. The double image of wheatfield and battlefield is a standard perception of war as the harvesting of the young, and is adumbrated in the play’s second scene:

Lillian: Have you ever been in a battle?
Sergeant: A real one? No, missus. I did see a man run over by one of those new mechanical ploughs last year. He was chewed up something bad. I guess a battlefield is a bit like that. (p. 27)

Nowra’s use of these overlaid landscapes pushes this metaphor further to draw out the connections between the Western Front campaign and its underlying causes – Australia’s colonial economic history and condition at that time. The ghostly bloodied soldiers enduring their private infernos on the Aboriginal campsite elide past, present and future in one hallucinatory moment.

The image of the cricket match, civilized and ordered, occurs in the play and in Souter’s citation of ‘a bush worker from Gilgandra’ who described the Pozières offensive of 23 July 1916 thus: ‘The lads walked across 600 yards at right angles to main road to middle of village, our prearranged objective, as though going to a cricket match’ (p. 234). On the crest of the road between Pozières and Bapaume, as Bean depicts, was the stump of a former windmill ‘which had once creaked as it ground the wheat of Pozières’ (p. 234). A wheatmill and a creek are significant locations in Nowra’s play as well, the mill being finally destroyed in the raging bushfire. These mirror-images link the ‘old’ and ‘new’ landscapes is such a way as to render the unthinkable – and in 1914 unimaginable – carnage of the Western Front as weirdly homely and familiar to the Australian mind. Pozières, the play suggests, although cataclysmic in scale, was in no true sense alien or unknown, as Australia as a nation moved towards its fate as if in a dream, entranced among landscapes which it already recognized.

The testimony which Souter cites of the effects on the Australian Imperial Force of the repeated futile attacks ordered by the British command, and of the continual bombardment, bring one close to the area of experience which Inside the Island explores in its second part. ‘A sergeant who watched the survivors coming out of the rest area wrote: “They looked like men who had been in Hell ... drawn and haggard and so dazed that they appeared to be walking in a dream and their eyes looked glassy and starey”’ (p. 234).
Higgs (shouting): They’re moving. They’re coming. Got to get away. Get moving.

Captain: Shhh! Who’s coming?

Higgs (more calmly): The men – that’s why we’ve got to get up the hill.

Captain: Why do you have to get up the hill?

Higgs: You fuckin’ idiot – I’ve got to get up the hill to see the top. All the corpses are coming down the hill so I’ve got to go up. I don’t want to die. (pp. 73-74)

The diary of an Adelaide journalist, Alec Raws, himself killed shortly afterwards in the wasteful offensive, fills out the concrete and emotional detail of Souter’s picture of the terrors of the second Allied attack on the night of 4 August 1916; his is the testimony which Nowra cites as ‘a unique glimpse of Australians mentally lost’ (p. 11):

I have one puttee, a dead man’s helmet, another dead man’s gas-protector, a dead man’s bayonet. My tunic is rotten with other men’s blood, and partly splattered with a comrade’s brains. It is horrible, but why should you people at home not know? Several of my friends are raving mad. I met three officers in No Man’s Land the other night, all rambling and mad. (p. 236)

Other details of Raws’ narrative of the battle are picked up in the play. The night-time entrenching-party led by Raws had no idea where they were or where their lines were. The noise of their position being shelled from three sides, their own included, was continual, and enemy flares turned night into day. The living couldn’t stop to help the wounded, and Raws resorted to a swig of whisky to summon up the necessary courage. The ground was a compost of fragments of the dead and dying; during this night many officers and men went mad (p. 237). The theatrical brilliance of the play consists of its use of the stage’s physical resources to conjure up this concealed reality. The roar of the bombardment and the glare of the bursting shells are suggested through the increasing noise and red glare of the approaching bushfire, culminating in the stage directions at the end of Act 2, Scene 7: ‘A sudden brilliance is seen, then a sudden blackout. The noise of the fire grows unbearably loud in the darkness as if the audience is going to be swallowed up by it; then it stops abruptly’ (p. 87). George Dawson, despite his resolution to the contrary, resorts to the whisky bottle (p. 72) and as the fire encircles the characters they, like the entrenching party, no longer know which way safety lies (pp. 86-87). The captain and the sergeant are helpless to help their afflicted men, who variously run into the fire, blind themselves, and imagine that red flowers (the Flanders poppies symbolizing bloody wounds?) are growing out of their chest. Some soldiers are withdrawn and stunned, others ecstatic, and another rapes and murders Susan, the daughter of George and Lillian. The musician Peter Blackwood is also killed by them. As the idiot Andy cries, as he tries to flee the dangers of the
night, 'The men from the slaughter-house are here!' (p. 79).

If *Inside the Island* is Nowra's contribution to the volume of recent dramatic material dealing with the Anzac legend, it is interesting in that the author chooses not to focus on the Gallipoli landing itself. Nowra's dramatic themes deal not with heroism, mateship or the forging of nationhood but with people lost, coerced or poisoned, who are engulfed in an inferno. His documentary inspiration for this play, and the dramatic metaphors through which the transmutation of the material are conveyed, suggest not the bronzed antique heroes dying on the plains of Illium which elsewhere pervade the imagery of Anzac, but the far more terrible and industrialized hell of modern mass-warfare, where, as happened on the Somme, two thirds of an attacking force could be dead within half an hour. However bad Gallipoli was, the Western Front was worse. As Raw's attests, 'I saw strong men who had been through Gallipoli sobbing and trembling with ague' (p. 238).

The play's refusal of the obvious mythic battlefield makes this point: that Australia's authentic war-imagery is not pastoral, aristocratic or epic, but modern, industrial and mechanized, indeed postnuclear. Just as veterans of Gallipoli said that it was 'a picnic' compared to the Somme (pp. 231-32), so too Nowra's picnic/cricket-game deepens to display its infernal and haunted subtext. The young soldiers of the play have all this in front of them, as the audience realizes, and it may recall too that such nightmares continue to haunt our future. The play's resonances do not halt at the historical point of 1916. The image of maddened drugged soldiers mentally devastated by their environment suggests also Vietnam, that other engagement which the nations, while now prepared to celebrate and criticize the heroic disaster of Anzac, is in danger of forgetting. As Lillian Dawson comments: 'If the Apocalypse came they [Australians] wouldn't know it: they'd think it was a public holiday' (p. 47). Perhaps our most famous public holiday remembers the wrong Apocalypse, and for limited reasons, because every war the nation has engaged in except the first - the war for the land itself - has been fought elsewhere. It is this 'first' war which *Inside the Island* remembers.

Nowra's other Sydney premiere of 1980, *The Precious Woman* (Sydney Theatre Company, November) is a kind of companion play to *Inside the Island*. Between them these two plays present complementary explorations of the difficulties of being human and acting humanely in the wider social world. Inner pain and the psychic life are reflected in outer action, both social and political. The canvas of these plays is broad; the body politic itself - whether of Australia or the China of *The Precious Woman* - is the ultimate recipient of the effects of the inner life and of the haunted past forcing their way to the surface. However, the sub-theme of colonialism and its catastrophic, even apocalyptic outcomes - of yesterday and tomorrow - finds a
secure historical moment in the pre-World War One setting of *Inside the Island*, that being the last moment when this country could naively assume that despite the bloody price of the land’s settlement no blood-price would be exacted for the imperial relationship. The play suggests moreover that the moment of reckoning is not safely past, that a still-colonial society can at any moment awaken from its spellbound imperial sleep to face a nightmare reality undreamt of except in the worst imaginings of poets and prophets. Genocide, the Somme, Vietnam, nuclear warfare, all have in fact already ‘happened here’, and when we experience them we recognize a dream long suppressed.

NOTES

2. Louis Nowra, *Inside the Island* and *The Precious Woman* (Sydney: Currency, 1981), p. 24. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
4. Compare the recollections of an old Gippsland pioneer, which perfectly sum up the settler myth that, before they took over, the country consisted of ‘nothing but ...’ and was itself, essentially, nothing: ‘I stand on the top of “Kilynon”, the whole district lies stretched out before me in one grand panorama. Not a vestige remains of the vast forest that once so stubbornly resisted our labours.’ From W. M. Elliott, *The Land of the Lyre Bird* (1966), p. 13, quoted in Geoffrey Blainey, *A Land Half Won* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1980), p. 360.
9. See Ridgman, p. 112: ‘This literalism doesn’t plague the novel or poem to the extent that it does theatre. It isn’t understood that some writers are essentially using metaphors’.

13. Souter quotes this phrase from the assessment by the Hobart Mercury of the significance of Gallipoli itself, not of the Western Front. See Lion and Kangaroo. Australia 1901-1919: The Rise of a Nation ([1976]; rpt. Sydney: Fontana, 1978), p. 228. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.


17. Souter, p. 234.
In *Burn*, his fourth published novel, Ireland uses war – and violence – to develop a number of his perceptions of Australians and their society. Some of the images of the repressive and destructive nature of respectable, institutionalized society which characterized *The Chantic Bird* and *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner*, are here the backdrop against which Ireland presents a group of descendants of those who had inhabited the land before the arrival of the English. The novel presents an evocative picture of a day in the life of a blacks’ camp, that outermost fringe of respectable (white) Australian society.

Originally written as a play, the novel retains a number of features which suggest its origins, notably the way in which, in its surface structure, it respects fairly closely the classical unities. The action takes place between early in the morning of 31st December and some time after midnight on New Year’s Day. The time is some twenty-one years after the demobilization of the Australian troops at the end of World War II. Similarly, most of the overt action takes place on the banks of the Murrumbidgee, in an Aboriginal camp, over the bridge and a quarter mile upstream from the town of Myoora. We are, Ireland points outs, on the road to Kelly country; violence or the memory of it is not far away. The camp is made up of six huts, of which we really hear of only one, where Gunner, the central character of the novel, lives with his family.

Gunner, officially Stanley McAllister, is the half-caste son of Old McAllister; his wife, Mary, is white, so that his two sons, Billy and Gordon, are quarter-castes. (I have given these rather objectionable calculations of ‘caste’ since they remind us of the sort of mentality of racial discrimination which was still fairly widespread in Australia in the fifties and sixties, especially in some country areas). Billy, the elder, is drawn to old Gorooh, an aged and isolated full-blood Aborigine whose father, a tribal elder, had been a great story teller in earlier days (pp. 42, 90). Gordon is his mother’s favourite and has been sent by the education authorities to a high school in the city (p.31). Though other
characters do appear in the novel, the central core is essentially this bickering, squabbling yet finally cohesive group, ranging from black, tribally oriented Gorooh to completely white Mary and Old McAllister, with the various degrees of autonomy, integration or assimilation advocated, sought or rejected by each of them.

Yet Ireland’s world is not as simple as this schematic presentation might suggest, for Gunner is that great Australian folk hero, a returned serviceman. More, he was decorated for his action on Bougainville during the war. Since his demobilization, Gunner has done little except sit in the sun, fish, relive his memories and, from time to time, get drunk.

However, he does more than simply relive his memories; he thinks about them and, more, about their implications. He rarely does this aloud, of course, but rather silently, in his mind, which is more prudent. In this way, Ireland creates two parallel texts: what Gunner says publicly and his running commentary on this. This intertextual movement emphasizes the fragmentation of Gunner’s personality—torn between what he can say aloud and what he must keep to himself—and, by creating two widely separate chronological sequences, also modifies the simple linear time sequence of the day’s events. Gunner’s realization of the contradictions between what he was encouraged to do as a soldier and what he is not allowed to do as a civilian—one can hardly say, as a citizen—is also expressed in the overt action of the novel through Gunner’s having kept a rifle, which he should have handed in on demobilization at the end of the war and which, as an Aborigine, he should not have in any case. Over and above this detail which runs through the narrative, as Gunner and the local policeman play ‘hide and seek’ with the rifle, Gunner generalizes his problem, mulling over the flagrant double standards in the exercise of authority, which mark Ireland’s Australian society. Gunner’s over-riding preoccupation, one could almost say his obsession, with the war, allows Ireland and obliges the reader, implicitly a white reader, to reconsider one of the central Australian myths: the Anzac spirit and the unity of national identity which the world wars are alleged to have revealed. The Anzac spirit Ireland is reconsidering is, of course, the naive, even simplistic, version which was still taught in Australian schools, at least until the end of the 1950s and still, apparently, believed by enough people to justify the various ‘reconsiderations’ proposed against it.

The Aborigines, dispossessed, chased off their land and deprived of their traditional sources of food, were not able or allowed to retaliate against the incursions of the whites (p. 56). For Gunner, his people (and he consciously discounts the white part of his heritage) are like the Japanese he had been allowed to kill on Bougainville. Just as the Japanese, whom Gunner saw as harmless, had been trapped on an
island, so the Aborigines are equally trapped and harmless in white society. Gunner develops further this daring parallel between the declared and the undeclared enemies when he sees that the whites will clean out the Aborigines, just as the whites (and Gunner) had cleaned out the Japanese twenty years before (pp. 65, 125).

Gunner sees the power structure of the army as a pyramid with himself at the bottom. Everybody could and did tell him what to do or, more importantly perhaps, what not to do. As both Gunner and Gordon see it, in white society, the blacks have no autonomous existence; black is not a colour, it is dirt, a sign of contamination, of being unacceptable. As older, blacker, hieratic Gorooh understands his daily life, Aborigines are neither black nor dirty to white eyes, they are simply invisible (p. 70). White Australians no longer see them, either as a separate group or as a full part of society; invisible, the blacks no longer exist.

Gorooh, whose meditations form another subtext, in counterpoint both to Gunner's interior monologues and to the general, 'public' conversations, turns this white logic against the whites themselves. He questions the source of the eviction notice which has been served on the Aborigines and orders them to leave their shacks by 1st January, since, according to different versions, the land is needed for 'progress', for irrigation for the white farmers, or simply as a caravan park for white tourists. For the Aborigines, New Year's Day will also be the last day they will be allowed to stay in what they call home. This notice has come from the Government, but Gorooh is neither impressed nor convinced. 'They say the Government is all-powerful. We must be subject. But does it exist? No one I know has ever seen it. Has it ever existed? I think their Government means nothing more than what the whites want to do. And they do whatever comes into their heads. They have no tjuringa, no sacred stone to hold the spirits of their ancestors. And guide them' (p. 53).5

For Gorooh, power can be exercised only by clearly defined people or bodies, whose authority is clearly seen to be sanctioned by some source which transcends them. It follows that if the whites have no tjuringa, no sense of the transcendental, they cannot, in Gorooh's eyes, have any legitimate law. In Ireland's Australia, the old Aborigine's impeccable logic is as out of place as is his elegant English in the family's impotent squabbling.

On the other hand, Gunner has learnt through the army, a microcosm of Australian society, that power structures, whatever their name, do exist, but he is not convinced of their value. As he says to his sons; the whites took his country, which he then fought for against the Japanese, and now he intends to let the country support him (p. 81), a radical reworking of the Aboriginal notion of reciprocity, of gifts for services rendered. Further, he points out that 'there is not enough to
the country' for him to devote or sacrifice his life to it (p. 89).

These passages capture a number of the points Ireland raises. The whites used violence to conquer the country, killing or starving the Aboriginal populations if they tried to resist. War is still their way of dealing with an enemy though a new development is that they are now willing to arm the blacks to fight against external enemies, while still forbidding them to have access to weapons at other times or for other reasons. Further, they prevent the Aborigines from integrating into white society by depriving them of the means of achieving this integration. Education, as Gordon, who has tried integration and failed, says, is not just going to school, it is also being adequately prepared, intellectually and psychologically, before arriving in the classroom. It is also being accepted by the whites both at school and, later, at work.

We find, then, that in *Burn*, Ireland takes an Australian folk hero, the Returned Serviceman, but by making him a half-caste, neither completely accepted in white society nor allowed to live completely outside it, he turns the myth inside out. Where other authors have looked at war as the loss or the destruction of innocence, Ireland shows that the whites had never been innocent. Where Australian volunteers have often been seen (and have seen themselves) as defending democracy and freedom, Ireland reminds us that white Australian society was founded on the subjugation and dispossession of the original inhabitants (p.114). Where popular Australian mythology cherishes the notion of a democratic 'fair-go' for everybody, Ireland shows that one part of the population is systematically excluded (three parts, if we consider women as well as the industrial 'prisoners'). Ireland does not ask whether the Returned Servicemen's organization would have allowed Gunner to join; he, in any case, points out that he has never wanted to take part in an Anzac Day parade. The reader is nevertheless left in little doubt as to the whites' probable reaction to such a request.

In short, Ireland shows us a country which, from the black point of view, is occupied by the enemy and from the implied narrator's point of view can be seen as in a state of undeclared civil war, as a result of the whites' inability to accept the existence of others; of their differences. In the Aborigines' case, these differences can be seen as triple: of colour, obviously, of life style, both in the fringe-dwelling present and in the tribal past and, thirdly, of attitudes towards nature. Old McAllister, for example, can have no place in Aboriginal society since, as a sawmiller, he is committed to an exploitation of nature diametrically opposed to the attitude of the blacks. This lack of a sense of sacredness of what is given finally excludes any possibility of integration of the whites into the system of positive values represented by the Aborigines.
These criticisms seem clear enough but in this situation of undeclared hostilities, Ireland’s view of the story-teller’s or the writer’s place, while no less central, is more ambiguous. Gunner’s memories and reflections on the years 1939-1945, his private monologues, are, as we have seen, central to the structure of the novel and crucial to our understanding of both what happened during the war and the ethical or philosophical value we are to attach to these events, and to all the racial fighting which has afflicted Australia since the arrival of the English.5 Gunner is also, in the ‘public’ text, a story teller, repeating the stories his (white) father handed on to him from Gorooh’s father. It is true that Gunner repeats mainly one story over and over in a somewhat fragmentary way but this only serves to underline structurally the repetitiveness and fragmentation of black and, therefore, white society in Australia, incapable, so far, of achieving wholeness. Yet, this very continuity of story-telling, depending as it does on the collaboration and mutual respect of a black and a white man and the didactic nature of the story we learn – Aborigines have lost their capacity to think for themselves, they need to learn to use their heads – could lead us to expect that Ireland sees the writer or the narrator as the person ideally placed to help the Aborigines (and the whites) to a fuller, more complete view of life which would transcend the state of war presented in the novel.10

Yet, in Burn, Ireland’s narrators are also subversive, as texts and subtexts weave an intricate net of implication and suggestion, whose structure underlines the ethical and social messages of the novel. Each of the examples we have looked at, Gunner’s ‘harmless’ Japanese, Gorooh’s proof of the non-existence of the Government, Gordon’s analysis of what integration really means or, crucially in a society that bases its mythology on the shifting sands of Anzac Cove, Gunner’s lucid definition of bravery as ‘blood lust’ (p. 81),11 all throw the white reader off balance, since the narrative point of view consistently adopts that of the blackman, whom white society does not see and whose history white readers do not know.12 This black point of view also helps explain the leisurely pace of the morning part of the narrative, where time is told by the position of the sun, not by the white man’s timetables.

