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Constructing the ‘Australian Iliad’: Ancient Heroes and Anzac Diggers in the Dardanelles

Horace asserts in his Satires that we tell the same stories again and again, changing only the relevant names to ensure the story becomes about us, rather than the previous narrator. Homer’s Iliad is one of Western civilisation’s great stories, fated to be continually retold. David Malouf recognises the continuing cultural power of the Iliad in his assertion that we inhabit a world of unfinished stories, echoes, and repetitive horrors and miseries, to which the Iliad acts as a beautiful and pure mirror. This Homeric mirror is often employed in literary representations of the 1915 Anzac Campaign at Gallipoli. The stories created during and about this formative event in Australia’s nationhood served as a militaristic origin myth, stories which since 1915 have been continually reconstructed. This paper will investigate Australia’s use of classical allusions in the construction of its origin story and demonstrate how the Anzac Campaign provided the opportunity for the newly formed Australian nation to compose a meaningful story which would be relevant to the nation’s past, present and future. More specifically, this paper will focus on how allusions to antiquity were used in Australian literature: before the Great War; during the Gallipoli Campaign; and, to a limited extent, how classical allusions continued to be utilised in representations of the war after its end.

By drawing classical parallels to contemporary Australian events, authors could contextualise the nation and its people within the continuous mythical and historical narrative of Western Civilisation. This connection to Europe’s past incorporated and extended the bushmen mythologies that had dominated Australian literature before 1915. This article will also establish that Australia’s

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1 Hor. Sat. 1.1.69-70: mutato nomine de te fabula narratur. (‘change the name and the story is told about you’). A.M. Juster, trans., The Satires of Horace (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).


3 The bushmen mythologies will not be discussed here in any great detail. See Richard White, Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688–1980 (Sydney:
engagement with the ancient world contributed to the Gallipoli Campaign’s power as a story that united people in the recently federated States of Australia, which in turn ensured its continued presence in the nation’s popular imagination. Just as the *Iliad* served to unite the Greek people, the composition of Australia’s own story of origin, the Australian *Iliad*, provided a narrative which created a bond of shared sacrifice around which the nation could rally.\(^4\)

Inherent to the construction of the ‘Anzac myth’ are the classical allusions of its foundation.\(^5\) John Carroll asserts that ‘Australia had deliberately chosen its own sacred origins within breathing proximity of the birthplace of the West’,\(^6\) and it is this deliberate choice that this paper will elucidate. The geographical proximity of the Gallipoli Peninsula to Troy is important, but it is the ideological proximity between ‘the birthplace of the West’ and Australia’s first substantial martial achievement that generates epic connotations between the Trojan and Great Wars. Allusions to ancient Greece in writing about the Great War

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4. Jan deVries, *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend*, trans. B.J. Timmer (New York: Arno Press, 1978), 269; there is no one text in Australia that can be called ‘the Australian *Iliad*’ rather, the term will be applied to those texts in which the legend or myth that is collectively understood in Australia as the ‘Anzac myth’ is contained.


were not unique to the fighting at Gallipoli or unique to Australian authors, but the comparisons made between Anzacs and ancient heroes often served a different purpose in the context of the Gallipoli Campaign. By comparing Australian soldiers to ancient heroes, and drawing on the shared landscape of the Dardanelles, poets, journalists, politicians, soldiers and writers of every kind have consolidated, and will continue to consolidate the connection between Australia’s present and Europe’s past, establishing a continuum of cultural experience in spite of geographical isolation. Through the retelling of ancient stories with Australian protagonists, Australia’s first act as an autonomous nation becomes an origin myth with epic implications, an Australian *Iliad*.

Before the Great War Australian poets had made comparisons between Australia and antiquity. Among several other historical and mythological themes, Bernard O’Dowd in his 1912 poem ‘The Bush’ writes about Australia as being the heir to ancient mythology and Homeric narratives. Looking to the future, O’Dowd writes that the Australian bush can be ‘the matrix where are forming slowly/ Troy tales of Old Australia’; that the bush is ‘the scroll on which we are to write/ Mythologies of our own epics anew’. O’Dowd states that ‘Homers are waiting in the gum trees now’ and, although the European and Australian races may be long apart, now ‘their manas [are] mingling’. This poem articulates a desire to contextualise the Australian nation within a continuous narrative of civilisation. In addition to a story that would promote unity, it expresses a belief that a narrative of epic proportions was required.

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7 Bernard O’Dowd, ‘The Bush’, in *Poems of Bernard O’Dowd: Collectors Edition* (Melbourne: Lothian Publishing, 1944), 187-8. It should be emphasised that this poem does not focus specifically on ancient Greece, the *Iliad* or any particular mythical or historical theme. The poem draws examples from all over Europe, including references to the Vikings, Celts, the Middle East and Buddhists. It has no specific chronological focus. Although the references to the *Iliad* are specifically referred to in this paper, the poem as a whole demonstrates O’Dowd’s broader desire for the Australian nation to contextualise itself within the ongoing narrative of civilisation. While part of this narrative is the *Iliad*, the entirety of this poem is much more complex than this paper has opportunity to consider in any depth.


9 ibid., lines 566-7.

10 ibid., line 366.

11 ibid., line 374.
Using historical and mythological exemplars, including those from antiquity, was a means of creating a cultural heritage for the Australian nation, which at that time had a relatively short history. As the article ‘Colonial Education’ printed in the December 1835 issue of the Van Diemen’s Land Monthly Magazine states, ‘What are the prospects of Van Diemen’s Land? What is its future history? The elements have been collected—the impetus given—it has started in the race of nations, and its course, glorious or disgraceful must be recorded in the world’s annals. The chronicles of Carthage, or of the offsets of Greece and Rome, must be followed by the chronicles of our story—and so we shall pass away!’

Although this example is specific to Van Diemen’s Land and cannot represent the opinion of the Australian nation as a whole (because it would not exist for another sixty-six years), it does complement the sentiments expressed by the Victorian O’Dowd in his poem ‘The Bush’. The Australian colonies had not been afforded the time to establish a long or great history in the vein of Greece, Rome, Carthage or any of the world’s great civilisations, but, by implying a connection to antiquity and Europe’s past generally, Australia’s history could constitute the next chapter in the world’s great historical annals and access part of Europe’s long heritage. Once Australia became involved in the Great War the new mythologies appealed for by O’Dowd could be attached to a specific event that would facilitate their literary composition. The coincidental location of the Gallipoli Campaign made it easier for allusions to be made to the Iliad and epic more broadly.

John Butler Cooper refers to the ease with which the geography of Anzac Cove could lend itself to classical allusion and narratives of epic proportion when, in 1916, he wrote, ‘[t]he troops were the virile expression of the young nation...Hereafter some Australian Homer will tell the story in an Iliad that will rival the tale of the siege of Troy’. By borrowing elements from older, more established narratives, Australia could incorporate Western traditions into the national story they were constructing while articulating their coming of age in a well-established and easily understood epic language. Robin Gerster argues extensively in his book Big Noting the Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing that the use of the classics in literary representations of the Anzac Campaign was widespread:

13 John Butler Cooper, Coo-Oo-Ee! A Tale of Bushmen from Australia to Anzac (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916), 237.
Propaganda hacks, misguided ego-trippers, self-styled modern Homers…
From 1915 on, every mode of Australian war prose, whether ‘factual’, ‘fictional’, ‘historical’ or ‘imaginative’, typically functions either overtly or covertly as publicity for the Australian soldier as a twentieth-century embodiment of classical heroic virtue.¹⁴

This embodiment of classical heroic virtue facilitated the embedding of Anzac mythology into the continuum of Western mythology as a whole. This required borrowing exemplars from the classical past and rewriting cultural inheritances to serve Australian purposes. John Carroll notes that all societies have a body of myth or archetypal stories and that Australia’s do largely derive from the Western *mythos*.¹⁵ The Gallipoli campaign was fought on a European stage and this allowed the audiences from both the old and the new worlds to watch on as Australians proved themselves in a landscape previously inhabited by the ancient warrior heroes of epic poetry.

Before the outbreak of the Great War, Australia still had not established a universally accepted story that united the recently federated nation. David Knight argues that people who live in different parts of a common territory require common factors which physically, socially and psychologically link the individuals into a collective whole.¹⁶ In addition to the integration necessary for the divergent nation, the Anzac story needed to simultaneously promote the nation’s standing in relation to more established nation states while embodying what it meant to be uniquely Australian. In the years preceding Federation it was predicted that this link would come from the martial arena because of the popular belief that war was the ‘foundation of all the high virtues and facilities of men’.¹⁷ This sentiment is illustrated in the words of the poet Henry Lawson who, in 1895, wrote of the much hoped for day that ‘the star of the South shall rise—in the lurid clouds of war’.¹⁸ This poem, ‘The Star of the South Shall Rise’, indicates that Australian unification would occur through military involvement: ‘There are boys to-day in the city slum and the home of wealth and pride/ Who’ll have one

¹⁴ Gerster, *Big Noting the Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing*, 5.
home when the storm is come, and fight for it side by side’.\textsuperscript{19} Lawson clearly states in the poem that the nation would be born from this eventual conflict: ‘[a] Nation’s born where the shells fall fast, or its lease of life renewed’.\textsuperscript{20} The poem concludes:

’Twill be while ever our blood is hot, while ever the world goes wrong,
The nations rise in a war, to rot in a peace that lasts too long.
And southern Nation and southern State, aroused from their dream of ease,
Must sign in the Book of Eternal Fate their stormy histories.\textsuperscript{21}

These concluding lines indicate the pre-war notion that Australia was experiencing an idyllic time of ease and peace that would lead to its eventual deterioration. Lawson’s poem indicates that this lethargy could never produce a notable or lasting Australian history, only war could. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Lawson captures the pervading notion that Australia needed to prove their worth as a nation through war and that it was only through the sacrifice and difficulty of conflict that enduring memory, or ‘Eternal Fate’, could be accomplished.\textsuperscript{22}