If, in Australia, the Aborigine can no longer move through a familiar landscape, where each feature bears a significant name, so, in Burn, Ireland’s implicit white reader, finds perspectives changing before him, as his white expectations are not fulfilled. He can no longer rely on conventional white Australian narratives to guide him and must try to read the signs anew at each step. This is nowhere clearer than when the central story teller rejects the role he seems destined to play. Gunner expressly rejects the idea of being a ‘half-caste Christ’; he is not going to save or guide whites or blacks. Both have to find their own
way. To my mind, this refusal to be a guide is not just an expression of apathy or inner abdication (or lack of it) for his or her own actions.\textsuperscript{13}

The end of the novel, moreover, leaves all options open. The whites have won: they have burnt the shacks abandoned by the blacks but Gordon and Old McAllister had already made sure their family could not come back, by demolishing the McAllisters' hut. Gunner, too, has had at least a partial victory: he has kept his rifle, outwitting the local policeman.\textsuperscript{14} However, his own father intends to steal it from wherever Gunner hides it and 'drop it down the well' (p. 146), to prevent his son from putting into action the idea of country town guerrilla warfare which he has suddenly articulated at the end of the novel, in terms which recall the apocalyptic end of \textit{The Unknown Industrial Prisoner}.

The open-ended conclusion, marked by Ireland's refusal to suggest simple or simplistic collective or political answers, leaves all his characters and, I suggest, his readers faced with a number of problems, entailing individual choices. Present day Australian society in Ireland's eyes, founded on violence and finding its sustaining myths – at least its official ones – in war, continues to exist in a state of undeclared civil war against blacks and all those excluded by the richer, more powerful groups in society. The obvious comparison is with the work of Xavier Herbert, despite differences of setting and period. For both writers, their implicit reader is white; both appeal to his practical reason as well as to his aesthetic sensibility and they share a number of attitudes and values, as numerous passages suggest.\textsuperscript{15}

The writer can and should point to these problems but for Ireland, each individual who witnesses these situations, each reader confronted with social or literary texts, must find a way of interpreting the full story of the past, of preparing for the future. It is in the context of this preoccupation with each individual's ethical response to life, that we can best see the final words of the novel, which otherwise seem inappropriate and portentous, compared with the tone of the rest of the novel. \textit{Burn} is, more directly perhaps than Ireland's other novels, a 'de te fabula'; Ireland is talking about how we should live, what should be the guidelines of our conduct. In these last words of the novel, Ireland says a man must try to take 'the straight line that's so simple that men become lost along its complex length' (p. 144). But, will he look for it and, if he recognizes it, will he take it? For Ireland, that straight line is the longest distance between a man and his true end.
NOTES

1. David Ireland, *Burn* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1974). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
4. Gunner’s feeling that the war was ‘the one big thing in his life’ (p. 115) echoes *The One Day of the Year*, the title of Alan Seymour’s 1962 play about the fate of two ex-servicemen and their attempts to find a place in peace-time society. See Alan Seymour *The One Day of the Year*, in, for example *Three Australian Plays*, ed., H. G. Kippax ([1963] Ringwood: Penguin, 1971).
5. Just as the whites eradicate the camp, so they have wilfully forgotten the meaning of the name ‘Myoora’, which meant, ironically, ‘camp’, p. 1.
6. Here, of course, David Malouf’s *Fly Away Peter* and Roger McDonald’s *1915* come to mind, though there are other titles where ‘innocence’ is important.
7. One could also refer to film. For example the hero in *Gallipoli*. In World War I, Australians were said to be wonderful as soldiers but impossible as officers and gentlemen and this was seen by many Australians as a virtue.
9. Interestingly enough, Ireland does not mention fighting within and between native tribes. To have considered one Aboriginal tribe fighting another would have ‘diluted’ Ireland’s concentration on the deracination of the Aborigines by the whites. It would also have gone far outside the time framework of the novel. It would need another study to look at the way in which the war against the Aborigines has attracted little attention from writers or critics. Is it just a case of military tourism being more interesting, more ‘exotic’ than cleaning up one’s own backyard?
11. Ireland is not the only Australian novelist to express scepticism about this sort of bravery. One is reminded of Patrick White’s ‘Courage is often despair running in the right direction’. See *The Twyborn Affair* ([1979] Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981).
13. Here, I differ from Helen Daniel’s interpretation which seems to me somewhat moralistic on this particular point. See Daniel, op. cit., pp. 83ff and also her article ‘Purpose and the Racial Outsider’, *Southerly*, 38 (March 1978), pp. 25-43, esp., pp. 36ff.
14. Or has he? I think the question remains open.
15. The comparison with Peter Mathers' *Trap* is less obvious, despite evident similarities of content and some similarity of style, mainly because of what I see as a hesitation in Mathers' point of view. While much of the novel apparently expressed deeply felt anger, there is a certain jokiness, a tendency to give way to punning, which is not, I think, integrated into the fabric of the novel. The result is a 'dispersal' of effect which I do not find in *Burn* or even in Herbert's more comic-apocalyptic passages in *Capricornia*. See Herbert's *Capricornia* ([1937] Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1972); *Seven Emus* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1959); and especially, *Poor Fellow My Country* ([1975] London: Pan, 1977). Cf. Peter Mathers, *Trap* (Melbourne: Cassell, 1966).

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**Bruce Dawe**

**FOR THE OTHER FALLEN**

You fought here for your country.
   Where are your monuments?
You resisted the invader as best you knew how.
   Where are your songs of those days?

When you were captured you were not prisoners-of-war.
   That would have been awkward.
You had the misfortune of occupying 'unoccupied land'.
   You had to correct your gross error.

There was a prisoner tradition waiting to be unfolded.
   Tales resilient as ironbark.
Your share in them was minimal and negative.
   You were rather slow to understand this.

The bush and the stone and the stream.
   The tree. The plain.
The special green. The faded calico blue.
   They were your last line of resistance.

You fought here for your country.
   Where are your monuments?
The difficulties we have in belonging
   - these, these are your cenotaph.
Aboriginal Anzac

Ngarrindjeri Soldier
Ngarrindjeri Soldier that fought
In with Australia at War
Ngarrindjeri Soldier buried with comrades
Where he fought & died
And the returned Ngarrindjeri Soldier
Came home
Only to be forgotten
For their Services
Their courage
Their Pride

Kurwingie '88
August
mobilisation
to end the war in Vietnam

SUNDAY AUGUST 13th 'AT 2.00 pm SYDNEY
CITY MARCH: Assemble corner of Liverpool & College Sts. Departs 2.00 pm. PUBLIC RALLY: Rushcutters Bay Stadium 3.00 pm.
Maurie McNarn’s argument that Australia’s ‘[i]nvolvement in Vietnam was the climax of the shift from dependence upon Britain, as an Imperial appendage, to alliance with America, as a satellite’¹ is now commonplace, and most historians agree that the same colonialist mentality has governed both patterns of allegiance. The anti-Americanism that characterized our Vietnam period, and which persists in various watered-down forms today, can be seen as ‘the latest version of post-colonial defiance which [is] itself the reverse side of Antipodean dependency’.² The contemporary theatrical response to Australian intervention in Vietnam attests not only to the complexities of such a positioning in Asian-Pacific politics but also to the dilemma of representation that inevitably faces a culture which has ‘relied all too heavily on a military [patriarchal] past for images of national character’.³ Although the Vietnam experience invites an interrogation of the masculinist hegemony which has informed accounts of earlier wars and which still undergirds constructions of our most enduring national hero, the Anzac/Digger, in general there has not been a significant revisiting of this figure in the literature about the period.⁴ That Vietnam has become, in Robin Gerster’s terms, a sort of ‘military pariah’ while Gallipoli ‘remains sacrosanct’,⁵ seems related to the perception that we fought the American way of war in Vietnam and not the Australian way as we had at Gallipoli. Dennis Phillips argues that this also explains why ‘Australians as a whole have shown little inclination to remember the Vietnam war, to evaluate the experience, or to try to draw historical lessons from it’.⁶ Phillips is both right and wrong, for although this war ‘has not had the cumulative social impact in Australia that it has had in the United States’,⁷ it remains a site of rupture in our nation’s (hi)story and a signal event which continues to inflect upon our constructions of both Asia and America, the latter often troped as posing a cultural and ideological threat which is far more pernicious than the feared spread of
Asian communism. Australia, meanwhile, figures ambivalently in many critical reassessments of the period, often exculpated of guilt for its aggression towards Vietnam but at the same time vilified for its status as 'lackey' to yet another imperial power.

This paper focuses mainly on two plays which dramatize the power relations at issue in the story of Vietnam. Using a post-colonial theoretical framework, it investigates textual responses to this controversial war and also speculates on how performance reflects and/or critiques concepts of national culture/character as imaged through the Aussie Digger (Dave), the Yankee GI (Joe), and Uncle Sam himself. As well as examining representations of American neo-imperialism, I also explore relationships between the Western allies and highlight the ways in which their competitive masculinities are mediated through discourses that hover obsessively, if sometimes covertly, around the body/text of 'woman' as a site of conquest.

As an unresolved issue, Vietnam haunts a number of contemporary plays, (dis)appearing in the margins as a site of repressed trauma which frequently attenuates the social and psychological growth of individuals and/or groups. Stephen Sewell’s *The Blind Giant is Dancing* (1983) and Michael Gow’s *Away* (1986) both feature dysfunctional characters whose guilt at having sent their sons to Vietnam emblematizes a wider psychic stress over our nation’s failure to resist the tide of American imperialism. Most notably, Louis Nowra’s work exhibits a recurrent and intense interest in the subject of Vietnam although this is often communicated by visual resonance rather than direct reference. If the apocalyptic landscape of *Inside the Island* (1980) remembers Gallipoli, it also conjures the killing fields of My Lai, as does the nuclear inferno imagined in *Sunrise* (1983). In this play, Nowra makes the Vietnam link explicit through the figure of the gardener, Ly, a shell-shocked Vietnamese refugee who cowers trembling when the helicopters fly overhead, but it is not until *Cosi* (1992) that Nowra mentions American imperialism in Vietnam, and then only briefly. Other dramatists take a slightly different tack, seeming to engage directly with the central debates raised by Australian participation in that 'dirty capitalist war', but ultimately using Vietnam as a pressurised space to sharpen more personal conflicts. This pattern is evident in Nick Enright’s recent *Bildungsdráma, St James Infirmary* (1992), which situates the emotional and political crises of its rebel schoolboy protagonist within the framework of the 1960s Australian protest movement. In all of these texts, Vietnam is somehow displaced from centre-stage, included as an unnameable anxiety or referred to in passing but not dwelt on for long.

Notwithstanding the probable connections between Vietnam and the sustained attack on American hegemony expressed in *The Blind Giant is Dancing*, it is curious that playwrights such as Sewell, Nowra and Gow, who have elsewhere been chroniclers and re-interpreters of the broader
canvas of Australian history, and mordant critics of imperialism, have not seized more directly upon Vietnam as a dramatic subject. In a 1983 interview with Jeremy Ridgman, Sewell and Nowra identified it as one of the 'central experiences' of our culture. Sewell states:

The interest in Vietnam for me goes back to a sense of shame; about how the crime was committed against the Vietnamese people and how we participated in that crime. No acknowledgment has been made at the level of culture, let alone in reparations, after we participated in the devastation of that country.

Nowra adds that

It was a dubious and immoral war, especially from the point of view of Australia. We were a participant, not from ideas of honour or moral commitment or beliefs, but from a cringing necessity to align ourselves with a big boy power.

Neither playwright shies away from confronting the fact of Australia's willing participation in Vietnam and together they highlight the complex power relations at issue in the whole conflict. That their planned collaboration on a Vietnam play has not eventuated suggests, nevertheless, the acute difficulty which this subject poses.

Of the few contemporary plays which do focus squarely on the significance of the Vietnam experience for the wider Australian community, Rob George's *Sandy Lee Live at Nui Dat* (1981) provides the most thorough-going indictment of American imperialism. In his preface to the published text, the playwright claims that the events of the 1960s precipitated the 'Americanisation of Australia in a way that had never been known before'. He explores this phenomenon on a number of levels by examining those who participated in the Vietnam war, those who protested against it, and those who profited by it. What is most distinctive about this text is its cognition that we have become neo-colonials - or 'Coca-Colonials' - through active consent. As Beryl Langer argues in her discussion of American hegemony, '[w]e tend to conceptualize our status as colonized subjects in terms of a discourse of cultural imperialism which constructs our relation to the United States as one of domination/oppression. What this leaves out is the extent of our own complicity'. Rob George's play is very much about this complicity even though it is openly anti-American. Its exploration of the Vietnam experience is developed not only in direct debates about neo-imperialism but also through a non-naturalistic mode which uses parody, song, and agit-prop theatre to underscore criticism of all factions. The play's overt theatricality is particularly apposite for its subject since to many the war seemed like a badly managed stage production. Gerster describes Australia's participation in these terms:

This was not the starring role and triumphant curtain call in a drama of clearly
demarcated ‘good’ versus ‘evil’ to which Australians – thanks largely to the zeal of mythmakers like the First World War Official Historian C.E.W. Bean – had become accustomed ... Australians in Vietnam were ‘a side show ... a walk-on part in an expensive production.’ To use a squib in vogue during the conflict, the whole sorry performance seemed to prove that Australia really was ‘The Lackey Country’.17

The protest movement, with its carefully orchestrated performances – the public burning of conscription papers is a case in point – was also styled according to theatrical paradigms, albeit of a different kind.

George’s play sketches its characters in terms of broad stereotype and its structure is loosely documentary, developing in juxtaposition three distinct narratives which eventually merge. No Americans or Vietnamese actually appear in the text; the emphasis is on how these ‘others’ are constructed and positioned within the neo-colonial triangle created by our involvement in what is seen as America’s war in Vietnam. On the home front, the action revolves around the presentation of a number of pieces of street theatre by the anti-war agitators, university students Peter and Pat, along with a focus on their political ideologies as revealed in less public moments. Using the parlance of the period, these two characters articulate a vehement protest against the American invasion of South-East Asia. Well-worn slogans such as ‘Read about American war crimes’ and ‘Smash US imperialism’ resonate throughout their rather crudely staged demonstrations, but the playwright is careful to point out that even the theatre of protest has a distinctly American flavour. Hence Peter’s (unoriginal) idea to make a show of burning his call-up papers is treated with a degree of cynicism. That his ‘symbolic gesture’ goes entirely unnoticed suggests that mindless emulations of American models of (mis)behaviour are both ineffective and anything but revolutionary. Elsewhere in the play, the use of street theatre reveals something of the mechanisms by which Australians construct themselves vis à vis their Yankee allies/enemies. Theatrical signifiers like costume and accent become important in delineating national identities since the Australian-American contrast lacks a paradigm of racial difference to make visible that sense of essential ‘otherness’ which aids self-definition. When Peter and Pat perform a routine while decked out as ‘Uncle Sam’ and ‘Vietnam’ respectively, the play illustrates, by dint of metatheatrical emphasis on their artifice, how costume grafts particular characteristics onto the performing body rather than simply functioning as a neutral device that ‘blends straggling physiological signifiers so that they contribute to character’.18 Peter’s costume is intended to be highly evocative, suggesting militarism and political coercion, as well as more covert forms of cultural dominance. Uncle Sam is also very much a showbiz figure who reminds us that American hegemony operates through popular culture and the media. Hence his song has the structure and tone of an advertising jingle, as does Vietnam’s reply:
TWO YEARS GAOL

GEOFF MULLEN
TO BE GAILED FOR
DRAFT RESISTANCE

DEMONSTRATE

MARCH LEAVES
MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY
MARCH 24 2:30
Sandy Lee live at Nui Dat
PETER [as Uncle Sam]: Howdy doody, hello ma’am
You can call me Uncle Sam
I am big and I am strong
I’ve come to kill the Viet Cong
I’ll teach you all what’s right and wrong
Come to save you Vietnam
So come up here and let’s shake hands.

PAT [as Vietnam]: Thank you for your offer, friend,
But on ourselves we will depend.
We know our house is far from calm,
But we want peace and not napalm.
Yes, we want peace for Vietnam.
So give us food and we’ll say thanks,
Don’t sell us your expensive tanks. (pp. 10-11)

Punctuated by Uncle Sam pointing a revolver straight at Vietnam’s head (See p. 298), Peter’s and Pat’s performance is unequivocal in its positioning of America as an imperial power to be resisted at all costs. The gender codes are abundantly clear: male America stands poised to rape and/or murder a female Vietnam. However, since this scenario also uses visual and aural cues suggestive of an American-style sketch, its real subversiveness turns on the question of appropriation, that is, on whether the students actively seize upon the (stage) languages of the American protest and Australianize them or whether they simply reproduce borrowed tropes. I would argue that George’s careful delineation of Pat, the questioner, from Peter, the mimic man, ensures that such scenes operate counter-discursively because at least one of the pair seems fully aware of the hegemony of American discourse whether it peddles war or peace. Hence, the overall function of street theatre in this play seems to be to relocate the enemy as rhetoric itself. This move approximates what Peter Pierce terms the ‘tertiary stage’ of Australian representations of the enemy in war literature, the stage wherein ‘language itself ... comes to be recognised both as foe and as a major casualty of modern war’.19

The war narrative of Sandy Lee Live at Nui Dat concentrates on Australian imperialism in Vietnam, avoiding the common temptation to project our national guilt over the war on to the Americans. While their ‘pacification’ of a whole village certainly triggers the events which lead to the final catastrophic murder/suicide, it is clear that at least some of the Australian soldiers not only condone such violence but also (mis)use it for their own purposes. In particular, the play reveals how the (hi)story of Vietnam is shaped by the story-tellers in ways that support personal agendas. Hence, the mercenary, Ted, reports the pacification in order to crush Bruce’s romantic dreams while the third soldier, Gordon, later appropriates Bruce’s grief to concoct a credible tale that will convince the protesters of his anti-American stance. Gordon’s disingenuous pose is of
course radically undermined by the fact that he depends on the GIs to facilitate his drug-trafficking, a point which emphasizes how the graft and corruption associated with the Vietnam war is widespread rather than simply confined to the Americans. Although this section of the play is no less trenchant in its critique of U.S. imperialism, George also directs our focus towards the discursive representation of that imperialism. Here, as in the protest narrative, it is our own complicity with the American way of war/words that is highlighted.