Writing later, in 1910, Lawson’s call for Australia’s chance to prove itself escalates with his poem ‘At the Beating of a Drum’. This poem claims ‘the Battle Hymn is strong’, and cries for revolution.\textsuperscript{23} Lawson states that it is not important who writes this song, but that its composition is essential because it ‘shall ring through ages as a song of liberty’.\textsuperscript{24} The idea that war would provide the stage

\textsuperscript{19} Henry Lawson, ‘The Star of the South Shall Rise’, lines 17-18.
\textsuperscript{20} ibid., line 70.
\textsuperscript{21} ibid., lines 77-80.
\textsuperscript{22} The call for an Australian war narrative at the turn of the nineteenth century was not limited to this poem. Lawson writes of Australia’s martial fate in many poems with a similar zeal. See also Lawson ‘Shadows Before’ (1885); ‘The Heart of Australia’ (1904); ‘For Australia’ (1905); ‘Every Man Should have a Rifle’ (1907); ‘At The Beating Of A Drum’ (1910). Please note, the poems that specifically call for a revolution, a republic or a war on Australian soil have not been included in this footnote.
\textsuperscript{24} Henry Lawson ‘At the Beating of A Drum’, line 10. It is important to recognise that while Australia had sent soldiers to the Boer War (1899-1902), these troops were sent as part of British and South African units from the six un-federated colonies. In 1910 the Australian nation had been united through Federation and Lawson was calling for a new conflict, in which Australian soldiers would fight as united and autonomous people.
upon which Australia would prove their worth was also being actively taught in New South Welsh primary schools. This verse, 'The Song That Men Should Sing', written by Kenneth Mackay in 1899 was reproduced in a contemporary school text. The poem warns young Australians that leisure in life is fleeting and that they should be prepared for the day when it would end with a call to arms:

...there’s a stern task
Than playing a well-pitched ball;
That the land we love may someday ask.
For a team that is ready to take the field
To bowling with balls of lead,
In a test match grim, where if one appealed,
The umpire might answer ‘dead’!

Henry Lawson’s belief coupled with this extract from a school text demonstrates that not only was Australia looking for a story of national achievement but that it must come from martial endeavour and individual sacrifice. Richard White argues that the Gallipoli landing on the 25 April 1915 gave a name, a time and a place to a myth that had already been fully formed in the popular imagination of Australians. The Gallipoli landing demonstrated not only the high virtues and facilities of Australian soldiers, but did so on a world stage. In addition to pride felt in the Australian forces, White notes the nation’s feelings of relief that the Australian soldiers had passed the test of war, a test which they had set for themselves. As British war correspondent Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett identified in his first news copy, ‘they had been tried for the first time, and not been found wanting’.

Being tested as an independent nation was key to the power that the Gallipoli Campaign came to hold for the Australian people. This independence did not displace Britain as Australia’s imperial founder but defined Australia as a sovereign race within British ancestry. Robin Winks identifies the need for former colonies to assert a national independence separate to governmental independence. On 1 January 1901 governmental control of Australia was given to the newly federated nation as a gift from Britain, Australia’s imperial

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founder. This freedom from imperialism was inherently compromised because the independence did not come from the Australian people establishing their own government through actions taken for and by the nation; rather, it came from accepting power from the British government on imperial terms. Without a story of revolution to rally around and the limited inspiration which the gift of independence could muster, Australia needed to mark their independence with an act of evolution, rather than revolution. The Gallipoli landing afforded Australia an opportunity to demonstrate their evolution and to assert their independence as a nation of strong and resourceful citizens, equal to, and perhaps even greater than, their imperial founders who landed separately at Cape Helles.29

Ashmead-Bartlett’s affirmation of the Anzac soldiers’ capabilities was especially well received because of his British nationality. As an Englishman and an experienced war correspondent, Ashmead-Bartlett lent prestige to the Gallipoli Campaign through his praise of the Anzac soldiers.30 His praise was that of a representative from the ‘Mother Country’ and became the first international, auspicious recognition of Australia’s contribution to the Empire. Fred and Elizabeth Brenchley and K.S. Inglis argue that if Bean had delivered the first dispatch to Australia, the glorification and heroics of the Australian troops may not have been received in Australia with such interest and enthusiasm.31 Ashmead-Bartlett called the Australian troops ‘heroes’ and described them as a ‘race of athletes’ who were ‘cheerful, quiet and confident’, rather than nervous or excited, when going into battle.32 This first international impression of Australian heroism was well received at home and Bean believed that, ‘the tradition of the Anzac landing is probably more influenced by that first story than by all the other accounts that have since been written’.33 Ashmead-Bartlett’s praiseworthy account of the Anzacs laid the foundation for the ‘Anzac myth’, which was to be constructed in subsequent years. Without Ashmead-Bartlett’s dispatch the glorification of Australian troops would not have had the same

30 Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, Sydney Morning Herald, 8 May 1915, 14.
32 Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, ‘Gallant Australians’.
impact on the Australian people and may not have endured so long in Australia’s national consciousness.  

In addition to Ashmead-Bartlett’s praise, the location of the Gallipoli campaign contributed significantly to the transition of the Anzac from soldier to warrior through poetic comparisons to ancient warrior heroes. As the First World War soldier and novelist John North states, ‘no battle ground so easily lends itself to retrospective sentimentality’. This geographical connection to the classical past significantly contributes to the modern historical event’s transition into epic. As Martin Ball asserts, the story of Gallipoli will be celebrated for thousands of years, in the same manner as the story of Troy, because of the poetic connections made between the Australasian forces and the past glory of the Trojan War. As a result of the idealisation of the Anzac soldiers, the Anzac myth fulfils a necessary function as an origin story of exemplary deeds for the Australian nation. Myths are often stories of past greatness. These stories can describe a golden age of heroes or a great event from a nation’s past but, as a myth, it must tell of human actions in the constructed past which led to the present incarnation of the same society. This means that they must express the inherent characteristics and ideals of the society to which they pertain and project them as exemplars for the inhabitants of that society. Historically myths are transmitted from one generation to another without anyone knowing who created them. They are the last and not the first stage in the development of a hero. Over the course of time events come to be remembered in their poetic form rather than their historical form. In the my-


35 John North, *Gallipoli: The Fading Vision* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), 20. North became preoccupied with the Gallipoli Campaign after visiting the peninsula in 1926, he argued that the continual association between Gallipoli and the classics actually obscured the true story of the Anzac campaign and stated that, ‘All classical opiates will … be absent from this volume; the snows of Ida will go unsung’, 17.


thologisation of martial events, romanticism becomes more prevalent as time passes because the importance of a war’s politics subsides and the actions of the heroic participants can take a central role in the re-telling. Any nation can experience a heroic age because heroes originate in historical fact, but a hero must also occupy an imaginary space where history and legend combine. In this way, as deVries puts it, a hero is ‘the sublimation of a man who actually lived at some time’. This man is elevated to ‘a sphere much higher and more important than that of the world from which he has emerged’. Amongst others, C.E.W. Bean idealised the Anzac soldier as a hero as early as the first anniversary of the Anzac landing at Gallipoli saying, ‘[a] year ago Australians made a world name and the word ‘Anzac’ became a synonym for every desirable human quality.’ The ‘Anzac myth’ subscribes to the mythical aspect that makes it at once temporal and immediate, as well as external and transcendent.

Australian soldiers and the Australian public were generally aware of the epic history of the Dardanelles. Classical education in the mid- to late- eighteenth and the early- nineteenth centuries was common for those who reached Fifth Class. Students were well versed in reading, parsing, paraphrasing and criticiising poetry. Latin was sometimes offered only as an elective in the different colonies but it was more often than not a subject available to students. Those who went on to university needed to be classically educated in order to pass matriculation. Because of this Latin and Greek were taught at both boys and

40 deVries, Heroic Song and Heroic Legend, 203.
41 ibid., 208.
42 ibid., 209.
45 In 1857 it was also one of two elective options for students to take Latin and read Caesar’s De Bello Gallico, William Wilkins, ‘Ninth Report of the Commissioners of National Education in New South Wales’, V. & P., NSW Leg. Assembly, 1857. Latin was a compulsory subject in New South Welsh women’s schools until 1890, Coral Chambers, Lessons for Ladies: A social history of girls’ education in Australia 1870–1900 (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1986), 146.
46 In the 1880s NSW matriculation subjects were: English grammar and composition, Latin, arithmetic, algebra, geometry and either French or German and one of either ancient Greek, elementary Chemistry or elementary Physics, Sydney University Calendar (1885), 109.
girls schools. Even at lower levels of schooling, the classics were an inherent component of education. In the *New South Wales: Public Instruction Gazette*, published in November 1907, an objection is made to the fact that children at primary school level were only educated about the deeds of Greek and Roman heroes rather than about more culturally relevant Australian heroes.

Those Australians who were not aware of the Dardanelles’ historical and mythical significance were quickly informed in newspaper reports of the Anzac’s achievements at Gallipoli. In October of 1915, E.C. Buley states that ‘it was an additional joy for Australians to learn that they were to fight in the footsteps of Homer’s heroes and Alexander the Great’ calling them the ‘new Argonauts’. The location of the campaign would also have recalled for many the relatively recent excavation of Hissarlik on the other side of the straight where, in 1873, the German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann began unearthing the site now identified as Troy. The knowledge in the Australian trenches of the region’s past events can be seen in the diary entry of Private T.J. Richards of the First Field Ambulance, A.I.F. who wrote:

Gallipoli has mythological interests as the great warrior of the siege of Troy – Achilles – is buried here, or at any rate there is a place described as the ‘Tomb of Achilles’. Lemnos Island is known also to mythology as it was here that Vulcan landed when he was thrown out of Mount Olympos by Juno.