The Vietnam scenes also communicate the Australians’ anxiety about their official position as U.S. allies in a war where the antonyms ‘friend’ and ‘enemy’ are no longer polar points in a binary opposition, and where the racial ‘other’ refuses simple categorization. The mistrust which ensues in such situations is aptly described by a 1960s news report:

The Vietnamese hate the Americans. The Americans hate the Vietnamese. Americans hate other Americans. The local Chinese are hated by both the Vietnamese and the Americans. The Australians hate everybody.20

This certainly seems applicable to most of the soldiers in George’s play. Gordon’s comment that the Diggers are ‘open season for Charlie and Uncle Sam and every slope-eyed bastard [they] come across’ (p.29) reveals not only his racism but a deep confusion over how the enemy might be confidently identified. The result is a solipsistic retreat into self-delusion or cynicism. Through the figure of the soldier doubly alienated from his nominal allies and his fellow Australians, the play dismantles the myth of mateship which undergirds the Digger legend, especially since George refuses to present images/myths of a revenant soldiery which will exonerate the Australians, or to sanitise the war narrative by filtering it through the discourses of Gallipoli. Instead, it makes a point of deconstructing the Anzac myth by showing how the ‘innocent’ and youthful bush balladeer, Bruce, is anything but a modern version of his heroic prototype, for he is neither courageous nor self-sacrificing, and, crucially, by his obsessive love/lust for a Vietnamese woman, he calls into question his fealty to his ‘mates’.

While Bruce is the one soldier to draw our empathy, his fetishisation and appropriation of his Vietnamese lover is severely criticized. He might profess undying devotion to Lai Dai, but it is quite obviously his own construction of her as a Madonna figure which fuels his love, a point stressed, when he reveals that he does not even know her real name. That he simply ‘makes up’ a new name for her denies her subjectivity, and demonstrates the linguistic interpellation of the racial and sexual ‘other’ that is characteristic of imperial patriarchy. Similarly, his plans to bring Lai Dai to Australia suggest that she is merely a commodity to be imported at will. The particularly sexual nature of Australian imperialism in Asia is clearly expressed by Ted’s satirical response to Bruce’s query about why they are in Vietnam at all: ‘It’s actually all just a great big
lonely hearts club where poor unattached males like you get to meet beautiful Asian girls in the romantic, exotic and colourful Far East’ (p. 25). Thus the play makes explicit the generic links between the war narrative and the traveller’s tale, positioning the Australian soldiers as Occidental (sex) tourists whose invasion of Asia is the predictable outcome of a wider desire for self-authentication through conquest of the passive Oriental ‘other’. That Bruce’s orientalist fantasy devolves into a ‘bad trip’ which leaves him ‘travel sick’ is one of the major ironies of the Vietnam experience/tour.

Where the Americans fit in this paradigm is slightly less clear, but I would argue that a large part of the Australians’ antipathy towards them can be traced to genital anxieties about their own sexual potency. This view is supported by Ted’s aggressively dismissive construction of Lai Dai as a ‘whore’ who ‘chat[s] up the Yank generals’ (p. 27), and by the ways in which the Australians compare themselves repeatedly to the Americans in what could be sexual terms of reference: ‘Is it true that us Aussies are six times better than the Yank soldiers?’ asks Bruce (p. 14). Significantly, Digger Dave and GI Joe never seem to meet in the flesh, or at least this is not detailed by the play, but in the complex story of Vietnam, the female body becomes a space on and through which the competitive national masculinities/sexualities of Australia and America are contested.

If the war scenes of Sandy Lee Live at Nui Dat reveal the sexual imperative of Australia’s neo-imperialism in Asia, the third narrative thread of the play, which focuses on the pop singer, Sandy Lee, shows another kind of economic exploitation. Sandy Lee’s career exemplifies capitalism’s most insidious workings, not only because her tours to the military camps in Vietnam take on a progressively opportunistic bent, but also because her music and her public rhetoric justify Australian participation in the war. By setting her nauseatingly patriotic songs in ironic counterpoint to the students’ protest ditties, the play strips her form of entertainment of its apolitical masquerade and positions the singer as yet another conduit for American hegemony. A sitting target for parody, Sandy Lee functions as a site of anti-war discourse, but she is also an ambiguous figure who elicits some sympathy because she is obviously a victim of the very imperial and patriarchal systems she supports. This is particularly evident in the way that she too is situated as the fetishized object of the male gaze, constructed by Bruce as a surrogate for the beautiful Lai Dai, and by Ted as ‘a pretty round-eyed sheila’ who will remind the soldiers ‘that the army does, after all, care for them’ (pp. 9-10). Within the overall scheme of the play, however, Sandy emerges as a callous character and one who practises the worst kind of denial. Even though, in an unguarded moment, she articulates most fully the moral futility of the Vietnam ‘tour’ of duty, it seems she has learnt little from her travels. That her closing number is a song stolen from Bruce and
introduced by an announcer with a phoney American accent reminds us that Sandy Lee shows the ugly face of Australia’s neo-colonial experience in Vietnam, the pervasive cultural ‘Coca Cola-nisation’ which is the enduring legacy of our American dreams.

Rob George’s honest, complex and entertaining assessment of Australia’s complicity with American imperialism in Asia should have sparked more interest in our theatre circles than it did, and it is regrettable that some of the prickly issues he raises have not been fully canvassed in a number of more recent plays about Australia’s ongoing and problematic role in Asian-Pacific politics. A brief analysis of Barry Lowe’s *Tokyo Rose* (1989) illustrates how the imperative to distance ourselves from American neo-colonialism can result in a figural displacement of our own economic, military and sexual aggression towards various Asian countries. Although set during World War Two and ostensibly about the trial of a Japanese-American woman suspected by the U.S. of treason, *Tokyo Rose* has the ambience of a Vietnam protest play. Its quasi-documentary structure and burlesque musical style, along with an extended focus on the figure of Uncle Sam, invites comparisons with *Sandy Lee Live at Nui Dat*. In particular, the savage anti-Americanism of *Tokyo Rose* seems commensurate with a post-Vietnam assessment of the U.S. imperium as does the play’s portrait of a feminine Japan/Asia victimized by the menacing Uncle Sam. Lowe’s inclusion of an Australian soldier as the adventitious ‘innocent abroad’, combined with costume and scene designs which emphasize contrasts between the Aussie khaki and the Yankee red, white and blue, completes the picture of a refracted and displaced Vietnam narrative.

Like George, Lowe is intensely interested in exploring the rhetorical and theatrical power of American popular entertainment and in showing how its tropes can be deployed to critique U.S. imperialism. In the first half of the play, he presents the (hi)story of Iva Toguri, the woman framed as Tokyo Rose, within the framework of a proposed musical being put together by a smooth-talking American, Carroll, who appropriates Iva’s experience for his ‘exotic’ new show. Carroll presents himself as the quintessential Broadway entrepreneur, ‘the body merchant’ and ‘connoisseur of female flesh’, who will ‘turn Iva’s life-story into the sensation it should be’. The mutability of this kind of war history (his story) is clearly demonstrated as Carroll experiments with a number of ideas and theatrical images, censoring Iva’s tale unless it is contingent with his own vision. Of course, his blatantly artificial reconstruction of Iva/Tokyo Rose is specifically designed to expose his own biases, and on a broader level, to critique the racism and sexism of his society; however, despite the play’s metatheatre, or maybe because of it, the audience is easily persuaded that such distortions of history are the precinct of the Americans. What is missing from the performance’s self-reflexive focus on the making of history/theatre is the sense that the
audience is always implicated in that process. Whereas *Sandy Lee Live at Nui Dat* challenges Australian spectators with uncomfortable reminders of our likeness to the Americans, *Tokyo Rose* reassures us of our difference.

The play's construction of Uncle Sam as Iva's corrupt and malicious prosecutor similarly distances us from the American-style (in)justice meted out by the judges, bureaucrats and politicians whose prejudices deny her a fair trial. When he brands her a 'dastardly slur on the lives of other women' (p. 37) and a 'female Nipponese turncoat' (p. 57), Uncle Sam only reveals his own misogyny, while his accusation that Iva is a 'vicious propagandist' has more than a hint of irony (p. 39). Always appearing in full stars-and-stripes regalia and present on stage for most of the action, Uncle Sam is a grotesque parody of American culture. Once again, costume is used as a visible hook which allows the audience's immediate recognition of cultural stereotypes (See p. 304). As in George's play, Uncle Sam is very much the performer, the master of showbiz who weeps theatrically at will, the media hack who 'speaks like a TV promo' (p. 43), and at the same time, a threatening patriarchal presence who represents the military might of the U.S.A. But because we are never made aware that someone is also playing the part of Uncle Sam, unlike in Rob George's text where Peter's 'act' is encoded as an entirely visible piece of (meta)theatre, Lowe's Uncle Sam character, despite his artificiality, is naturalized as the average American. Hollow to the core, a simulacrum, a play of surface images, he embodies Australia's post-modern nightmare, but the reasons behind this post-colonial construction of America are rarely examined, when perhaps they should be.

For the purposes of this discussion, I have privileged George's account of American neo-imperialism over that of Lowe because the former shows an acute awareness of that complex ambivalence which results from our partial identification with and simultaneous disavowal of the colonizing culture. *Tokyo Rose* is, nevertheless, an important text in so far as it recognizes and satirizes Orientalist discourses, and undermines the disciplinary regimes, both rhetorical and corporeal, through which American militarism attempts to bring the destabilizing difference of the racial/sexual 'other' under its control. As far as Australian-American relationships are concerned, however, perhaps the real subversion of the play lies in Lowe's deliberate appropriation of American theatrical tropes – the Uncle Sam figure, the Broadway razzamatazz, the musical chorus – to create a strongly anti-American play. If, as Homi Bhabha posits, '[t]he menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority',*25* *Tokyo Rose*’s replication of American generic conventions surely provides a grotesque mirror that refracts inherited stage traditions even while attempting to emulate them.

That the dramas discussed generally enact their more penetrating
critiques of the Vietnam war by examining it in some relation to American imperialism is a result not only of the historical circumstance of U.S. military intervention in the Asia-Pacific region but also of Australia's own ambivalences in dealing with its near neighbours. While we have long perceived the importance of having Western allies to protect our privileged position in what is essentially a non-Western region, we do not want the dependency, servility, and competition that such a relationship implies. Pierce's argument that Australia's bitter resentment of American neo-colonialism (compared to its tolerance of British colonialism) stems from the absence of 'countervailing forces of Empire loyalty', tells only half the story. The other half, as Jeff Doyle avers, is that our anti-Americanism:

betrays the insecurity of Australia's movement from an inward looking, conservative and comfortable nation aspiring to an Anglo-European culture long since passed, to a player of whatever calibre on the world stage and in particular on the stage of Asia-Pacific matters. That move had been and remains troubling and problematic.

If our ambivalence towards the United States remains unresolved, as the theatrical treatment of Vietnam suggests, this attests to the complexity of the colonialisms which have impacted upon Australian history and which continue to shape its contours.
GI Joe Versus Digger Dave

Plays mentioned in text but not listed in bibliographical notes:

NOTES

4. It could be argued that many recent Australian narratives about World War One are deeply inflected by the Vietnam conflict although few show direct cognisance of its legacy. In particular, attempts to revivify the Anzac legend, as evident in a number of 1980s novels and films, can be linked to an anxiety about the erosion of the heroic soldier ideal, which resulted from our experience of Vietnam. Similar anxieties have energised the recent media coverage of events relating to our military history, for example, the 75th anniversary of Gallipoli in April 1990, and the return of the body of the Unknown Australian Soldier to the Canberra War Memorial in late 1993. Such celebrations of the soldier figure, as Susan Jeffords has argued in her book, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) suggests a reordering of the gender relations that feminism has threatened over the last quarter-century.
7. Ibid., p. 134.
8. Dates given for plays in parentheses in the main body of this paper refer to the premiere performance. All page references are to the published texts.
9. See Veronica Kelly’s article, ‘Lest We Forget’: Louis Nowra’s *Inside the Island*, in this volume.
10. A variant response on this theme can be identified in Janis Balodis’s representation of war in *Too Young for Ghosts* (Sydney: Currency, 1985). Here, although Vietnam is never mentioned, the portrayal of the Americans as openly predatory and violent suggests that the play’s World War Two narrative has been adapted to fit the contingencies of the post-Vietnam era.
11. Nor has John Romeril re-visited this subject directly, although his work figured prominently in the theatre of the Vietnam period, mainly in the form of agit-prop protests against Australian internalisation of American hegemony, as demonstrated by sketches such as *The American Independence Hour* (1969) and *Chicago, Chicago* (1970). It could be argued, however, that his 1989 play, *Top End* (unpublished) draws deliberate parallels between Vietnam and the
war in East Timor. See Gareth Griffiths, 'John Romeril’s Wars: The Dissenting View', in this volume.


13. Ibid., p. 122.

14. Other notable plays of the 1980s which take Vietnam as their central subject include Rosemary John’s *Luck of the Draw* (Sydney: Currency, 1985), about two veteran soldiers in the post-war era, and *Dustoff Vietnam* (unpublished, 1988), a play put together by Darwin veterans and local Vietnamese residents. Both include Vietnamese characters and deal, to some extent, with the ongoing problem of Australian racism but do not examine American imperialism in any detailed way.

15. Rob George, *Sandy Lee Live at Nui Dat* (Sydney: Currency, 1982), p. vii. Further references to this play are given in the text.


19. Peter Pierce, ‘Perceptions of the Enemy in Australian War Literature’, *Australian Literary Studies*, 12, 2 (1985), p. 172. According to Pierce, the first stage confidently locates the enemy ‘in the opposing battlelines’ while in the second, he is also ‘discovered elsewhere’, mainly as a cowardly profiteer.


22. Similar paradigms of gender/nation are characteristic of many accounts of the Australian-American alliance during World War Two, particularly in reference to the GI invasion of our shores in the early 1940s. See, for example, John Hammond Moore’s book, *Over-Sexed, Over-Paid and Over Here: Americans in Australia 1941-1945* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1981), and the plays, *Dinkum Assorted* by Linda Aronson (Sydney: Currency, 1989) and *No Names ... No Pack Drill* by Bob Herbert (Sydney: Currency, 1980). In these texts, Australian women function as arbiters of the competing versions of masculinity embodied by the Aussie Digger and the Yankee GI, and they are expected to exercise probity in their choices. At the same time, women are troped as the trouble spots of our defence system. Vulnerable and potentially treacherous, they threaten to compromise the moral fabric of our society and to become conduits for a dirty American capitalism which trades in sex, nylons and perfume.


24. Barry Lowe, *Tokyo Rose* (unpublished script, 1989), p. 2. All further references to this play are included in the text.

RICHARD TIPPING

VIETGRAM: 1968

WE HAVE BEEN SOLD OUT DEAR PEOPLE DEAR JUMBLED CITY AND GUMTREE PEOPLE WE HAVE BEEN AUCTIONED OFF FOR TEN THOUSAND SQUARE SUBURBS OF DEAD CARS OR THREE FOR EVERY TWO CONSCRIPTS WHO LOVE THEIR COUNTRY MORE THAN THE DIRTY YELLOW CANCER OF COMMUNISM ADVANCING AT THIS VERY MOMENT ON A UNITED FRONT THEY MAY BE SMALL BUT THEY ARE HUNGRY AS WE ALL KNOW DEAR SUNBURNED AND KANGAROO PEOPLE A PRIME MINISTER RETURNED IN HUMILITY TO THE SEA THAT DROWNS ALL EVENTUALLY WHILE HIS DAME WEPT AND BOUNCED BACK BUT MEANWHILE THE BOMBS STILL FALL ACCORDING TO THE RAGGED LAWS OF WESTERN GRAVITY BUY A BADGE AND BOMB A CHILD SIR LEAP SCREAM OR JUMP DOWN THE LEFTWING THROATS SPREADING SUBVERSIVE AND SEDITIOUS LITERATURE HOW TO SPREAD A PEANUT BUTTER SANDWICH ON CRACKED DUPLICATORS AT MIDNIGHT LONELY THROWING THEIR WEIGHT AROUND DEAR SUBURBAN AND RETURNED PEOPLE THIS IS NOT A QUESTION OF BEEF EXPORTS OR PROTECTION ALTHOUGH PERHAPS YOUR MEMORIAL UGLY HALLS KEEP THE PAIN OUT BUT THAT IS ANOTHER QUESTION SO ELECT YOUR VOICES AND SHUT UP AS CANBERRA IS OF COURSE COMPETENT TO DEAL WITH THE SITUATION ANCIENT BACKBENCHERS THUMP BANDAGED FISTS AND DRINK ONEHANDED ACROSS THE HALFSYLLABLES OF DEMOCRACY HUNTED OUT IN MYSTERIOUS CORRIDORS INEVITABLE OFFICES DEAR TILED AND NEAT LAWN PEOPLE YOU SAY THE STOBIE POLES MAY NOT BE BEAUTIFUL BUT THEY ARE STRONG TO HANG THE WEIGHT OF CHILDREN

NOTES: Conscripts National service was introduced for males aged 19, who were selected through a lottery system of birthdates. Many of the 500 Australian soldiers killed in Vietnam were conscripts. This poem was written as a telegram when the poet was 18. Returned people refers to the R.S.L., the Returned Serviceman’s League, a politically conservative force. Backbenchers members of Parliament not in the Cabinet Prime Minister Harold Holt, who welcomed the closing of defence ties with the United States and committed Australian troops (only after beef exports had been threatened) and drowned while surfing. The Women’s Weekly magazine reported that his wife, Dame Lara Holt had ‘bounced back’. Stobie poles Electricity poles prevalent in the streets Drink onehanded refers to accusations by Liberal Member Andrew Jones that half of the Parliamentarians in the Federal Parliament in Canberra, were ‘half drunk half the time’ – quickly denied
Barbara Hanrahan, 'Poppy Day'
ANNA RUTHERFORD

Mars versus Venus: The Dialectics of Power in Shirley Hazzard’s *The Transit of Venus*

God of our Fathers known of old –
Lord of our far-flung battle line
Beneath whose awful Hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine –
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet
Lest we forget – lest we forget!

Rudyard Kipling
‘The Recessional’

Patriarchal poetry makes no mistake.
Patriarchal Poetry is the same as Patriotic poetry.
Gertrude Stein from ‘Patriarchal Poetry’
*Bee Time Vine and Other Pieces*

Men should be trained for war and women for the recreation of warriors.

Nietzsche

Much has been said and written about the military mind.
Nothing, however, harsh enough.

Shirley Hazzard
*The Bay of Noon*

*The Transit of Venus*¹ is set within the framework of war. The opening page places the scene in the period of the Korean war; the final lines refer, not only to the gratuitous sinking of the *Tirpitz* (compare the sinking of the *Belgrano*), but point also to the possibility of a total nuclear holocaust in which that ‘work of ages’ humanity, will ‘shrivel in an instant’ (p. 337). The whole novel is concerned with different levels of war, of power relationships between nations, empires and colonies, classes, races, individuals and the collective, females and males. As they converge, intersect and intertwine to show the relationship between each and every one of them it becomes clear that war provides much more than a framework. It is the ground bass on which the whole novel is structured.

In an Australian context, what is particularly interesting is Shirley
Hazzard's recording of that country's shift in allegiance - dependence - after the Second World War, when 'down' became no longer Kew, 'Go down to Kew in lilac time', but 'down Mexico way'; 'the power of Kew was passing like an empire', (p. 48) and Fisher's 'last man and the last shilling' was replaced by Holt's 'All the way with LBJ', an alliance that was to lead to Australia's participation in the Vietnam War and the positioning of American bases on Australian soil.

Accompanying this shift in allegiance and change of tunes was what Shirley Hazzard describes as Caro's and Grace's 'first encounter with calculated uselessness'. The latter consisted of nibless pens, 'pencils with lights attached' brought to school by a girl 'whose father had been in America for Munitions' (p. 47, my emphasis) and who had brought them back with him. When one reads about them one recalls the dippy bird toy in John Romeril's play *The Floating World*. The instructions on the box containing the dippy bird, which John Romeril claims are taken straight from an actual instruction slip read:

> the contents is Not-Inflammable but if the high heat is touched then the pressure of contents are going up so please take care of above caution.

It is clear that Shirley Hazzard intends the trinkets she describes to have the same significance. 'The trinkets were assembled with collective meaning, like exhibits in a crime, or like explosives no expert could defuse. Invention was the mother of necessity' (p. 47). The same technology that produced the trinkets would also produce the nuclear armaments. And if capitalism would see to it that a market was created for the trinkets, 'They would have to be conditioned to a new acquisitiveness' (p. 47), so too would the armament manufacturers create a market for the armaments. It is not only the munitions manufacturers, it is also those with interests to boost their own status. War is a godsend to any government, particularly conservative ones, especially during periods of economic depression and especially when it is skilfully manipulated to take the mind of the population from the enemy within to the enemy without. The same thing applies to generals and Ministers of War as Will Dyson has pointed out in his cartoon of Winston Churchill, one of 'the architects of invasion'.

On the opening page of C.E.W. Bean's *Anzac to Amiens*, we read:

> The motive of any grouping may in the first instance have been trade, or domination, or even the conversion of the pagan - and the group may be an Empire, a federation, or an alliance; but when once its common defence system has been set up, it becomes, among other things, a group for self-protection; and a threat to any part of its body is felt, often acutely, by each of its members.

Implicit in Bean's statement, just as it is in the whole of his history is a belief in racial, sexual and class superiority. What is also present is an
CHURCHILL: "If one is the greatest War Minister the World has known, obviously one must have some wars in which to prove it!"

Will Dyson
awareness of the necessity for the dominating groups to close ranks should they be challenged, the ‘them and us’ mentality. Bean’s attitude and its consequences – are discussed by the South American poet in a conversation with Caro:

‘Even a right side imposes wrongful silences, required untruths. As the timid say, “There is strength, or safety, in numbers; but solidarity is an extension of power, that is, the beginning of the lie. The only proper solidarity is with the truth, if one can discover it”’. (p. 249)

In the closed societies of the Reagans, the Thatchers, and all others like them there is no room for ‘the independent mind’ that ‘raises questions that go beyond the answers supplied by nationality and society’, that challenges the status quo and people like Sefton Thrale and Captain Girling, who had become ‘the views ... [they] had never contested’, servants to ‘perjured acquiescence registered in an inward shrivelling (my emphasis) of lip and chin’6 (p. 85).

Once the battle lines are drawn up and the ‘them and us’ mentality comes into operation there is no room for questions. Those who challenge the accepted order face dismissal (Tice’s parents), destruction (Victor), imprisonment (Rex Ivory, who draws an analogy between the mental asylum in which the British placed him and the Japanese prisoner of war camp), or exile (Edward VIII). This exclusion policy operates in death as well as in life; the reason suicides are refused burial in consecrated ground, Caro suggests, is because they ‘refuse to maintain the fiction that all is normal and peaceful’ (p. 76).

My argument is that in The Transit of Venus Shirley Hazzard presents war in all its aspects as a product of patriarchal capitalism and in doing so she explores the process of power. She shows how power is manifested through both the material and ideological dimensions of patriarchy, capitalism and racism, of Empire and colony and how oppression reflects the hierarchical relations of the sexual and racial divisions of labour and society. What she endeavours to do is to explicate the dialectic between sex and class, race and class, and sex, race and class; to reveal the relationship between the private (personal) and public (political) and to show, as Virginia Woolf also endeavoured to show, how ‘the public and the private worlds are inseparably connected’, ‘the tyranny and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other’.7

In her book Capitalist Patriarchy and The Case for Socialist Feminism Zillah Eisenstein writes:

A moment cannot be understood outside the relations of power which shape it and the ideology which defines, protects, and maintains it. In describing these moments, understanding the ideology of a society becomes crucial because the social relations of capitalist patriarchy are maintained through the ideologies of liberalism, male supremacy, and racism.8
In a footnote to her chapter ‘Developing a Theory of Capitalist Patriarchy’ she quotes Karl Marx:

In order to understand power one needs to analyze the relations that define power rather than treating power as an abstract thing. Any moment embodies the relations of power that define it. The only way to understand what the moment is, is to understand it as a reflection of the processes involved in it. By definition, this requires one to see moments as part of other moments rather than as cut off from each other. Seeing things in separation from each other, as part of either/or options, is the dichotomous thinking of positivism. By trying to understand the elements defining the synthesis of power as it is embodied in any particular moment, one is forced to come to terms with the conflict embodied within it, and hence the dialectical processes of power.9

There could I believe be no better description of Shirley Hazzard’s method of writing. Through association of ideas and events, through complex interweaving of patterns and linguistic reverberations she leads us to see moments as part of other moments, as patterns of oppression, and so helps us to understand the dialectical processes of power. The rest of this paper is a brief examination of how she does this.

The official war history of Australia, Shirley Hazzard tells us, is represented by ‘the brittle brown wreaths at cenotaphs, two minutes silence ... and the monuments to war’s sweetest symbols, the soldier, bronze rifle rested supporting his decorously felled comrade, the marshal clearly victorious on his flawless horse’ (p. 36). In defiance of these official images, ‘the stately edifice[s]’ erected by ‘the architects of the invasion’ (p. 28), Shirley Hazzard presents the realities, the ‘dreaded spectres’ who for ‘a dead and atrocious certainty’ always awaited you at the corner of Market and Castlereagh Streets, a ‘particular and affluent corner, which for that reason seemed not to be a street at all, but a pit or arena’ (pp. 34-5):

What music they made, and how they sang, that ghastly orchestra in lopped and shiny serge, with unstrung fiddles and wheezing concertinas and the rusted mouth-organ grasped in the remaining and inexpert hand; the voices out of tune with everything but pitched extremity. How cruelly they wracked, for Depression pennies, an unwilling audience with their excruciating songs – ‘The Rose of No Man’s Land’, and ‘The Roses of Picardy’, and ‘The Rose of Tralee’, and ‘Oh My, I don’t want to die, I want to go home’. The war of the roses, roses and smile, smile, smile. (p. 35)

We meet their British counterparts later on, appropriately enough outside Harrods, where ‘a trio of street musicians in ancient serge, bawled about Tipperary while a fourth held out a khaki cap’ (p. 197). In yet another incident in the novel we are presented with more of their ‘relations’. Ted Tice, in a letter to Caro, tells how, with two of his colleagues, he had visited the mines near Lille:
During the holiday I drove with two French colleagues to the mines near Lille, where we went down a pit. The coal-face straight from Dante, worked by boys of sixteen or so, mostly North Africans who spoke no French. Worse than this were the hovels they went back to afterwards, ten to a filthy hut. Having uselessly petitioned the Ministère du Travail on behalf of these people, my two friends are helping them form a union. We returned to Paris by way of the First World War cemeteries of Vimy and Notre-Dame-de-Lorette and a quarter of a million graves. (p. 115)

Through association, Shirley Hazzard draws our attention not only to the connection between capitalism and war but also to the class/race connection. In the section just quoted she points to the exploitation of one section of international capital’s reserve army (an army without a voice – they ‘spoke no French’), an army composed essentially of Third World people and white women, an army to be called upon when the need arises (women in factories in time of war, foreign workers in time of affluence), and to be discarded when capital no longer needs their labour – women are returned to the home and foreign workers to their home countries. It’s amazing how easily so-called female ‘natural functions’ and ‘idealized states’ are abandoned when found inconvenient. The natural female function of child-bearing is to be suspended when the occasion demands, for example in the case of Ted
Tice's parents but not when cannon fodder is needed. The so-called 'moral majority' assures us that 'the family that prays together stays together' but one feels that no amount of divine intervention is likely to help the families of foreign workers or innocent victims of war. Dislocation and the breaking up of families are aspects both of war and capitalism.

The treatment of Cordelia Ware shows this situation working on a personal level and at the same time points to the sex/class and race relationship. She is, we are told, anxious 'to give satisfaction' (p. 224). This phrase links her to the Mullions, whose acceptance of the class structure is reflected in their belief in the notion of 'service and satisfaction' (p. 79). At the same time it places her in opposition to Ted Tice's parents, who rejected the class structure and refused 'to serve', just as Rex Ivory refused 'to serve'. Christian Thrale decides to seduce Cordelia Ware who is his temporary secretary. He is excited at the idea of conquest and titillated by the thought that she may be a virgin, for what explorer/conqueror can resist the thrill of being first. He also takes delight in the fact that she and her kind are exploited. 'What lives we give them, Christian reflected - not without gratification' (p. 224), the knowledge of exploitation giving an added sense of power. Cordelia performs as is expected, she 'gives satisfaction'. However, what Christian had not foreseen was that she might prove a threat. Here we have an obvious link between Cordelia and Paul Ivory's lover, Victor, which in turn presents a further link between sex and class. The response to the threat is the usual one. The members of the club join ranks: compare the earlier Bean quotation and Paul Ivory's remark, 'In the castle, believe me, they look after their own' (p. 309). Cordelia Ware is 'returned to the pool' (p. 236), just as Victor is left to the mercies of the flooded river.

It is also through Christian Thrale that the link between women and Third World people and the way they are both regarded as market commodities to be colonized and exploited is revealed. He briefly considers choosing Caro rather than Grace. 'He was', we are told 'like a cabinet minister faced with a capital decision' (p. 23). However, he dismisses the thought because 'Caro was beyond his means' (p. 23). Unable to gain dominion over Caro, Christian turns to Grace and to the Third World and here he has more success, a success that culminates in his announcement to Grace that he has something momentous to report. 'I have been given Africa ... South of the Sahara' and almost in the next breath he says, 'it will make a whopping difference in the pension' (pp. 282-3). This is a good example of the pecking order in disadvantage, for whilst Christian at some, though not great expense, possesses Grace he is given Africa (my emphasis).

If I may return to the previously mentioned letter of Ted Tice to Caro. Here Shirley Hazzard further stresses the political implications of the
total situation by having Ted Tice discuss the working class background, the class issue and the liberal humanists. ‘The poor don’t want solidarity with their lot, they want it changed’. He continues:

‘Even more than change, they want revenge. Men can make up soon enough with enemies who slaughtered them in battle, but never with the brethren who humiliated them in cold blood. They take reprisal on their own shame – that is what makes all hatreds, in war or class, or in love’. (p. 117, my emphasis)

Tice recognizes that the true enemy is not the Turkish or German soldier but the representatives of international capitalism, anti-worker capitalism, whose lust for power and profit happily consigned those million men on both sides to the grave in war time and in peace time, should the necessity arise, would, and do, just as happily consign them to the dole line.

When I was first considering writing this paper the miners’ strike was in progress in Great Britain. It came as no surprise to find that Mrs. Thatcher saw the pit strike as another Falklands with Galtieri as the enemy without and Arthur Scargill as the enemy within. At the Brighton conference (9 October 1984) Peter Walker declared that ‘the miners’ strike is no longer a union conflict but a revolutionary attempt to bring about a Marxist revolution. The Conservative Party is determined to fight Scargill’s Stalinism’. One recalls that the anti-conscriptionists, trade unionists and strikers in Australia during the First World War were branded as traitors, Bolsheviks and enemies of Australia. In the speeches of Mrs. Thatcher one hears only too clearly the voice of Billy Hughes. ‘There is no way of salvation save by the gospel of work. Those who endeavour to set class against class, or destroy wealth, are counsellors of destruction’. 10

It goes without saying that Anzac and the Digger tradition are part of the Australian male ethos and that women play no role within it except in the recreation of warriors. Just how male it is can be gauged by the people that A.G. Butler was willing to acknowledge as honorary diggers. These included Hereward the Wake, Leonidas the Spartan and perhaps nicest of all, St. Paul. ‘In his outlook on life’ Butler writes, ‘St. Paul himself was a digger, and he followed in the footsteps of a greater than he’.11 Interestingly enough Paul Ivory also invokes St. Paul. ‘It was the way of women to require choices, sortings, and proofs, and then to attribute blame. The Judgement of Paul’ (p. 105). That A.G. Butler’s club hasn’t changed its requirements for membership was brought home to me when I received an invitation from an Australian Embassy in Europe to attend an Anzac Day ceremony. After being invited to attend the ceremony the next paragraph read:

Dress for civilians will be dark suit with service medals (full size) and for serving members of the Armed Forces, uniforms with medals and swords.
Possessing neither a dark suit nor medals, large or small, and being like
the natives and petits blancs of Haiti under the Code Noir before the
Revolution, not permitted to wear a sword even if one possessed a
uniform, I regretfully had to decline on the grounds of an ineligibility of
a club to which I had no desire to belong. 12

Shirley Hazzard has made numerous references to the misogynistic
aspect of Australian society. Writing in Australian Literary Studies in
1981 she commented on the cultural aridity of the Australia in which
she spent her childhood and suggested that maybe gender had
something to do with this:

the arts, though forceful enough in their way, being (or being seen as) part of
the feminine aspect of humanity; and for this reason lying under particular pro-
scription in a country whose ‘maleness’ was a matter of strident and even panic
stricken assertion, and whose derision of all artistic expression was not uncon-
nected with women as a sex. Even now, those who would not jeer in Australia,
at opera, dance, painting, writing, have sometimes no hesitation in raising a
brute laugh over a woman’s appearance. Misogyny is part of the Australian
wound. 13

It is interesting to see the Australian male literary establishment when
challenged and with their backs to the wall lash out in the very way
that Shirley Hazzard describes. I am of course referring to Peter Pierce’s
comments on The Transit of Venus, when he claimed that it ‘looked
more than ever like the best-dressed women’s magazine fiction of the
year’ 14 and Don Anderson’s comment on the Boyer lectures, ‘It is a
Jeremiad, or if that sounds sexist, then it resembles nothing so much as
a speech-day address by the headmistress of a girls’ private school, of,
dare I suggest, Queenswood’. 15 Do I dare suggest that in these critics I
detect shades of Christian Thrale and Paul Ivory, ‘Now that Caro had
proved too much for him, he almost disliked her (p. 24) and Paul Ivory;
‘Paul wished perhaps to punish her – for her being remarkable’ (p. 76).

If misogyny is part of the Australian wound it is also part of the ethos
of war. In his book Sexual Suicide George Gilder describes training in
the American Marine Corps:

From the moment one arrives, the drill instructors begin a torrent of
misogynistic and anti-individualistic abuse. The good things are manly and
collective; the despicable are feminine and individual ... When you want to
create a ... group of male killers ... you kill the woman in them.16

It goes without saying that rape is part of the language of war and not
only of the language but also of the actuality. As Susan Brownmiller
points out, ‘rape has been perpetrated everywhere and always on both
sides of patriarchal wars with the attendant symbolism of bayonet and
gun’. 17 In an effort to eradicate the feminine within themselves, their
own humanity, and in fear of and compensation for the resultant loss,
emptiness, these ‘hollow men’, let rip with their primitive passions and
My Lai is the result. The consequences of the training described by Girder are discussed by Philip Caputo in his book *A Rumour of War*. Caputo, a Marine officer who served in Vietnam, explains how military life provided ‘meaning’ and the needed injections of ‘excitement’. ‘The heroic experience I sought was war; war, the ultimate adventure; war, the ordinary man’s most convenient means of escaping from the ordinary’. He goes on to explain:

The tedium was occasionally relieved by a large scale search-and-destroy operation ... Weeks of bottled up tension would be released in a few minutes of orgiastic violence. Men screaming and shouting obscenities above the explosions of grenades and the rapid, ripping bursts of automatic rifles.\(^{18}\)

The misogynist aspect of Australia and of war is one that Shirley Hazzard has commented on on more than one occasion. In an article in the *Bulletin* in 1981 she stated:

the violence of war [is] something that is male ... men often find it hard to go through with the private occasions of life, or with independent beliefs. And perhaps the very fact of allowing – or enabling – other men to launch you into wholesale slaughter is a way of announcing, what does it all mean? Let’s cry havoc and let rip with our private passions.\(^{19}\)

In one incident in *The Transit of Venus* Ted Tice is taken to the ruins of Hiroshima. His obvious horror at ‘the catastrophe of which no one would ever say, the Will of God’ (p. 53)\(^{20}\) is all too evident and gives Captain Girling cause for alarm. ‘Ted Tice’s manner of looking interrupted the smooth flow of acceptance, casting useless doubt on the inevitable. If he and his kind had their way, the world would be a bonny mess. So Captain Girling reflected amid the atomic ruins’ (p. 54). Girling takes Ted aside and warns him. ‘“Look here, Don’t make a goat of yourself,” Goat signifying anything unmanly or humane’ (p. 54). It was after this experience we are told that ‘Ted Tice’s life began to alter aspect and direction ... This derived ... from a revelation nearly religious, that the colossal scale of evil could only be matched or countered by some solitary flicker of intense and private humanity’ (p.53, my emphasis).

In World War I it was not just the trade unionists and anti-conscriptionists who were branded as traitors. Women too were accused of treachery, their crime being that they were failing to produce sufficient cannon fodder. A Royal Commission which examined the falling birth rate accused women of selfishness and of putting their own pleasure before that of the nation’s need. Miles Franklin raised the question of child bearing and national loyalty in *My Career Goes Bung*. Sybylla is told that it is Australian Women’s duty to fill up Australia to protect it from the yellow peril at its doors. She replied that ‘the
unfortunate Yellow Peril women might be relieved to enter into an alliance with Australian women to stem the swarming business'. In suggesting that gender be placed above race and nationality and in refusing to act in a tribalistic or nationalistic way Sybylla would meet with Shirley Hazzard’s approval. In an interview in the *Bulletin* in 1981 Shirley Hazzard said that she saw ‘women as more truly international than men ... women are more part of the planet than their country’. In the same interview she added that she still found the division between male and female very pronounced in Australia. ‘It’s like two nations at times’. The use of Disraeli’s phrase seems particularly appropriate not only because it draws attention to the inequalities between the sexes but also to the ever-widening gap between rich and poor in our present society.