It is the connection to ancient mythology, present in the minds of the Anzac soldiers and the Australian public that encouraged writers to turn to the classics for inspiration. As Gerster argues, Australian soldiers ‘inherited the transcendent qualities of the heroes of the legendary Trojan battlefield’ because of the tanta-

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47 Chambers, *Lessons for Ladies*, 82. It was less common to teach the classics in schools for girls because there were fewer females who attended university. French was the most commonly taught language in schools for girls, ibid., 92.

48 *New South Wales: Public Instruction Gazette*, 25 November 1907, 118.


50 Heinrich Schliemann began excavations in 1870 without permission from the local government. The excavations resumed in 1873 after permission was granted. The work of his assistant Wilhelm Dörpfeld between 1893 and 1894 shed new light on Schliemann’s discoveries after his death.

lising proximity of Troy to Gallipoli. By asserting their connection to ancient Greek warriors Australian writers were accessing a proud historical and cultural heritage. By placing themselves within a historical continuum, Australia’s history was imposed upon existing chronology. This made the Australian nation the future of ancient Greece, in turn making Australia’s past that of ancient Greece. It also offered the potential for Australia’s future to be envisaged as being as grand as that of ancient Greece.

By relating the Gallipoli campaign to the myths of the ancient world, Australia’s historical narrative becomes part of the continuous narrative of Western civilisation and shows Australia’s place within the broader cultural context of its forebears. Just as Australians were to prove that they were brave and strong enough to fight on the world stage on 25 April 1915, the literature that followed was to perpetually reassert the nation’s place within European cultural tradition by constructing a link between Australian greatness and the majesty of antiquity. Like the ancient warriors the Anzacs transcended historical circumstances and individual limits in what was their first and most important test. Without a national tradition of battle literature on which they could draw, the war writers cultivated a home-grown heroic image while simultaneously exploiting an imported one from antiquity. The transcendence from an ordinary soldier to world-renowned hero is prevalent in Bean’s rhetoric about the Anzacs. Carroll equates Bean and his heroisation of the Anzac soldiers with Homer and the ancient Greek epic tradition when he asserts that the two volumes of Bean’s *Official History of Australia* about Gallipoli ‘have claims as the Australian Iliad’. Carroll is clearly not referring to Bean’s histories as being poetic epic, but rather, he is expressing the fact that the deeds contained within the historical tomes capture the heroic and epic spirit of the Anzac soldier and the Australian nation just as the *Iliad* did for the ancient Greeks.

Bean’s contribution to the Anzac myth is unrivalled. Whether by design or default, the Australian war correspondent was responsible for the compilation of a significant volume of Anzac literature and artefacts articulating the Anzacs’ experience at Gallipoli and the remainder of the Great War. Bean’s *Official History*, the *Anzac Book* and the eventual construction and curation of

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52 Gerster, *Big Noting the Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing*, 2.
the Australian War Memorial are all examples of his contribution.55 The Anzac Book, first published in 1916, was compiled and edited by Bean as a souvenir for the soldiers on the Peninsula as well as for a broad Australian audience on the home-front. Classical allusions are littered throughout the book in the exploits of the soldiers, but none are so overt as those in the poem entitled ‘The Trojan War’ attributed to J. Wareham of the First Australian Field Ambulance in the original 1916 publication. This poem is an example of literature casting Anzacs as epic heroes in the image of ancient warriors:

We care not what old Homer tells
Of Trojan War and Helen’s fame
Upon the ancient Dardanelles
New people’s write—in blood —their name.

Those Grecian heroes long have fled,
No more the Plain of Troy they haunt;
Made sacred by our Southern dead
Historic is the Hellespont.

No legend lured these men to roam;
They journeyed forth to save from harm
Some Mother-Helen sad at home,
Some obscure Helen on a farm.

And when one falls upon the hill—
Then by dark Styx’s gloomy strand,
In honour to plain Private Bill
Great Agamemnon lifts his hand.56

Although this declaration begins by dismissing Homer’s importance, the poem concludes with a categorical statement that the Anzacs have a place alongside the heroes of Troy. Agamemnon lifts his great hand to the dead Anzac who has written his name in blood, not only into the landscape of the Dardanelles, but also into the sacred legends of the southern people. Agamemnon’s acknowledgement of the Anzac’s greatness is warranted because, in this poem, their legend has supplanted that of the Greek heroes.

55 See Letter: Bean to J. Trelor 19/4/25, AWM 38/1 DRL 6673, Item 667, 3rd Series for Bean’s conception of the Australian War Memorial.
The soldiers’ mothers and wives at home provide the justification for the sacrifice of these noble dead and the gravity of Homer’s words are diminished in comparison with the sacrifice of the Anzacs. The intended message of the poem is that Anzac soldiers did not care for epic poetry as much as they did for their Helens. However, through the comparison made with the Trojan War the author acknowledges the importance of the ancient heroes to the conception of Australia’s place in the Great War. Australia came of age on the Gallipoli Peninsula, and the Anzacs proved that they were brave and worthy men. This could not be demonstrated more emphatically than by asserting that the heroes were the heirs to the epic tradition and that the Anzacs were the greatest warriors not only of their time but of all time. The inclusion of this poem in the Anzac Book is significant.\(^{57}\) The poem was not written by a soldier serving on the Gallipoli Peninsula, as all contributions to the Anzac Book were intended to be. Rather, Arthur Adams published this poem in the Bulletin on 20 May 1915. The only change made to the version of the poem submitted to the Anzac Book was the more inclusive line ‘New people’s write—in blood—their name’ from the original ‘Australians write—in blood—their name’.\(^{58}\) Wareham/Adams’ poem illustrates how authors could be tempted by the romantic location of the Anzacs at Gallipoli and demonstrates a desire to explore the site where ancient and modern myth intersect.