The most obvious aspect of the Mars versus Venus conflict operating on a personal level is of course to be found in the Caro/Paul Ivory relationship. In *Sex and Love: New Thoughts on Old Contradictions* the authors write:

> Only in the system that is male oppression does the oppressor actually invade and colonize the interior body of the oppressed. Attached to all forms of sexual behaviour are meanings of dominance and submission, power and powerlessness, conquest and humiliation. (p. 188)

The situation they describe sums up Paul Ivory’s attitude to Caro and indeed the attitude of the majority of the male characters in Shirley Hazzard’s fiction who ‘only look on a love affair ... as a displacement, not just of his habits – though that, too – but of his intelligence. Of the mind itself. Being in love was, like pain, an indignity, a reducing thing’. Paul Ivory not only felt that Caro’s love ‘was disabling’ (p. 312) but also irritating by her show of self-sufficiency – she refuses to acknowledge that her sex, her nationality (a colonial!) and her non-possession of sheep stations are a disadvantage. This self-sufficiency ‘had given her some small degree of power over him – power that could only be reversed by an act of possession’ (p. 98). Possess her he does – prior to that she is a virgin – and directly after the possession we read:

> Paul drew her body between his knees. Pressure of sleeves and trousers on her bare skin urged on Caroline Bell another sensation, from infancy, when her father would lean over her cot and take up the scarcely clad child in hard omnipotent arms of serge or flannel that smelt of the city and the great world. A particular memory, inapposite, of her father in evening dress on his way to some ceremony, wearing medals of war that swung from bright ribbons as he bent to kiss his elder daughter. And she was the child reaching up to a smell of tobacco and cologne and the dark male friction of the coat, while medals dangled like coins of small denominations. (p. 101)

If I may refer back to the Eisenstein quotation ‘Any moment embodies
relations of power that define it. The only way to understand what the moment is is to understand it as a reflection of the processes of power involved in it. It seems to me that this is one of the most perfect instances in The Transit of Venus of Shirley Hazzard pointing to those processes.

Years later Paul Ivory, who is bi-sexual, reveals to Caro that it was in that same room with 'a mildewed snapshot ... labelled 1915 ... smirched and spattered with a brown consciousness of the trenches' (p.105) that he had 'taken' his working class lover Victor. He reveals that he was responsible for Victor's death and he describes the feeling of 'elation - a sense of deceiving, and thus controlling, all mankind, of defying natural laws. A state of being strengthened, omnipotent, some mad analogy with what heroes must feel who've risked their lives to defy the state, and survived' (p. 308). Caro's response to this confession was an awareness of 'the blood shed twice' and a knowledge that Paul Ivory belonged to those 'who enlisted Death on their side' (p. 313).

In opposition to Paul Ivory who enlists Death on his side is Ted Tice, who is in fact Caro's true lover, though the relationship is never physically consummated. If you think that I am trying to indicate that Shirley Hazzard is opposed to physical sex you are wrong. See for example her once again turning bourgeois convention upside down when she examines the word 'adulteress'. '[Grace] thought [of] the word "adulteress" and it was archaic as being stoned to death - a bigoted word, like Negress or Jewess or seamstress or poetess: but precise' (pp. 281-2). Here again she is addressing the whole political agenda of the novel. What she is opposed to is the mentality that twists species relationships into those of ownership and domination. Towards the conclusion of the novel Ted Tice says of Caro, "I never had, or wished for power over you. That isn't true, of course. I wanted the greatest power of all. But not advantage, or authority" (p. 333).

In the early stages of the novel Ted Tice tells the story of the French astronomer who waited years for Venus and failed because of poor visibility. "'His story has such nobility you can scarcely call it unsuccessful.' Ted Tice was honouring the faith, not the failure'. This sentence could be Ted Tice's epitaph. At the conclusion of the novel Tice tells Caro, "'I am happier than I have ever been'" and Caro replies "'That might be enough. That is fulfilment'" (p. 334). In a yet unpublished interview with Shirley Hazzard, the interviewer, Karen Brooks, asked Shirley Hazzard if she agreed that the ending was sad. Shirley Hazzard agreed that the ending was sad but went on to say 'it also has a better ending than it might have had, because at least they got together. It is in that way consummated'. In terms of astronomy, which is the symbolic core of the novel, Caro's life is a Transit in which there are the 'contacts' followed by the 'culmination'.
As a young boy during the war Ted Tice had failed to report meeting an escaped German officer who it later turned out was a nuclear physicist and who eventually went over to the American side to make nuclear weapons for both Britain and America. Tice later recalls the meeting and points to the moral implications that were inherent in his decision not to report it:

'A conscious act of independent humanity is what society can least afford. If they once let that in, there'd be no end to it. If he and I had been in battle, I would have killed him, having accepted society's standards. As it was, I was left to apply my own.' (p. 61)

Shirley Hazzard uses this incident to point to two issues: first of all the relativity of right and wrong in national interests, the question of 'natural' enemies, which is reflected in the irony that in national terms the humanitarian act on the part of Ted Tice which made him a traitor, twenty years later would make him a national hero though his role plays no part in the official history. 'I do not figure in it - perhaps the recollection would be incompatible with the life of power' (p. 60). Ironically enough it is Paul Ivory who recognizes Tice's 'dated morality'. "'Barely credible," Paul said. "The self-command." "Which leads to sovereign power" Caro replies (p. 314). Very early in life Caro had discovered that 'truth has a life of its own' (p. 10).

Apart from the relativity of right and wrong in national affairs another issue that Shirley Hazzard takes up in the previously mentioned passage is that the nuclear scientist exhibits allegiance to the powers of destruction rather than to an individual country or person. In Sefton Thrale, who exonerated completely the inventors of deadly weapons, 'We merely interpret the choices of mankind' (p. 59) we see a disavowal of his own humanity.

There is also the question of capitalism and jingoistic nationalism. In an article in the Bulletin in 1984 Shirley Hazzard referred to the rash of nationalism and tribalism in Australia, a rash which reached gigantic proportions in 1988 and is mounting again in preparation for the Olympics in Sydney in the year 2000. This phenomenon is promoted not only by governments for political expediency but also by capitalism for profit and gain. In a book of essays edited by Russell Braddon Robyn Archer attacks this form of capitalism and the capitalist interests that lie behind it.

There's currently a highly financed promotion of a despicably aggressive Australian nationalism with slogans like 'Advance Australia' and 'Come On, Aussie, Come On'. It's manifest in koala and cockatoo T-shirts, wattle brooches, kangaroo post cards and increased consumption of Vegemite, and is supported by the kind of Australian who will not lift a finger to prevent the flooding of the Franklin River or the increase in the number of US nuclear missile tracking-stations, or to protect the land rights and sacred sites of the
beautiful race of black Australians we have all but wiped out, first by near-genocide and then by apartheid. The new nationalism is white to its profiteering core, and sporting one of its slogans on your breast, you can easily pass through every city in the Commonwealth without seeing a single Aboriginal Australian. Only by touring the Red Centre and the north will you begin to understand the burden of what should be white Australia’s guilt.  

Also fanning the tribalism and nationalism in Australia were the films and video series about war, in particular the First World War. For a closer examination of these films see the articles by Pat and Livio Dobrez, Shirley Walker, Maurie Scott and Graeme Turner in this volume, as well as the articles on drama by Gareth Griffiths and Helen Gilbert. What I personally found disturbing about the films was the fact that there was not so much condemnation of war but instead a celebration of Australian exploits. This applied particularly to the ANZAC series. The aim of the series we were told was to restore to the nation what those nasty intellectuals had been trying to take away from it. Prior advertisements for the series ran something like this. ‘They died in vain’ said the intellectuals after the war, they’re still saying it, but we’ll show you otherwise and the man to show you is the person all Australians would want to be – Paul Hogan. Well apart from excluding approximately 51% of the Australian population, I’m not sure all Australians would cheerfully TAKE wine from a French inn or give their young mate a prostitute for his 18th birthday present. We are also asked to believe that if we hadn’t been there the war would most probably have been lost – indeed we are almost persuaded that we won it single-handed. What is frightening is the cheap nationalism and the xenophobia that this creates and the mentality behind it, and the perpetuation of the macho/male/anti-intellectual image. Those who protest against such films become what Shirley Hazzard describes as the authorized enemies – the socialists, the feminists and agitators of all breeds.

Such xenophobic tribalism is of course supported to the hilt by capitalism. Capitalism has always been quick to exploit patriotism and nationalism. In his Select Documents on Australian History, Manning Clark quotes some of the slogans current during the First World War, e.g.

Buy, Buy, Buy of your own kindred
To your own land be true.

When I said earlier that I possessed no medals I was not quite telling the truth. I actually do have an aluminium one with a picture of King George V and Queen Mary on one side and on the other side an emu advertising Emu Australian wines with the caption, ‘Good for the Empire. Good for you’. The use of Australia’s unique animals to promote nationalism and as a consequence capitalism (though one that
YOUR CHANCE!

THE man who wears an Australian Suit, made of Australian Tweed, is helping Australia.

We have always stocked Vicars' Marrickville Tweeds, and you can get your Suit at once with the fullest range of patterns to select from, unequalled in quality, cut, finish and wear, from £3/3/- Send for patterns and self-measurement forms.

ALL ORDERS CARRIAGE PAID.

GOWING BROS.

"PIONEER DISTRIBUTORS OF AUSTRALIAN GOODS."

484, 486, 488 and 490 GEORGE STREET: and 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15 and 17 ROYAL ARCADE, SYDNEY.
‘Runcie’ Officer with two stripes holding wallaby, 20 June 1916

Sister’s wedding. Sister and native bear, Anzac Provost Corps
Mars versus Venus: The Dialectics of Power in Shirley Hazzard’s The Transit of Venus

many would not be aware of) is reflected in the cartoons, photographs and advertisements. For example the advertisement for Gowings published during the First World War and the fighting kangaroo which was the flag used in Australia’s successful challenge for the America’s Cup. The wallaby nursed by the soldier and the koala held by the nurse in Egypt, as J.B. Priestley said, be looked upon as symbols of Australia, as nationalism, ‘as honest regionalism’, unaware of how it was to be ‘tainted and manipulated by ambitious politicians’ and capitalists. As Manning Clark points out the First World War was a terrific boost for Australian manufacturers for one of their foremost competitors was Germany. What an extra boon it must have been in the Second World War when your competitor/enemy happened to belong to the ‘yellow peril’.

Shirley Hazzard warns us that ‘war creates the evolution of a mentality that can justify any evil action in the belief that it is necessary for the State and for society’. ‘Solidarity [becomes] an extension of power’ (p. 249). Billy Hughes’ statement to the Australian people is a perfect illustration of this:

We went into this conflict for our own national safety, in order to insure our national integrity, which was in dire peril, to safeguard our liberties, and those free institutions of government which, whatever may be our political opinions, are essential to our national life, and to maintain those ideals which we have nailed to the very topmost of our flagpoles – White Australia, and those other aspirations of this young democracy.

Listening to these words we can only agree with Manning Clark when he said that ‘Australia’s day of glory had made her a prisoner of her past rather than the architect of a new future for humanity’. words which are echoed by Michael Neill in an introductory note to Maurice Shadbolt’s play Once on Chunuk Bair: ‘Shadbolt has reminded us that we have a past, but I’m not sure he’s taken us out from under it. It’s the use of that bayonet that bothers me: we shall have to wait and bloody see’. What Shirley Hazzard constantly calls on us to do is to negate the ‘them and us’ mentality and to recognize our common humanity, something which war of necessity must seek to obliterate and in which the promoters of war, the seekers of power can only rejoice. She would agree with Mary Daly that the rulers of patriarchy – mates with power – wage increasing war against life itself.

‘Since life activity in this society is always in process, in process through power relations, we must try to understand the process. To understand the process is to understand the way the process may be changed’. It is my belief that in The Transit of Venus Shirley Hazzard has done much to help us understand that process and hopefully in the understanding help us to change it.
NOTES

1. Shirley Hazzard, *The Transit of Venus* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text. Shirley Hazzard has herself stated that 'war is an undercurrent of the book ... The theme of war is a background to other destructions men wreak on themselves; men, as distinct from women'. Quoted in Jenny Palmer, 'An Interview in New York with Australia's Top Novelist of 1981'. Published in the *Bulletin*, 13 October 1981, p. 84.

2. Compare Will Dyson's comment that war was 'the almost inevitable outcome' of the armaments trade, 'the hollow fraudulence of diplomacy and the criminal danger to civilization of unchecked militarism'. Quoted by Ross McMullin, *Will Dyson: Cartoonist, Etcher and Australia's Finest War Artist* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1984), p. 84. Dyson shared many views in common with Shirley Hazzard, expressed very clearly in his book *Artist Amongst the Bankers* (London: J.M. Dent, 1933). It was a book, McMullin points out, whose prime aim was 'to overthrow the essentially "anti-human", iron-clad "Law of Business, the Doctrine of Life as a commercial transaction, as a financial phenomenon"'. This was necessary because any emergence of change from within was inconceivable: "To ask or expect that financial reform may spring from the Central Banks of the world is like asking the hungry lion with a lamb beneath its paws to subscribe to the beauties of vegetarianism". Quoted by McMullin on p. 287. We are told in *The Transit of Venus* that the head of Christian Thrale's department 'had a Common market face' (p. 273).


4. One is well aware that England was on the brink of civil war prior to World War I and that the unemployment figures in the USA in the year before the outbreak of World War II were higher than any year during the Depression. The enemy without is a godsend to take the people's minds off the enemy within. Compare the statement made by the father of one of the British soldiers taken hostage in the present war in Bosnia. 'It's not our war ... it's just the idiots back home trying to run things that create our problems. I don't know if they're doing the same as Mrs Thatcher and trying to win an election. They just don't live in the real world'. The *Independent*, 30 May 1995, p. 1.


6. Shrivelled is a word that occurs on numerous occasions in Hazzard's book, e.g. the 'shrivelled chronicle' of our Australian colonial history that teachers swiftly passed over to return to the northern hemisphere where 'History ... proceeded, gorgeous, spiritualized, without a downward glance at Australia' (p. 53). There is an Antipodean reversal when Caro looks *down* (my emphasis) on Paul and Tertia (p. 107). The most important use of 'shrivelling' is to be found in the concluding lines of the novel. It is interesting to find C.E.W. Bean of all people echoing these sentiments at the conclusion of his book (op. cit., p. 538).


12. The invitation is in my possession.

   For a very interesting discussion of this issue see the article by Rosalind Miles, 'Frogmarched into Manhood: Fifty years after the Second World War, our society has yet to learn that armed conflict deforms not defines, masculinity', The Independent, 1 May 1995.
19. Jenny Palmer, 'An Interview in New York with Australia's Top Novelist of 1981', the Bulletin, 13 October 1981, p. 84. Shirley Hazzard is not alone when she stresses that the image of Australia is one of the macho male. See for instance the cover of the National Geographic Magazine in the Bicentennial year.
20. Compare Caro's feeling as she looked at the landscape of England (Empire) through the eyes of an Australian (colonial). She knew about 'deciduous England' but had 'still been unprepared for anything as extreme as autumn - more in its red destruction, like an act of man than of God'. p.26. (my emphasis)
32. Manning Clark, quoted in McMullin, op.cit., p.266.
35. Zillah Eisenstein, op.cit., p.52.
Anzac and why I write

Anna Rutherford asked the following writers the question, ‘What did ANZAC mean to you as a child and why did you choose to write about the subject?’ What follows is their answers.

LES A. MURRAY

Why I write about war is all inherent in the poem *The Ballad of the Barbed Wire Ocean* which accompanies this statement. I’m a child of the borderlands of war, and of the military age which preceded the paramilitary and police age of Marxism. My father was spared from World War II because he was a food producer and because of an ill-knit leg broken when he was a bullock driver in the forests near home. In 1942, before I had my fourth birthday, I remember him planning to take his shotgun and meet the Japanese soldiers as they came down our ridge, which would have ensured his instant death and maybe ours as well. It was courage in the face of extremity, though, and it was the fate of myriad simple men in countries where the invasions did happen. I remember the plans to burn our homes and farm buildings and drive our cows over the Dividing Range to deny them to the enemy, and I saw the same thing actually done, at Nabiack Pictures in Chauvel’s film *The Overlanders*. Not long after that, my mother and I saw fresh shell holes and smelt their fumes on my first visit to her native Newcastle. That’s in a poem titled *The Smell of Coal Smoke*, one of several poems of mine in which I go back to inarticulate childhood equipped with a vocabulary to capture the apprehensions I’d had there.

There are two statistics which hold me in a grip of horror. One is that in the twentieth century a hundred million men have been killed while serving as soldiers. The other is that in the same period a hundred million people have been killed by police. This figure includes all those killed in peacetime or away from war zones by soldiers being used as police. I don’t know a figure for civilians killed as it were by the overspill of warfare, in aerial bombing of cities and the like, but the first two of these statistics surely suffice to make war a subject worth probing with literature’s instruments.
what might replace it? It’s a royal road to the dimension of poignancy, and a challenge to the imaginative powers of a non-veteran, a challenge which the young Stephen Crane met so well in *The Red Badge of Courage*. What is the secret of war, which many veterans guard so jealously, and why do they guard it, often till it eats them alive? My attempts on the subject began before Vietnam and the Marxist ascendancy, and haven’t followed the post-Sixties ground rules, so this side of my writing has been largely misrepresented and used against me, not least by apple-polishing colleagues. An early lead was given to Australian criticism of my work in 1961 by the late Vincent Buckley, then poetry editor of the *Bulletin*. I sold him two poems on warlike subjects and then chatted with him about the SS and its fearful dynamics, trying as always to get my head around the fact that humans really will do the very worst. As soon as my back was turned, Buckley went around Melbourne saying ‘this young poet Murray, you know: very promising, but a terrible Nazi’. After a moment, I felt proud that I had provoked such a panic of rivalry, and I nicknamed him first Vin Blank, then Vin Ordinaire.

I was born into the sex traditionally dedicated to war and the use of human sacrifice to establish the importance of institutions. I was born into the class of the rural poor, of labourers with the temerity to own land without being squatter-genteel. This class has always provided a disproportionately high quota of fighting men, and my generation of boys often thought of itself as the probable Third AIF. We toughened ourselves and others accordingly, and while we didn’t precisely envision hideous death and maiming for ourselves at the end of adolescence, we also didn’t talk much about normal adult life and growing old in the work force. For us, somewhere up ahead, before the age of twenty or so, there was a formless glare on the horizon, by no means always nuclear, but terrible and alluring, and little real sense of a self continuing beyond that. For some of us, that glare turned out to be Vietnam, for most it proved to be little more than the odd high-speed scare on the highway, for a few it mutated into going to university. When Roger McDonald’s fine novel *1915* came out, and I launched it for him in Canberra, I said to him privately at the launch ‘The book’s really about going to university, isn’t it, Rog?’ His answer was lost in the larrikin joy of seeing the Bungendore Polo Club, invited for the occasion and wearing their Light Horse khakis, ride their beautiful horses up the steps of the old Parliament House and into King’s Hall.
THE BALLAD OF THE BARBED WIRE OCEAN

No more rice pudding. Pink coupons for Plume. Smokes under the lap for aunts.

Four running black boots beside a red sun. Flash wireless words like Advance.

When the ocean was wrapped in barbed wire, terror radiant up the night sky,
exhilaration raced flat out in squadrons; Mum’s friends took off sun-hats to cry.

Starting south of the then world with new showground rifles being screamed at and shown
for a giggle-suit three feeds a day and no more plans of your own, it went with some swagger till God bless you, Tom! and Daddy come back! at the train
or a hoot up the gangways for all the girls and soon the coast fading in rain,

but then it was flared screams from blood-bundles whipped rolling as iron bombs keened down
and the insect-eyed bombers burned their crews alive in off-register henna and brown.

In steep ruins of rainforest pre-affluent thousands ape-scuttling mixed sewage with blood and fear and the poem played vodka to morals, fear jolting to the mouth like cud.

It was sleep atop supplies, it was pickhandle, it was coming against the wall in tears,
sometimes it was factory banter, stoking jerked breechblocks and filing souvenirs,
or miles-wide humming cattleyards of humans, or oiled ship-fires slanting in ice,
rag-wearers burst as by huge War Bonds coins, girls’ mouths full of living rice.

No one came home from it. Phantoms smoked two hundred daily.

Ghosts held civilians at bay,

since war turns beyond strut and adventure to keeping what you’ve learned, and shown,
what you’ve approved, and what you’ve done, from ever reaching your own.

This is died for. And nihil and nonsense feed on it day after day.
Like most young people of my generation I grew up surrounded by men, some of them uncles, who had been to the War. It was the greatest historical event of the immediate past and those who had experienced it were endowed, in fact, and by legend, with a particular power and mystery: they had been there; they had touched History. The stories they had to tell, in a time when a good deal of history was still orally transmitted, were exciting to a young mind, but I was impressed as well by their reticence. I think I had grasped, even then, that the real things were not being told. Some of this, I thought, might have to do with the fact that I was a child; but I knew as well that some things were simply too deep, or too difficult or painful for expression. We are on the whole a reticent people. Children learn that early. The real things are not told. They have to be picked up out of silence. So it was with the War. What was most essential to the experience remained largely unexpressed.

I should add that I also recognized, and very early, that this was not entirely the men's experience - it had also been critical for the large number of women who, in my childhood, had 'lost their fiancé at the war' and remained faithful either to the man or the memory. They were a feature of our society, those women. So were the huge houses, half-ruined by then, that had once been the homes of a patrician class in Brisbane that the War had finally done for. The sons (all Public School boys because there were no state high schools, and all officers) had been killed. Their names were on our school honour boards. Or they had come home crippled and were in War Service Hospitals. The houses were inhabited by their sisters, odd women, mostly unmarried, stand-offish, curtly superior to the new classes that had taken over; late survivors of a colonial aristocracy whose style, in my day, lingered on in Brisbane and is still perceptible, a product of High Church Anglicanism and 'elocution' that Beatrice Webb has characterized as 'shadily genteel'.

So there was this personal side to ANZAC: the experience as it went down into actual lives. There was also, as I came up against it, the institutionalized exploitation of it and the rhetoric. These I disliked in all their forms, but especially in the tub-stumping addresses I got at school, where ANZAC Day was used as an occasion for insisting on all those received notions of Imperial jingoism, Christian virtue and good clean middle class male superiority that I found myself at war with. Its language was the same empty rhetoric that had been used to bully schoolboys and young workers into the War in the first place, and was presented, often, by the same awful old men. This official version of what it had all meant was embodied, in the society I came from, in the RSL. It expressed in those days all the forces of intolerant repression, Anglo-Celtic xenophobia, militarism and red-necked philistinism of Queensland in the grip of the Cold War. The RSL was a pressure-group that as a
young student I regarded as the enemy (both politically and spiritually) of everything I most hoped for in the Australia I was growing up into. What I resented most was the claim that it alone spoke for the real Australian values, and the use it made of the dead in order to shame the rest of us into silence.

My attitude to ANZAC was, and remains, divided: between a humbling respect for the experience itself and those who endured it, a continuing preoccupation with what it deeply means to us, and on the other hand an impatience, sometimes rising to anger, at the institutionalized version and its shoddy rhetorics.

Why I felt moved to write about it should be clear.

GEOFF PAGE

Well, I can’t remember any particular ANZAC Day ceremony before I went to boarding school at the age of eleven. That boarding school is The Armidale School and it had a fairly strong cadet tradition, a quasi-military tradition, and on ANZAC Day there would always be a Dawn Service, a fairly moving ceremony really, which the cadet corps would perform with drums and reverse arms and so on. It was always taken fairly seriously without being particularly blimpish. Later on in the morning there would be a march through the Armidale streets in which the cadet corps would participate along with veterans’ organisations etc. and I remember the bands and so on from that. At the same school there was a huge honour role in the main foyer which filled up the whole of one wall. When I look back I am impressed by just how big this was. This was a school which at that time only had about 250 students and earlier it had only about 150 and yet, somehow, there seemed to be thousands of names of people who had gone to the First and Second World Wars, these names all painted in gold with a little cross next to the ones who had been killed. That was something that was there everyday and the sheer size of it impressed me.

The Headmaster there was an interesting person. There’s a poem of mine, in Collected Lives (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1986), p.37, called ‘Dry Run’, which is about his peculiar attitude to war in general and in particular to Australia’s participation. He was too young for the First War and too old for the Second, and he used to give these very strong, military, Christian sermons in chapel. The Chaplain would give his sermon and then the Headmaster would come on and give his, an incredible secularised version of how these people had died fighting for Christianity. I think my interest in war and that issue must go back at least to that point. I was about the age of eleven or twelve when I became aware of that link up which has both fascinated me and irritated me ever since.
I suppose the first poem it shows in is 'Christ at Gallipoli' and in some ways Benton's *Conviction* is a 170 page version of that poem. 'Christ at Gallipoli' is one of the very first World War I poems I wrote. I wrote it after having gone supposedly to demonstrate with some anti-Vietnam demonstrators at an ANZAC Dawn Service. None of the others turned up, I was very peripheral to it anyway and I was damned if I was going to do anything so I went to the Dawn Service instead. At this there was an incredibly fatuous, long-winded speech placing God on our side in all wars including World War I and I walked away from that service very irritated. That was the first time I really started to feel about the issue. It wasn’t something that had been obsessing me before. It suddenly struck me ‘what if Christ was literally there’ and I wrote ‘Christ at Gallipoli’. I wrote it fairly quickly, just two or three drafts, and I’ve been using it ever since. I read it recently at poetry readings all around America and it still goes well. I’ve since written a lot of other poems about World War I mainly deriving from particular documents, visual stimuli or small incidents. I’ve never tried to write to demonstrate a particular overall thesis.

*Benton’s Conviction* again came from something specific. I read Michael McKernan’s book, *Australian Churches at War*, where he deals with the clergymen who sought and were given the job of delivering the fatality telegrams in 1916-1917 and then came to wish they hadn’t sought that job. I started with the idea for a short story with the clergymen walking up to the gate with the telegram foreshadowing what he was going to say and I thought, this is just a few pages of prose - somehow I knew it had to be in prose. Then I talked to Michael about that situation and he said, ‘What about all the rest of it. In these congregations certain things would be happening’. The whole range of fairly predictable episodes suggested themselves, so I strung them out into a persuasive, chronological order, wrote about each one successively and the novel developed in that way.

**CHRIST AT GALLIPOLI**

This synod is convinced that the forces of the Allies are being used of God to vindicate the rights of the weak and to maintain the moral order of the world.

*Anglican Synod, Melbourne, 1916*

Bit weird at first,
That starey look in the eyes,
The hair down past his shoulders,
But after a go with the ship’s barber,
A sea-water shower and the old slouch hat
Across his ears, he started to look the part.
Took him a while to get the way
A bayonet fits the old Lee-Enfield,
But going in on the boats
He looked calmer than any of us,
Just gazing in over the swell
Where the cliffs looked black against the sky.
When we hit he fairly raced in through the waves,
Then up the beach, swerving like a full-back at the end
When the Turks'd really got on to us.
Time we all caught up,
He was off like a flash, up the cliffs,
After his first machine gun.
He'd done for three Turks when we got there,
The fourth was a gibbering mess.
Seeing him wave that blood-red bayonet,
I reckoned we were glad
To have him on the side.

ROGER MCDONALD

As a child I remember thinking of the ANZAC story as something that happened in the dusty and remote past. (It had, in fact, occurred 26 years before my birth.) It was about as real to me as Bible stories - a costume drama in monochrome, involving the canonized heroics of a man on a donkey travelling down the same unfeatured road as the Good Samaritan. At school, pre-ANZAC Day ceremonies focused on an annual school broadcast: I can remember the metallic weave of the classroom’s loudspeaker-covering with sharper emotion than I recall the speeches of governors and prime ministers. The only catch came with the bugle call, which, empty of real remembering, had a sentimental power.

When I began writing the novel 1915, I did not see myself as dealing with a theme. Themes are for critical essays, subjects are for writers. One day by chance I looked into C.E.W. Bean’s History of Australia in the Great War and saw the ANZAC story as a possible subject for a novel, if ever I was to write one. This was at a time when the poetry I was writing had me trapped in a corner. I felt that if I was going to keep on as a writer I would have to move beyond a narrow range of emotion, incident, character and place. I felt a craving for direct speech and character interaction. At the same time I wanted to fit more of Australia into my work. The tragic compression of the story, on the steep gullies of a Turkish peninsula, held the wideness of Australia, which gave shape to my idea of how to go about the novel.
JOHN ROMERIL

To be honest, not much. I’m frankly of the opinion it is wasted on children as a propaganda exercise. Along with Remembrance Day. To wear a poppy or go to school with whatever medals your father had come by was a buzz perhaps. Had I been taken to the march there might have stirred in me those deep feelings I get at May Day or on demonstrations. But honouring the dead is not something children do well. They fit in at the edges, the more sensitized glimpsing that for the adults such ceremonies have a profound meaning. But by and large, as a child your geo-political sense seldom extends beyond your suburb. I was no exception. My father never said as much but I suspect, having served in the 2nd AIF in New Guinea, he wanted no more of the army. He didn’t join the RSL. Yes we got a war service loan to buy our home. But from memory only once did he go to one of those ‘get togethers’. And never to the Dawn Service. Or the march. I think he thought it was bullshit. A waste. And best forgotten. I suspect his example trickled down to me.

As an adult the story’s somewhat different. By chance I happened across the ANZAC ceremony here in Castlemaine. Its a country town of 7,000 people – once a far grander place than it is today. There was a small knot of survivors, the odd widow, and passing by-standers like myself looking on. We were outside the red brick, red tiled RSL. And on the lawn, stuck in the ground like a child’s cemetery, were (I counted) forty-six white crosses, each bearing the name of a dead soldier. A good portion of the names were family names I recognised – people whose heirs still live in the district. Others were names I’d not come across – families that had moved on – or perhaps come to the end of their line in 1915. I remember being struck by how many Swiss-Italian names there were, for much of this area was settled by Swiss-Italians. Of the living there were three or four older men whom I knew from my membership of the ALP, men for whom socialism and fellow feeling were important. I’d long admired them as human beings and from their seriousness, their gravity, came to a richer understanding of what ANZAC Day means to a good many Australians. These were our dead – not ‘the dead’. Had the world been a saner place many would still be with us. If not, their bones would be in a more fit burial ground. They would not be toy white crosses. What struck me about the occasion was not that it celebrated bravery and courage, or militarism. Rather it was the infinite sadness that what could have been had not come to pass, and that what had come to pass meant many could no longer be. Its said (though it hardly accounts for envy) that you don’t miss what you never had. Perhaps there’s a truth to a kind of reverse of that: you prize the more what you have, knowing others have it not. Honouring the dead can, I think, make life seem more precious.
As a rider to all this I have visited ANZAC Cove. I have stood on those cliffs looking down to the sea. It was a first order military idiocy not to retreat the moment it was discovered those cliffs were defended. Not for nothing is there a category of beast called war criminal. On that trip an American who hadn't left the bus asked a compatriot who had: 'What's down there? 'Not much', came the reply, 'just a place where the Australians fought the New Zealanders.' And when, on another occasion, 'good Australians' like Ian Sinclair insisted that Australia should do all it could to make the Kiwis toe the American line, who knows?

Why write about war? I have often rehearsed the arguments pros and cons. It is the case for instance that much theoretically anti-war literature ends up in practice glorifying war, or at least ennobling those who prosecute it. Much as I admire Williamson I think that’s what he and Weir ended up doing with Gallipoli, despite their no doubt laudable intentions. There’s an awful ‘we know not what we do’ about writing. Patient self-analysis does thrust some light into the murk. It remains, however, the case that what we set out to do is not always what we achieve. For most of us the real drug is the setting out, the process, the journey. The end result we walk away from. The finished product is someone else’s drug. The audience’s. It becomes part of their process.

I'm something of a 'then' playwright. I spend a lot of time writing 'sort of' histories. In my blacker, less self-regarding moments I suspect I do the far less harder thing. By being a 'then' playwright one is excused from scribing 'the now'. As with diving, so with writing, there are degrees of difficulty. The present, especially the autobiographical now, has always been intensely problematic for me. It may well be an immature psychological condition, a fear of finding out who I really am, what I'm really like. The past is dead, finished, can be approached without too much danger, and research can cover a multitude of sins (what you don’t know, what you can’t feel).

The defence, the rationale is laudable enough. The best of my work examines not simply the past but how the past impacts on the present. It uses a 'then' to put our 'now' into a politically useful perspective. Since ours is a society much given to a kind of cultural amnesia my project in its small way has the utility of an antidote. The events of 19751 are a case in point. As a people we had been there, done that, and should have known better. But it wasn’t the stuff of living memory. To expand living memory is, I suppose, the project. Not to mention make a buck and have people love you.

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1 '1975' is a reference to the dismissal of the Whitlam Labor Government by the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, a dismissal which took place on 11 November.
The Floating World began in a library, took shape on a ship, got finished (the writing) on the floor of the Pram Factory. It started in 1970. In the beginning it was an idiot play. I worked as a librarian at Monash University to support my family while I continued my studies part-time. I’d taken to reading about the Noh and Kabuki theatres. And was by then well versed in haiku. The Japanese struck me as a very civilized bunch. I toyed with the idea of depicting the war in New Guinea as a cultural clash: the haiku versus the bush ballad – them descending on Lae with the highly stylised and codified body language of the Noh – us dying like footballers. If the New Guineans – whose soil it was – were to appear no doubt it would have been as a chorus of Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels – or else a bunch of puppets designed by Jude Kuring, Tony Taylor or Alan Robertson. Like I say, an idiot play. I make no claim to being a deep thinker even now but in 1970 I was a moron. The fact is a lot of the world’s literature is produced by morons so I’ve never let it worry me.

A germ or two stuck. Vietnam was still raging. Australia was fighting its third war in Asia, against Asians. And New Guinea? My father had fought in New Guinea. There were one or two (he was not a forthcoming man) stories he let slip which I might be able to use.

In the end I suppose my father is a kind of key to the piece. Our relationship I’d always found problematic. A strange, moody, deeply insecure man, neither good at giving, nor receiving, love to or from his children. Our last words, two years earlier, had been: ‘What’ll you do when they come here?’ ‘What’, I replied, ‘they’ll be crawling through the hydrangea, will they?’ The subject was the Viet Cong. Absurd (the family is seldom the seat of logic). And it hurt and niggled as family bust ups do. I tried, in my young adult fashion, to make sense of him. I couldn’t be wrong! The depression that broke so many of his generation, the war where he’d missed death by a whisker, the 50s with all the rubbish that animal Menzies handed out, the grind of keeping a family on the road in a job that was none too secure. One more insane-makingly traumatic twentieth century Western individual. Nothing special there. A Willy Loman. But my own.

Trauma, not war, is the subject of The Floating World: trauma occasioned by war. It was my contention then – and is still – that to be alive in the twentieth century is to be traumatised. Ours is – I say it in the play – a century of disasters. A century (now less than four years from being over) of wars (with civil populations their target), revolutions, holocaust, genocide, socio-economic upheaval, on a scale hitherto undreamt of, mass dislocation. Its literature is the literature of

* There is only one decade in this century when we have not sent our troops to fight on foreign soil.
the refugee, the exile: your Brechts, your Nabokovs, Joycees, Nerudas, Cellines; the literature of transmigratory souls, homeless, rootless: your Greenes, your Naipauls, your Rhys's. Whether we write or not - and if we can perhaps we are among the lucky ones - there is scarcely a citizen on the globe today who has not borne witness at some time, in some way to this inferno and as like as not been deeply scarred by that experience. It is a century you can’t get out of the road of. Flee to the forest but the acid rain will find you. There is no out. Just pain. Was ever so much literature written in gaol? Was ever so much gaol, and so much torture, meted out to so many?

Les Harding is not my father. He is my Everyman. He saw his tiny bit of hell, tried to keep the show on the road, but couldn’t. I suppose, when you write, having an Everyman eases the pain of having a father such as mine in time like ours. My old man died (its symptomatic of what I’m arguing here) another statistic in one more epidemic: that of stress related heart attacks amongst the middle-aged. May the earth rest his bones dead - it didn’t rest them living.

For the record if the play’s genesis had something to do with me pondering over where my father was at - and how come - the rest had a great deal to do with a boat trip I took from Singapore to Perth. There I observed the rituals and rhythms of shipboard life, getting them, as it were, down. It was also on board that ship that a fellow passenger let me in on the basic storyline. A neighbour of hers, an ex-POW, had taken a Cherry Blossom cruise but the closer the cruise ship got to Japan the more his memories of Changi and the Burma railroad began to haunt him. In short, I lucked onto the story. The rest was research, with bits taken from Russell Braddon, Ray Parkinson and others, quotes if you like, from the collective memory.