The romance associated with the mythical history of the Gallipoli peninsula came from its distant past, before the complications of modern life and the existence of the nations who had instigated the conflicts of the Great War. Carroll notes that rather than using classical Greek and Christian narratives as the base for Australian myth, it is from the heroic epics of Homer that Australians choose to look for identity.\(^{59}\) The Australian use of antiquity was a conscious ignoring of industrialisation and Christianity. They were a new people, part of a new nation, and they had an opportunity to succeed where Europe had failed. By returning to what they perceived to be the origin of civilisation, Australia was

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57 Bean’s inclusion of this poem in the Anzac Book is the only overtly Homeric reference in the compilation. However, this does not detract from the fact that it reveals that Homer’s myths had were important to the conception of heroism on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

58 Ball ‘The Story of the Story of Anzac’, 208 (n. 83) has speculated that the change to the poem published in the Anzac Book may have been an attempt to accommodate the New Zealand forces into the poem. For more discussion of this poem’s origins see Ball, ‘The Story of the Story of Anzac’, 208 and Gerster, Big Noting the Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing, 33.

asserting its desire to start free from the mistakes made in modern Europe that led to the carnage of the Great War. Paul Fussell makes this argument and goes on to state that the reinvigorated myth of the First World War was an actual displacement of Christianity. The Australian use of antiquity was then a conscious step over industrialisation and Christianity. In a war that amassed such great numbers of casualties, the idea that Christianity was an ominous shadow can be easily understood.

Contemporary artist and art critic Lionel Lindsay equates ancient Greece with the experience of happy lives and condemns Christianity as this ‘ominous shadow of melancholia and ‘purity’ upon the bliteness of life’. The romanticism of classical motifs offered a traditional language of representation, while being a safe alternative to the Christian faith, the God of which had allowed such destruction and pain. Bruce Kapferer offers an alternative perspective on Australia’s disinterest in Christianity, arguing that the soldiers were deliberately irreligious because Christianity was an inherent part of the military hierarchy and therefore part of the institutionalised domination which threatened the autonomy and egalitarian thought with which Anzac soldiers identified. Kapferer goes on to identify the fact that, despite the Anzacs general indifference to Christianity, the soldiers’ anti-religious sentiment was formed within Judeo-Christian ideologies. This means that, despite often ignoring Christian parallels and looking instead to the classics for structures of meaning, because of their inherent cultural knowledge, Christianity was intrinsic to all representations of the Gallipoli Campaign.

In addition to the avoidance of Christianity, avoidance of the mechanised aspects of the First World War prompted writers to retreat to the safety of simpler times, before humanity was complicated by technology and mechanised warfare. In the degradation of European civilisation Australia was able to demonstrate their strength, youth and virility to the world. August 1914 was commonly seen

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63 Kapferer, *Legends of People Myths of State*, 128.
64 ibid., 129.
as the end of an epoch and the collapse of civilisation. As the English author D.H. Lawrence wrote of the Great War in 1915, ‘a great wave of civilisation, 2000 years...now collapsing...the past, the great past, crumbling down, breaking down.’ Poetry and literary constructions were no antidote to these disillusionments and were of little comfort to the dead. At most, poetry and literature could elevate the deeds of participants for the survivors and relatives. During this time, poetry served to distance the author and reader from the reality and horror of mechanised warfare and romanticise the actions of men involved in brutal deeds on the front line.

In Australia the romantic treatment of the Great War was the beginning of their heroic age. Gerster argues that Australians believed their nation would rise triumphant from the ashes of the Great War as ‘Australia Phoenix’. For Australia, the devastation of the Great War afforded the nation the chance for their debut as an independent and unique people and provided an opportunity to contribute their actions to the ongoing narrative of civilisation. As ‘Australia Phoenix’, Europe’s demise would ensure that the Australian people were seen to be as strong and virile as the Anzac soldiers who represented them; a new breed in possession of ideal attributes. The new chapter in the history of Western civilisation would return to its cultural origins in antiquity, drawing on the romanticism of the ancient heroic age, a simpler time, uncomplicated by technology and Christianity. Australia’s narrative would start afresh, incorporating the past, but only the elements of it uncorrupted by the declining present in recent European history.