For simplicity’s sake the other imperatives at work, (and to nail the question: why did I choose to write about the war) were: I was a playwright. I was part of a performance ensemble dedicated to producing plays for, by and about Australians. The tale of an all but unknown soldier, a POW, who some years after the war travels to Japan with untoward consequences for himself, his wife and those he encounters seemed fair game. When I said earlier the writing was finished on the floor of the Pram Factory it was. The body of it was there but in rehearsal it underwent some changes. Some of these were political. It was not, nor is it now, from a Japanese viewpoint, an even-handed work. No single play can say everything there is to be said about anything and, compendious though it may seem to some, The Floating World is no exception to that rule. Nevertheless we tried to blunt, better to say widen, the play’s terms of reference lest it be seen solely and wholly as an anti-Japanese diatribe. Wilfred Last, who played McLeod, tabled material about American behaviour towards the Japanese in the last days of the Pacific War, in particular the tactic of
overkill, the ceaseless bombardment of the already cut off Japanese troops so the myth that they’d never surrender could not be put to the test, they were dead before they were asked, the artillery had made sure of that. Racism is not the prerogative of the Japanese. Indeed I know now (I didn’t then) that western racism did much during the thirties to make Japan’s entry into the war almost inevitable. Had the western powers been more sympathetic to Japan’s plight in the circumstances of the trade war that obtained during the depression there may never have been a Changi. Or a Hiroshima. Or a Les Harding.

PHILIP SALOM

For many of my childhood years ANZAC Day and the ANZACs of Gallipoli and World War II seemed intertwined. Consciously, I knew where they separated or touched; I knew my father had fought in New Guinea, but also sometimes marched on ANZAC Day, presenting me with images of the men in suits, the effects of age, memory and emotion on their faces and the strange, anachronistic rows of medals glinting sharply on their chests. All this beside the build-up, the stories about Gallipoli. If I chose to join those two symbolically, the choice, of course, had been made long before I arrived at it. The biggest actual blur was that Gallipoli seemed to be the only place Australians had fought in during World War I. In a sense, then, Gallipoli was WWI. It was only years later that I discovered how many Australians had fought in France. That seemed a different war, as if because that was not Australia’s war, whereas Gallipoli was.

If one side of the ritual myth or passing down of Gallipoli created for me (and many others, I know) the contradictory image of WWII returnees marching on ANZAC Day, the other side was oral, visual, literary. As school children we heard many stories, the most famous one being about Simpson and his donkey. This was not the classical or the romanticized hero at all. It was another contradiction: he was an individual, a loner, an eccentric surely, a simpleton perhaps, a saint – but whatever he was he was foreground, war was background. It was very interesting; it even sounded Biblical. The other stories had to do with the slaughter on the beach (but nothing exact about why), the lack of progress on the cliffs, the sun, the periscopic sights and the clever innovations used to keep the rifles firing during the successful evacuation at night. Australian inventiveness was, almost perversely, more stressed than was the war. At least it was a triumph.

Gallipoli also had a very colonial, Kiplingesque feel for me, whether due to a geographical or romantic (and typically ethnically confused) overlap with Kipling’s stories, I couldn’t say. And Gallipoli was always
about Australian men, their stoicism, cleverness and the old clichéd thing of mateship. And, despite the deaths, a kind of grand casualness.

As I grew older the heroic element became more complex. Simpson's actions had always been heroic but never in the rhetorical, glorious manner. My father became another kind of figure: a liaison officer during the Second World War, tramping along through the jungle and often shot at. He too seemed to me a different sort of hero. A modest and self-effacing man. This was not the individual breaking free and transcending the general ranks in brilliant and heroic acts (often dying as a result). Both my versions of the hero were men shot at rather than shooting. A great difference from the contemporary Rambo grotesquerie but somehow in keeping with the more idealized version of what an Australian was meant to be, and with the perhaps censored version of Australians as soldiers who were not great killers. I remember being shocked to hear of the various gratuitous tortures some Australians had performed on Japanese prisoners of war. Australians weren't like this, they were good guys...

Still, enough of the profile of the hero was there — male, brave, committed to the larger cause. And possibly also the lack of questioning, or nothing made obvious. Perhaps that passive role was one expression of a dissent. The ordinariness made it somehow especially Australian, for when I was a child, in a country town of the 50s and early 60s it was always stressed that one should be ordinary and not depart from or push anything too far from the normal.

If I was moved by the hero, and at a more deeply mythological level, then so too was I moved by death. Uncertain of any Christian reassurances about life after death, death in itself was unjust, tragic, and death through war, of large numbers of ordinary people, struck both at my sense of injustice and of heroism. A potent mix. A huge sadness that shifts from elevation into anger, further emphasized by the presence of the survivors, say at ANZAC Day. The living were the flip-side, having achieved heroic survival as against heroic death — symbols of the dead and the rhetorical and emotional counterparts then, but also the coating for what amounted to the more brutal fact of death at war to serve Imperial and exploitative masters. The Turks had the added rhetoric, of course, of being religious heroes as well.

I ramble on about this because it was rather rambling to me as a child, given graphic detail and imagery by a variety of stories and sensory impressions. Also because I now see in the filmed and televised popularised versions of Gallipoli this pushing of the great idealized 'Aussie' virtues of mateship and heroism and nationalism. I am very suspicious of such simplistic sentiment, just as I am very suspicious of all the great attempts made to try to find a single moment in our history that made us a nation, Gallipoli being that moment. It is not only simplistic it is again manipulative. Perhaps it is perceived that,
like a younger friend or younger sibling, Australia will remain younger. This exacerbates the desired need to find an identity with strongly universal resonance and yet distinctly Australian character (hopelessly confined and that in itself being perhaps a condemning giveaway).

Writing about Gallipoli, especially in *Sky Poems* where all rational laws could be suspended if desired, gave me one go at presenting not the truth - I have no pretensions to being able to do that - but some personally perceived ironies and unjustices and some historic resonances. I wanted to cut into the mythology a little. I wanted to do this to right, re-write the myths enough to allow a lessening of the taboos which kept so many of the soldier’s mouths shut. To do this tenderly, if hopelessly, in the attempted resurrection of a soldier. An irony when considering the Turks and a further irony as this soldier proceeds to wake full of confusion and anger and disorientation - with reactions that include knowledge of the post-war era he might have lived through as a member of the status quo where he would be returned to ordinariness, or less. He wakes to the possibility of fighting for something that truly is worth fighting for - his own rights. Except he remains mechanical, trapped in the metaphors of war.

As in many of the *Sky Poems* the surreal or fantastic beginnings go awry, are deliberately undercut by more stark conclusions. Out of such tension I hoped to create a particular complex of style and emotion and social comment. Despite its cliché value, because of it, and because of my rather sceptical views on the manipulative rhetoric of nationalism, Gallipoli was a logical inclusion in the Sky.

I also identify emotionally with those who suffered without fighting anyone, those who lost others through war. Specifically lovers and parents. This parental and female element is rather obviously absent in the overall imagery of Australia’s coming-of-age. And if a nation chooses an act of war for such distinction and such a plainly ambiguous one, giving off clear signs of exploitation, aggression, and self-destruction, what does this create symbolically - and in particular - for our future? Does it also indicate an anxiety about the great contemporary changes as the nation becomes more multi-cultural, more questioned by its intellectuals, by feminism, etc?

If Australian soldiers provided succeeding generations with the necessary male blood, more than enough it appears, perhaps the myth, the symbolic beginning founded there, also serves a strange duty to the national conscience.

The matter is just so complex. Despite all I have written above, I can still be profoundly moved by the tones of a bugle (now usually a trumpet) blowing the Last Post and by the sight of the old men standing in rows. Such emotion, such shared emotion, is inevitably simplistic and yet remains one way of touching, being touched by, the ageless history of human folly, tragedy and perseverance (See p. 163).
Although ANZAC was a word with which I was familiar when I was young, I had no precise idea of its meaning. I vaguely knew of ANZAC Day but that was about all. I say ‘vaguely’ because I had no relatives who marched and because they didn’t, it seemed an esoteric ceremony of which, because I was an outsider, I knew very little.

It is interesting that I use the word ceremony because in my puberty ANZAC was synonymous with the ANZAC Day march and to me it seemed as if the former soldiers were reconfirming something sacred just as I confirmed my Irish heritage by marching in the (to me then) more important St Patrick’s Day March.

I associated Australians at war with Remembrance Day (11 November) because, like all school children, I was brought into the ritual. The ingredients of this ceremony always seemed the same; there was the headmaster standing at the crackling microphone, his inconsequential words dying away before reaching us, there were the aggressive flies jumping from face to face as we began to sweat in the hot spring morning and when we placed our hands over our hearts, while the Last Post sounded, there was nearly always a giggling boy or girl unable to stand the tension of one minute’s silence. Even when young the ceremony had an extraordinary poignancy and the Last Post would evoke in my mind powerful but curiously opaque images, as if I could see images of men dying or the dead through a frosted window. Overall the sharpest, keenest feeling was a sense of loss and at the end of the sixty seconds I always felt profoundly and mysteriously moved. I never felt this when I heard the word ANZAC. It seemed a word lost in time, like some occult, indecipherable word carved in stone and excavated by non-comprehending archaeologists millennia later.

I was more conscious of the word Gallipoli, but only as a battlefield, I had no sense of its other meanings. To me the First World War was as remote as Troy. My only understanding of it was through a story my relatives told me of my grandfather who had fought both at Gallipoli and in France and had been buried alive three times when nearby exploding bombs had buried him under tons of dirt and mud. The third time it took his mates so long to dig him out that he thought he had died. It was said that he never really recovered from this third premature burial and soon afterwards he had to be repatriated back to Australia, forever being afraid of sleeping because he then had nightmares of being entombed alive and suffocating to death. A few months later in 1917 he was on a train travelling back to his hometown of Seymour, Victoria, dressed in his new civvies, when a woman threw a white feather onto his lap, calling him a coward for not being in the army. My grandfather stood up ‘to his full height’ (all the storytellers agreed on this point) and said proudly, ‘Madam, I fought overseas for
three years. I have done my duty.’ When I heard this story I liked to think of the woman slinking off into another carriage, thoroughly humiliated and embarrassed.

I gradually accumulated details about the ANZACs as I grew older; Simpson on his donkey, the mateship, the beach landing and the horrifying deaths. I was, of course, aware of the 25 April booze-ups and marches, especially as the marches were now televised on our small black and white TV and I remember not so much the returned soldiers marching down Swanson Street, but the haunting sight of those serious faced boys wearing their deceased father’s or grandfather’s medals, medals which seemed as large as saucers on the small boys’ chests. So intrigued was I by this sight that I enquired about my grandfather’s medals but found that they had ‘gone missing’ and my uncle, who had fought in the Second World War, had so hated the idea of receiving medals for slaughtering his fellow human beings that he refused to accept his at the end of the war.

Questioning as to what ANZAC actually meant started with Alan Seymour’s play *The One Day of the Year*. Because it was such a controversial play a television discussion program broadcast an excerpt from it. I think the piece centred on an argument between father and son over what ANZAC Day actually means. I remember thinking that the son was right. To me it seemed a protest play against the moribund and insidiously powerful but out-of-date mythology of ANZAC. Whether this was a correct interpretation of the play I do not know as I have never seen the play as a whole or even read it, but the extract seemed to crystallise my dislike of the older generation and, in a personal way, given the problem of drink in our family, it crystallised my anger at all those drunken men I saw in hotels who seemed oafish braggarts. The ANZAC myth had become twisted and personified in those men who drank themselves silly and who were indifferent or even callous towards their families and so, just as I hated venturing into those foul smelling hotels, so I by-passed what the ANZAC myth meant.

This attitude remained with me for some years and like many of my High School friends and, later, my university friends, ANZAC (or more correctly, its symbolic reinactment at ANZAC Day) became a bad joke. The returned soldiers were derided for living in the past and the drunken, stupefied men who were an essential part of ANZAC Day, symbolized the emptiness of their claims to importance as Australian heroes and worthy carriers of the Australian coming-of-age. At university I also dismissed the First World War as stupid – didn’t these men know they had partaken in an obviously imperialistic war?

It wasn’t until much later that I grew interested in these men and the ANZAC tradition. A few years ago I caught the tail end of a television documentary about Australians who had been prisoners of the
Japanese. Although the men’s experiences on the Burma railway were horrifying the most unsettling feature was how the men brought the war home with them. Many still had nightmares about their experiences, some still tried to strangle their wives in their sleep believing they were Japanese soldiers and successful businessmen secretly collected bits of string or soap, still going through the habits of surviving POW camps. This glimpse of Australians mentally scarred by war intrigued me because it revealed a complex and distressing interior life which these Australian men had always denied they had.

In order to find out why Australians still carried the horror of their experiences with them I started to read all I could about Australians at war. I vividly remember coming across a passage in Gavin Souter’s Lion and Kangaroo. It was an extract from a soldier’s diary, written during the battle of Pozières, ‘Several of my friends are raving mad. I met three officers out in No Man’s Land the other night, all ranting and mad’. The thing that startled me was this seemed hidden history. In talking about the ANZAC tradition Australians had never really talked about the true horrors of the war and the way it affected their interior lives.

Although Inside the Island was not set in the First World War battlefields, the play came out of my reading about the wars and what happened to the young boys who became ANZACs and at the end of the play the Captain says, ‘What they saw ... the things that went on in their heads ... Can they ever see the world the same way they saw it before?’

It was also my question.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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PETER KOCAN has written two partly autobiographical novels, one of which, *The Cure* (1982), won the NSW Première’s Award for fiction. He has written a number of plays and two volumes of poetry including *The Other Side of the Fence* (1975), from which ‘The Photograph’ was taken, and *Armistice* (1980). In 1982 he won the Mattara Festival poetry Prize.

Author of *The Inked-in Image* and *The Way We Were*, the cartoonist VANE LINDESAY (‘Vane’), has drawn for a number of Australia’s leading newspapers and magazines. He is also a book illustrator and a theatre designer, and has a long-standing research interest in Australian comic art.


A contemporary of Les Murray and Geoff Page, ROGER MCDONALD is the author of the highly acclaimed *1915* (1979) which was also turned into a television series by the ABC in 1982. A teacher, television producer, and editor, he has also published two volumes of poetry and several other works of prose.

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JOHN McQUILTON grew up in the township of Yackandandah. Among his publications are the *Kelly Outbreak* and the first historical atlas produced in Australia which he co-edited with Jack Camm. Originally trained as an historical geographer, his research interests remain regionally based. He is currently completing research on the impact of the First World War on North Eastern Victoria.

It is with deep regret that since commissioning his paper on conscription the editors have learned of the death, in London, of Professor TOM MILLAR. Formerly director of the Sir Robert Menzies Australian Studies Centre in London, Tom Millar had a distinguished career in Australia as a historian.

In a sustained writing career spanning over thirty years, LES A. MURRAY has made a singular contribution to Australian writing as a poet, reviewer, essayist and editor. The author of *The Boys Who Stole the Funeral* (1980), he has recently published a new *Collected Poems*.

AMANDA NETTELBECK teaches Australian and post-colonial literary studies at Flinders University in Adelaide. She is the author of a monograph on David Malouf and has published on aspects of Australian literary culture.
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The author of several volumes of poetry, PHILIP SALOM’S third volume of verse, *Sky Poems*, which includes the fine poem ‘Seeing Gallipoli from the Sky’, won the 1987 Commonwealth Poetry Prize; he was also successful in winning this award in 1981. He is also the author of a novel, *Playback* (1991).

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RICHARD TIPPING wrote ‘VIEGRAM’ in 1968, at the age of 18, as a telegram. Thus it is all in headline type. He lectures at the University of Newcastle, NSW. In February 1997 he has a major exhibition of visual poetry at the Eagle Gallery in London.

GRAEME TURNER is a Professor of English at the University of Queensland, where he teaches and researches in the area of Cultural and Textual Studies. He is the author of numerous books, including *National Fictions, Myths of Oz, Film as Social Practice*, and *Australian Television*.

An authority on the poetry of Judith Wright and editor of *Who Is She? Images of Women in Australian Fiction*, SHIRLEY WALKER helped establish the Centre for Australian Literature and Language Studies at the University of New England. She is widely published in Australian literature and is currently writing a history of women’s fiction in Australia.
The author of *Inventing Australia*, RICHARD WHITE teaches and researches Australian cultural history at the University of Sydney. He is currently working on a book on aspects of tourism and the Australian soldier in the First World War.