The idea that the Anzacs had undertaken deeds which were to form the Australian *Iliad* was largely accepted in the inter-war years. Sir Ian Hamilton contributed significantly to this. In 1935 Hamilton delivered a speech at an Anzac Day ceremony in London. He speaks about,

> a book called the *Iliad*, containing what we would nowadays call ‘Despatches from the Siege of Troy’, a campaign almost duplicate to ours, although it took place 3000 years ago...In another 2000 years the two legends will have

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68 Gerster, *Big Noting the Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing*, 14-5.
blended and passages from the historians will be expounded in the schools as beautiful images of wicked happenings long ago.69

Hamilton’s belief that the events of the Trojan and Great Wars would eventually become one promoted the eventual elision of time and space to his Australian audience. It also asserted the potential for the soldiers at Gallipoli to one day be indistinguishable from ancient heroes because of their shared sacrifice and glory.70 The romantic nature of his claim absolved the Commander of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force of his role in the death of so many young men. Rather than the event being remembered as the end of so many lives, it was to be remembered as a beginning of a new mythology that promoted virility and youth. In their supposition of ancient heroics, those who fought in the Dardanelles in 1915 would inspire future generations with their deeds, transcend their mortality and achieve their apotheosis as heroes.

Classical allusions are still visible in accounts of the Anzac campaign. Histories are often introduced with a brief recollection of previous conflicts within the same landscape or a reminder of a parallel incident in the Illiad. These references

69Ian Hamilton, ‘A Report of a Speech Made on Anzac Day in London’; Reveille 8 no. 11, 1 July (1935), 2; this quotation may not exclusively refer to Anzac soldiers. However, its delivery at an Anzac day ceremony, to what would have been a largely Australian and New Zealand audience, ensures that the comparison at least incorporates Anzac soldiers.

70Ian Hamilton quoted in Alan Moorhead, Gallipoli (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1956), 297. This speech is specifically directed at soldiers serving at Gallipoli and although these included Anzac soldiers it refers to all soldiers who served on the Peninsula, including the French, British and Canadian forces. The comparison of ancient warriors to modern soldiers is therefore not exclusively referring to Australian and New Zealand troops. Hamilton’s words contribute to the Anzac myth in their reception by the Australian people. An example of the weight invested in the Commander’s words generally can be found in an offer by Mr. A. Shannon, a Life Honorary Member of the Returned Sailors & Soldier’s Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA), to the Australian Prime Minister ‘to have prepared for presentation to the Commonwealth Government, a board similar to that of an Honour Roll on which the message [of Sir Ian Hamilton’s 1934 Anzac Day speech] would be inscribed in “letters of gold” … the board, which would be carved in Australian Hardwood, should be hung in a suitable place in Parliament House, Canberra, and the unveiling ceremony conducted by the Duke of Gloucester during his visit to Canberra’. The Prime Minister declined this offer but the letter goes some way to demonstrate the respect the RSSILA had for Hamilton’s words. ‘Sir Ian Hamilton’s Anzac Message 25 April, 1934. Offer of Honor Board by Mr. A. Shannon’ LOB/DS. ‘Sir Ian Hamilton’s Anzac Day Message. Proposed gift of Tablet.’ On Prime Ministerial Letterhead, signed L. O’Brown, 16 July, 1934. NAA A458, G304/1.
demonstrate that the initial attempt to contextualise the Anzac Campaign within the spectrum of Western civilisation was successful. As the Anzac Campaign fades from living memory it truly can take on its incarnation as Australia’s origin myth, but the fact that this tale of Australia’s independence as a unique and united people is so often contextualised within the classical landscape perhaps reveals that this independence has, at its core, a continued need to be part of the broader cultural history of the West.

This paper does not have the scope to effectively discuss the subsequent representations of the Gallipoli Campaign that incorporate ancient and classical references except for a few brief examples. Classical allusions in more recent histories include Peter Liddle. Liddle writes of ‘[t]his marvellously mixed force’ who were ‘to serve on what was, spatially, a tiny stage of the Classical world’.71 Alan Moorehead’s history is laden with classical allusions, which he weaves throughout the history of the Gallipoli Campaign, reminiscing about historical events that occurred in the same place, or noting the presence of a ruin or ancient artefact found within the landscape.72 Richard Nile equates Anzacs with ancient warriors.73 Les Carlyon states that ‘antiquity – or timelessness, its near relation – is easy to find here [at Gallipoli]’ and goes on to offer a brief history of ancient events which occurred in the same landscape.74 The back cover of Carlyon’s book actually markets the antique connections with Australia’s history of Gallipoli stating that ‘[b]ecause it was fought so close to his home ground, Homer might have seen this war on the Gallipoli Peninsula as an epic’.75 This immediately implies that Carlyon’s work tells a (potentially) epic story and contextualises the Australian participation in the Great War within the landscape of epic tradition and the Iliad. Peter Londey takes an alternative approach to the presence of the classics in the Anzac myth, arguing that Bean privileges the democratic narratives of Classical Athens to Homer and ancient epic.76 This alternative use of the classics, however, amounts to the same end. Australian achievement is still being contextualised within a broader historical narrative. Newspaper articles also continue to reference the Trojan War when