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Anzacs at the graves of the fallen, on the Western Front
INDEX

Numbers in italics refer to figures

Abbott, J.H.M.
- *An Outlander in England* 122
- *Tommy Cornstalk* 122

Aborigine 257-8 see also Anzac treatment of (Gallipoli) 218-19 and 1915 241 and The Boys Who Stole the Funeral 245-6

Ackland, Michael (article by) 1-14

Agamst the Wind 213

Alick Keat Documents 50-8

All Qwet on the Western Front (film) 212

American neo-imperialism 293-306 passim

Anderson, Frank 124

anti-war see War

ANZAC
- *Anzac, aboriginal* 291
- *Anzac Book, The* 27-39 passim,
  - 'Abdul' 34
  - 'Anzac in Alex' and 'That Night at Bencis' 35
  - 'Graves of Gallipoli' 35
  - 'Icy' 30
  - 'Killed in Action' 35
  - 'Landing, The' 35
  - 'Non Nobis' 35
  - 'Wallaby Joe' 30

- *Anzac Day* 65, 100, 221, 316, 331, 332-3, 334, 335, 339-40, 342-3

- *Anzac Legend* 27-39 passim, 155, 171, 172, 175-6, 179, 201-14 passim, 220-1, 229-38 passim, 250-1, 343

- and alcohol 33-4, 216-17

- and the British ('pommy-bashing') 230, 235, 250

- and racism 219

- *Anzacs* (tele-series, 1985) 209, 210, 229-38 passim, 322

- and Australian narrative 232

- and *Bodyline* 213, 230-1, 236

- and *Breaker Morant* 235

- and Gallipoli 230-2, 235

- and 1915 230-2

- characterization 232

Arnold, Matthew 72, 243

- *Culture and Anarchy* 72-3

Australia Calls (Longford) 203

Australian Heritage Commission 159

Australian Labor Party 59, 60 87, 91, 95, 98, 159

Australian Legend see bush myth, Anzac Legend

Australian Women’s Army Service (AWAS) 186

*Australian Worker* (newspaper) 87, 91, 93, 97, 98

Bahnsen, Carl August 166

Barker, David 'A helping hand' 188

Barthes, Roland 177, 217

Bartlett, Ellis Ashmead 29

Bates, Daisy (Daisy O'Dwyer) 19, 23

'Baylebridge, William' (William Blockedge) 175-7

- *Anzac Muster, An* 175-7

- 'Author's Preface' 175, 176

- 'All Flesh is One' 176

- 'Bill's Religion' 175, 176

- 'Lone Pine' 176

- 'Protest' 175, 176


*History of the Australians at War 1914-1918* 136, 169, 186, 334

- *Letters from France* 123

Bedford, Randolph *Explorations in Civilisation* 122

Beerbohm, Max *Zuleika Dobson* 69

Beersheba 172, 205

Belgium 131, 145

- *Relief Fund* 42

Ben Hall (tele-series) 213, 240

*Bendigonian Abroad, A* 123

Benson, G.G. 133, 136

Beresford, Bruce see Breaker Morant

Bertodamo, Ramon de 23-4

*Between the Wars* (1974) 206

Blake, William 4, 8, 12

- 'The French Revolution' 4

- 'America, a Prophecy' 4

- 'Blood Vote, The' see conscription, posters

*Bluey and Curley* 213

Boer War see War

Boote, Henry 91,93

Boorstin, Daniel 117

Boyd, Martin 68-82 passim, 171, 178-9

- *A Difficult Young Man* 73

- *A Single Flame* 69

- *Cardboard Crown* 77, 79

- *Day of My Delight* 69
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Love Gods</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucinda Brayford</td>
<td>68, 72, 78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montfords, The</td>
<td>68, 69, 72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much Else in Italy</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retrospect</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scandal of Spring</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Such Pleasure</td>
<td>69, 70-1, 78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Blackbirds Sing</td>
<td>68-82 passim, 179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why They Walk Out</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyd, Merric</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyd, Penleigh</td>
<td>71,72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brass Hat in no Man’s Land, A</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazier, Jan (article by)</td>
<td>155-60 see also Inglis, K.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break of Day (1976)</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaker Morant (1980)</td>
<td>206, 211-12, 235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brecht, Bertholt</td>
<td>264, 270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Courage</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridges, W.T.Major-Gen.</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadmeadows Camp</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooke, Rupert</td>
<td>69, 173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce, Mary Grant</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulletin</td>
<td>16, 17, 31, 83, 87, 91, 122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullets and Billets</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke, Robert O’Hara</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burn, David</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney Delivered</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our First Lieutenant</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush myth</td>
<td>201, 231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and the Anzac</td>
<td>30, 201-2, 220, 230 231-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and ‘Breaker’ Morant</td>
<td>15-16, 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bushveldt Carbineers</td>
<td>15, 17, 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butler, A.G.</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cairo</td>
<td>43, 121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caldwell, Arthur</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>capitalism</td>
<td>78, 87, 93, 97, 261-72 passim, 309-327 passim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capricornia</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caputo, Philip A Rumour of War</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carboni (play)</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carnegie and Shields In Search of Breaker Morant</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cartoonists</td>
<td>83-9 passim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catch 22 (1970)</td>
<td>211, 212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine (play)</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chauvel, Charles</td>
<td>204, 205, 207-8, 328 see also Forty Thousand Horsemen &amp; Rats of Tobruk, The</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chesterton, G.K.</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churchill, Winston Sir</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clancy, Jack</td>
<td>206, 209, 212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark, Manning</td>
<td>169, 220, 325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A History of Australia (6 vols.)</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarke, Marcus</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the Term of His Natural Life/His Natural Life</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>class</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discourses of</td>
<td>249-60 passim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clunies Ross, Bruce (article by)</td>
<td>169-82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coates, George, artist</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Arrival of first Australian wounded...’</td>
<td>186, 192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coates, George, film director</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coleridge, Samuel Taylor</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connor, Kevin</td>
<td>184, 187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Old woman in the town square at Najaf’</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Refugees’</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscription</td>
<td>44, 45, 55-63 passim, 59, 84, 95, 99, 203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anti-conscription</td>
<td>45, 60, 91, 97, 98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Service schemes</td>
<td>61, 62, 307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>posters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Blood Vote, The’</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Don’t Falter Go And Meet The Hun – Menace’</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘It Is Nice In The Surf’</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Women of Queensland’</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Would you stand by’</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referenda</td>
<td>45, 46, 60, 84, 91, 97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook, Joseph</td>
<td>95, 97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooper, Ross</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cummings, e.e.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumming, John</td>
<td>60, 187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutlack, F.M.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutlack, F.M. Breaker Morant: A Horseman Who Made History</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dadswell, Lyndon</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Munition workers’</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David, Jacques-Louis ‘The Oath of Horatii’</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawe, Bruce</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawes, J.N.I. &amp; L.L.Robson Citizen to Soldier</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day, Donald</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deakin, Alfred</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defence Acts</td>
<td>44-5, 59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis, C.J.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gibbs, May 142, 147, 148, 149, 150, 152
Snuggletop and Cuddlepie 149
Gibson, Mel as Frank in Gallipoli 215-27 passim, 233
Gilbert, Helen (article by) 93-306
Gittoes, George 187-8
‘Mother and child’ 185
‘Corporal Julie Baranowski,…’ 187-8
‘Sergeant Jodie Clark’ 188
Gordon, Adam Lindsay 5, 6
Ashtaroth 6
‘Gone’ 6
‘Laudamus’ 7
‘Rhyme of Joyous Garde, The’ 6
‘Ye Wearie Wayfarer’ 7
Gow, Michael Away 294
Graves, Robert Goodbye to All That 68
Gray, Anna (article by) 183-200
Green, Kevin (article by) 283-9
Grenfell, Julian Into Battle 173
Grey, Oriel 284
Griffiths, Gareth (article by) 261-72
Guadalcanal Dial’ (1943) 205
Gulf War see War
Gundagai 157
Haig, Douglas, Field Marshall, Sir 235-6
Hamilton, Ian, General Sir 144, 170
Hanna, Pat, as ‘Chic Williams’ 204
Harden-Murrumburrah (N.S.W.) 157
Harney, Bill 177, 178-9
Harper, Charles 1, 5
‘Aboriginal Mother’s Lament, An’ 3
‘Creek of the Four Graves, The’ 7, 10, 12
‘Slave Story, The’ 7
‘Spectre of the Cattle Flat, The’ 7
‘Tower of the Dream, The’ 10
‘To Myself June 1835’ 9
‘War’ 7-8, 10, 12
‘War Song for the Nineteenth Century, A’ 1, 8-9
‘Wellington’ 8
‘Witch of Hebron, The’ 10
Hart, Pro 16
Hatt, Cecil 188
‘Mary had a little lamb’ 188
‘Swank, The’ 188
Hawkins, Weaver & Noel Kilgour, ‘Two minutes silence’ 185, 191
Hazzard, Shirley 309-27 passim
Transit of Venus 309-27 passim
Hemingway, Ernest 176
Hergenhan, L.H. (article by) 239-48
Herman, Sali ‘Back Home’ 188

Hero of the Dardanelles, The (Rolfe) 203
Heysen, Nora 187
‘Separating blood’ 187, 194
‘Typing blood’ 187
history
and national mythology 250, 258-9
as subject 229-38 passim
Australian compared European 239-40, 250, 258
‘blood history’ 245-6
discourses of 249-60 passim
representation of 241, 249-60 passim
Hodgkinson, Roy 187, 189
‘Captain Constance Box’ 187, 195
‘One Sunday afternoon, Townsville’ 189, 199
‘Sister Joan Box’ 187
Hogan, Paul, as Cleary in Anzacs 231, 233, 234, 235, 236
as icon 233, 322
Holman, William 97
Horne, Donald 169
Horne, Arthur 155
How We Beat the Emden (Rolfe) 203
Hughes, William Morris (‘Billy’) 44, 60, 83, 95, 97, 98, 169, 325
Idriess, Ion 172, 176
Desert Column, The 172-3
If the Huns Come to Melbourne (Coates) 203
In Which We Serve (1942) 205
Indonesia, invasion of East Timor see Romeril, Top End
Inglis, Ken (article by) 155-60 see also Brazier, Jan, 169
Ireland, David 283-9 passim
Burn 283-9 passim
Chantic Bird, The 283
Unknown Industrial Prisoner, The 283, 288
Japan/Japanese 60, 61, 302
Jarvis, C.S. Half a Life 21
Jones, David In Parenthesis 176
Journal of a Wandering Australian 123
Jungle Patrol (1944) 205
Kangaroo (film, Burstill, 1986) 213
Kangaroo (the novel) see Lawrence, D.H.
Keat, Alick 44, 47-8, 50-4
Keat, Percy 43
Kelly, Ned 233
and ‘Breaker’ Morant 17
Kelly, Veronica (article by) 273-82
Kendall, Henry 2, 3, 5
‘Australian Volunteer Song’ 2
‘Last of His Tribe’ 3
‘Ogyges’ 5
‘King Saul at Gilgoa’ 5
‘Voyage of Telegonus, The’ 5
Kent, David (article by) 27-40
Kilgour, Noel see Hawkins, Weaver
King and Country (1964) 212
Kingsley, Henry Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn, The 5
Kipling, Rudyard 174, 221, 339
Jungle Book 221
‘Recessional’ 174, 309
Kitchener, Horatio Herbert 15, 20
Kocan, Peter ‘Photograph’ 167-8
Kokoda Front Line (Parer) 205
Korean War see War
Kurwinge ‘Aboriginal Anzac’ 291
Laurel, John 171, 176
Lambert, George ‘La croix de guerre’ 184-5
larrkinism 235
in Egypt 215, 217
Last Bastion, The (tele-series) 211
Lawrence, D.H. Kangaroo 157-9, 213,
(film version) 213
Lawson, Henry 1, 16
Lee, Mark, as Archy in Gallipoli 215-27
passim, 180-6
Letters from a Young Queenslander 123
Leunig, — see McQuilton, John
Levi-Strauss, Claude Tristes Tropiques 117
Liberal Party 60
‘Light Horse Mule-Transport Song, The’ 34
Lighthorsemen, The (film, 1987) 209
Lindesay, Vane (article by) 83-90, (article by) 90-8 see also McLaren, John
Lindsay, Joan 70
Lindsay, Lionel 149
Lindsay, Norman 83, 84, 85, 149, 183
‘Will you fight now...?’ 182, 183
‘The Peril to Australia’ 183
and Will Dyson 83-4
Liverpool camp 133
Lohrey, Amanda 233
Long, the Short and the Tall, The (film, 1951) 205
Longford, Raymond 203
Low, David 83
and Will Dyson 83-4
Lowe, Barry 302
Tokyo Rose 302-4, 304
Lymburner, Frances 188
‘Soldier with girlfriend’ 188, 198
M.A.S.H. (1987) 211, 212
McDonald, Roger (author’s statement) 334
1915 209, 230, 231-2, 239, 246, 247, (as
‘War’ novel) 239, 329, 334
McDonogh sisters 213
Mackenzie, Crompton 170, 179
Gallipoli Memories 170
McKinley, J.P. 177
McLaren, John (article by) 91-100 see also Lindesay, Vane
McQuilton, John (article by) 41-9
Madge’s Trip to Europe and Back: By Herself 123
Malouf, David 72, 239-48 passim, 249-60
passim, (author’s statement) 331-2
Imaginary Life, An 241, 242
‘Asphodel’ 242
‘At My Grandmother’s’ 241
‘Bad Dreams in Vienna’ 241
Child’s Play 240, 241
‘Crab Feast, The’ 242
‘Episode from an Early War’ 240
Fly Away Peter 72, 242, 245-6, 249-60
passim
Harland’s Half Acre 242-3
Johnno 240-1
‘News from the Dark Ages’ 241
‘Report from the Champagne Country’ 241
‘Theologica Germanica’ 241
‘With the Earlier Deaths’ 241
‘Year of the Foxes, The’ 240
Mandelstram, Osip 241
Mandle, W.F. 169
Mann, Leonard 171, 178
Flesh in Armour 171-2
Manning, Frederic 171, 259
Her Privates We (The Middle Parts of Fortune) 171, 247, 259
Mannix, Daniel 60
Maralinga Royal Commission 229-30
Marquet, Claude 83, 86, 87
‘Blood Vote, The’ 84, 87, 90, 95, 98
‘Children’s Joy Tax’ 97
‘Club That Bug Early’ 96
‘Conscription’ 95
‘Democracy’ 97
‘Drink Evil, The’ 95
‘For the Emancipation of Labor’ 93
‘God of War, The’ 93
‘Hats Off! The 5% Patriot’ 93, 94
recruitment 42-9 passim
Red Badge of Courage, The (Stephen Crane) 212, 329
Red Cross 42
religion and war 47
Renar, Frank (‘Frank Fox’) 17-18, 221
Bushman and Buccaneer 17
republicanism 8, 9
Robson, L.L. 169
Rodriguez, Judith, ‘Zouave Marching Team, Rollins College, 1913-1914’ 67
Rolfe, Alfred 203
romance see War
Romeril, John 261-72 passim, (author’s statement) 335
neglect of 270-1
thematic concerns with war, capitalism and the home front 261-72 passim
Centenary Dance, The 262
effect on those at home 262
Dud War, The (The Dudders) 262-72 passim
first production 262
Floating World, The 261-72 passim, 310, 337-8
Jonah Jones 262-3, 267
and Louis Stone’s Jonah 262
Top End 262
and Indonesian invasion of East Timor 262
Rosenberg, Isaac 171, 178
Ross, Kenneth Breaker Morant 16
RSL 331
Rush (tele-series) 240
Rutherford, Anna (article by) 309-327
Rutherford, John, Pte. 167
Salom, Philip (author’s statement) 339
‘Seeing Gallipoli from the Sky’ 163-5
Sky Poems 341
Sara Dane (tele-series) 240
Sartre, J-P/Sartrean 224
Sassoon, Siegfried 68, 171, 174, 179
Complete Memoirs 77
Memoirs of George Sherston 68, 76, 77
Scholar’s Letters From the Front, A 123
Scott, Maurie B. (article by) 201-14
screen drama see War
Second World War see War
Serle, Geoffrey 169
Sewell, Stephen 276, 294, 295
The Blind Giant is Dancing 276, 294
Seymour, Alan, The One Day of the Year 343
Seymour camp 133
Shadbolt, Maurice Once on Chunuk Bair 325
Shelley, Percy Bysshe 5, 10
Shields, F. see Carnegie
Soap see Williamson, Celluloid Heroes
socialism 66, 69, 97
Souter, Gavin 169
Lion and Kangaroo 277, 344
Souter, David Henry 83, 87-9
‘The Toast is “Anzac”, Gentlemen’ 141
Spielvogel, Nathan Gumsucker on the Tramp 122
spies, spying 203
Student in Arms, A 123
Such is Life 241
Sword of Honour (1986) 209, 210
Sydney, HMS 133
Sydney Stock and Station Journal 87, 88
Tate, Don 209
Tennant, Kylie Foveaux 177
Tennyson, Alfred Lord Maud 243
There and Back 123
Thring, Frank 204
Throssell, Hugo V.H. (Jim) 65-6 passim
Throssell, Ric My Father’s Son 65-6
Tocsin 91
Trench Pictures From France 123
tourism, tourist 145
soldier as 117-29
and cameras 127
Tucker, James Ralph Rashleigh 3
Turner, Ethel 149
Turner, Graeme (article by) 229-38
Twain, Mark Innocents Abroad 122, 123
Two Minutes Silence (McDonogh sisters, 1933) 213
Uncle Sam 293-306 passim
Undertones of War 123
United Australia Party 60
Vietnam (tele-series, 1987) 209, 210
Victoria Cross 65
Vietnam War see War
Virgin Soldiers, The (film, 1969) 212
Voss see White, Patrick
Walk in the Sun, A (1945) 205
Walker, Shirley (article by) 15-26
Wallace-Crabbe, Chris 242
Waltzing Matilda (Thring) 204
War
and alcohol 95, 133, 134, 136
and anti-war/dissent 261-72 passim
and colonial identity/neo-colonialism 1-14 passim, 20, 71-2 (Boyd), 118-19,
136, 141, 202-3, 206-7, 209, 216-17, 221, 249-60 passim, 264-5, 270
and innocence/experience 215, 216-17, 223, 230-1, 233, 250
and the Home Front 261-72 passim
and munitions manufacture 310
and nationalism 2, 3, 8, 15, 17, 201, 202-3, 209, 220-1, 227, 321, 322
and patriarchal capitalism 309-27 passim
and political reality 223
and racism 133, 134, 136, 202-3, 217, 219, 241
and romance 5, 226
and screen drama 201-14 passim, 215-50 passim
and conscription 203
and homosexuality 225-6
and propaganda 203
compared to American TV 219
compared to American war films 205-6
compared to British war films 205-6
and sport 173, 225, 247
and transcendence 209, 221-2, 224, 225
and violence 239-48 passim, 266
and women see Women and War
and misogyny 317, 318
as representation of change 240-1, 258, 266
discourses of 249-60 passim
images of 201-14 passim, 215-28 passim
American War of Independence 2
Boer War 15-26 passim, 122, 206-7, 211, 219
Crimean War 9, 65
First World War 27-334 passim
Gulf War 184, 187-8
Korean War 61, 309-27 passim
and sinking of Tirpitz 309
Second World War 60, 63, 70, 184, 185, 186-7, 188-9, 204-6, 240, 242, 245,
261-72 passim, 310, 325
and Anzac legend 205
Vietnam War 15, 59, 61, 70, 184, 187-8, 210, 211, 219, 236, 243, 249-60 passim, 310
and Australian drama 293-306 passim
War Memorials 155-61
Archibald Memorial 164
Australian War Memorial 227, 228
Breeze 161
Double Day 156
Gladstone 160
Newcastle 158
war mongering 75
warrior code 202, 215
and Bushido 202
and Homeric myth 226
and Old Norse 202
Weir, Peter 207-9, 215-25 passim
white feathers 44
White, Patrick
The Tree of Man 177
The Vivisector 177
White, Richard (article by) 117-130
Whitlam, E. Gough 62
Whitlam Labor Government 159
Wieland, James (articles by) 101-16 & 131-54, 209-10
Wilde, Oscar
De Profundis 70
The Picture of Dorian Gray 73
Williamson, David 211, 215, 216
Celluloid Heroes 219
and Soap (Benson) 219
Gallipoli 215-28 passim
Wilmot, Frank 177
Windsor, Simon see The Lighthorsemen
Winspear, W. R. (‘The Blood Vote’) 91, 95
Witton, George Scapegoats of the Empire 19, 20, 21
women and war 41, 43, 141, 183-200 passim, 213, 225-6, 243-4, 262, 257-60
absence in screen drama 202
and misogyny 317, 318
as stereotype 226
as sexual beings 188-9, 268-9
as victim 183-5, 267-70
at work 186-8, 267-9
fortitude of 185-6
Woolf, Virginia 312
Wordsworth, William 4, 5, 12
Lyrical Ballads 4
Yackandandah 41-9 passim
Yackandandah Times 41-9 passim
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