72 Alan Moorhead, *Gallipoli*, with additional text by Ann Moyal (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989), 1; 42-4; 60; 65; 80; 86; 92; 97; 116; 196-7; 246; 278; 297.
75 Carlyon, *Gallipoli*.
76 Londey, ‘A Possession for Ever’.
discussing the Gallipoli Campaign. In April 2009 Michael Ruffles, in the same vein as Carlyon, provides a brief ancient history of the landscape mentioning Troy, the Persian King Xerxes and Alexander the Great before placing the Australian soldiers immediately next in this historical continuum.\textsuperscript{77}

Film adaptations of the Anzac myth also incorporate classical themes. Peter Weir’s 1981 film \textit{Gallipoli} includes a wooden horse, which immediately recalls the Trojan myth and aesthetically juxtaposes the old and the new in the Australian camps pitched below the ancient pyramids of Egypt.\textsuperscript{78} Here antiquity exists at once with contemporary Australia as the youth and innocence of the Australian troops in their white pyramidal tents sit at the base of the great ancient stone pyramids, monuments of the past which symbolise death, but also immortality.\textsuperscript{79} In art, Sidney Nolan, while living on the Greek island of Hydra in 1955 and 1956, became interested in antiquity and Troy. This interest eventually produced his \textit{Gallipoli} series of paintings, which draw parallels between the Australian loss of life at Gallipoli and the tragedy of the Trojan War.\textsuperscript{80} Carroll also equates the mood of Will Longstaff’s painting \textit{Menin Gate at Midnight} with the \textit{Iliad}, because of the centrality of the funeral in the final two chapters of the epic and the painting.\textsuperscript{81} This may, perhaps, seem a long bow to draw. However, the inherent presence of the classics in the construction of the Anzac myth allows allusions to antiquity to be seen wherever one chooses to look for them.

The ‘Anzac myth’ has been reconstructed countless times over several generations with many of its original features completely obscured by its more recent re-writing and re-telling.\textsuperscript{82} The classical allusions are prevalent in the myth’s early incarnation and therefore form an inherent part of its overall construction. The connections made were not purely because of the geographical location of the Anzac landing, nor were they simply a result of the higher incidence of classical education before 1915. Rather, their presence indicates a desire to

\textsuperscript{81} Carroll, ‘The Blessed Country’, 30.
\textsuperscript{82} Fiona Jean Nicol, \textit{From Diggers to Drag Queens: Configurations of Australian National Identity} (Sydney: Pluto Press, 2001), 6.
connect Australian events with the great stories of Western civilisation. In the retelling of epic stories and incorporation of ancient warriors into the events at Anzac cove, the Australian nation was able to assert itself as part of the greater culture of the West. Australia needed to establish itself as a strong and independent nation and the Gallipoli Campaign provided an event of international acclaim in a location reminiscent of past greatness in which to unite the Australian people, while also contextualising their place in a broader mythical and historical past.

The use of the *Iliad* and the classics in the construction of the Anzac myth was symptomatic of the greater purpose of the narrative for the Australian nation. Rather than rewriting the *Iliad*, this paper has argued that representations of the Anzac campaign utilised the connotations of the mythological tale to compose their own national narrative: the next chapter in the annals of Western civilisation. This new chapter of Australian history is, in the spirit of its composition, the Australian *Iliad*, because it draws parallels between the heroic nature of the protagonists while making geographical and ideological connections to antiquity. The result is a common story that united the Australian people in grief and pride. The story has a martial foundation because pre-war expectations demanded it. However, the inherent classical allusions are present because of a combination of contemporary education and the geographical location of the campaign.

In this paper Homeric epic has been applied to representations of the Gallipoli Campaign as a framework to understand how the ‘Anzac myth’ has managed to sustain its power in Australian ideology since 1915. It has demonstrated that classical allusions were inherent to the story’s continuing significance and reconstruction. Initially it was important that Australians were recognised as competent and virile soldiers, and this was initially achieved through the words of Ashmead-Bartlett. With this international approval, Australians proceeded to compare the achievements of their men with those of the ancient warrior heroes who fought across the strait. This eventually led to the conflation of the two events in rhetoric, while the connection was also exploited in literary and historical accounts. The connections made between the two events were a romantic step over the grief that the campaign had caused; it was also an avoidance of Christianity and a derision of mechanised warfare, which elevated the prowess of the Anzac soldiers and the Australian nation (of which they were representative) above the deterioration of the European world. The Australian nation’s first chapter in the annals of civilised history would mark the coming
of a new race and a new era, one where the youth and heroic attributes of the
Australian people would lead the way to the rise of civilisation after its fall. By
going back to the beginning of Western literature, the ‘Anzac myth’ and the
Australian *Iliad* could incorporate the best of Western civilisation into Austra-
lia’s own national narrative while simultaneously writing themselves into the
historical continuum of the West. This Australian *Iliad*, then, was written with
Europe’s past firmly in sight. However, its significance lies in the elucidation of
Australia’s central part in the future of civilisation.

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