

# What Manner of Men are These? Peter Weir's *Gallipoli* as an Expression of an Australian Civil Religion

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This paper will explore Peter Weir's critically and popularly acclaimed *Gallipoli* (1981) as an expression of an Australian civil religion. Whilst many nations and cultures have produced films conveying religious themes, exploring them in an Australian film should expose elements that are either uniquely Australian and/or demonstrate how they are affected in a peculiarly Australian way. *Gallipoli* is the story of Australia's foundation myth portrayed through the experiences of two young Australians, Archy Hamilton (Mark Lee) and Frank Dunne (Mel Gibson), who enlist to fight for their country in the Great War. Whilst *Gallipoli* is primarily historical and nationalist, it also contains Christian elements of sacrifice and redemption, along with connotations of classic mythology, and devotional expressions of mateship and patriotism. It follows that the key to identifying Australian aspects of religious expression is to discover how Weir uses these expressions to act upon the national psyche. Accordingly, this essay explores the religious and spiritual expressions in *Gallipoli* and evaluates them in context to Australian national identity and the notion of an Australian civil religion and concludes that *Gallipoli* is, of itself, an expression of an Australian civil religion.

It is questionable whether Australia has a civil religion. The World War I historian, C. E. W. Bean, thought so: "Most nations practise, besides their formally acknowledged religion, the cult of some ideal manhood or womanhood."<sup>1</sup> The historical concepts behind civil religion inform the Australian context, particularly those of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Robert N. Bellah, Emile Durkheim, and Rudolf Otto.<sup>2</sup> Rousseau's concept of civil religion is one in which the population could express their patriotism, shared values and beliefs, and perform their civic duty:

The dogmas of civil religion ought to be simple, few in number, precisely fixed, and without explanation or comment. The existence of a powerful, wise, and benevolent Divinity, who foresees and provides the life to come, the happiness of the just, the punishment of the wicked, the sanctity of the social contract and the laws: these are its positive dogmas. Its negative dogmas I would confine to one – intolerance.<sup>3</sup>

In 1967, Bellah argued that American society contained a religious dimension "expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols and rituals that I am calling the American civil religion."<sup>4</sup> Bellah acknowledges Durkheim's belief that all social groups express a religious dimension.<sup>5</sup> Durkheim says:

Men who feel themselves united, partially by bonds of blood, but still more by community of interest and tradition, assemble and become conscious of their moral unity. ... They are led to represent this unity.<sup>6</sup>

Otto's conception of the numinous distinguishes the spiritual element in the practice of civil religion that separates it from the secular. The numinous exists within the human unconscious, separate from the 'holy' and 'sacred' but intrinsic to both. Otto says there is "no religion in which it does not live as the real innermost core, and without it no religion would be worthy of the name."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Inglis: *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, assisted by Jan Brazier, Carlton South, Melbourne University Press, 2005, 458. Inglis also believes the Anzac myth warrants the name 'civil religion', see 471.

<sup>2</sup> Rousseau first coined the term civil religion in a chapter in his seminal political philosophy, *On the Social Contract* (1763). Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, Donald A. Cress (trans.), Indianapolis/Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company, 1987, 96.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>4</sup> Robert N. Bellah: 'Civil Religion in America,' *Daedalus* 134 (4), 2005, 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Joseph Swain (trans.), New York, Collier, 1961, 432.

<sup>7</sup> Rudolf Otto: *The Idea of the Holy*, second edition, John W. Harvey (trans.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979, 6. Ken Inglis, reflecting Otto, argues that Australian civil religion must contain a sense of the Sacred if it is to be called a religion (see Inglis, *op cit.*, 461).

Elsbeth Tilley and Andrew Shanks bring an Australian dimension to the concept of national identity expressed through civil religion. Tilley conceives the national symbolic as a place against which we define our identity through our history, geography and stories "to make it distinct and memorable".<sup>8</sup> Shanks' concept of civil theology, "as the theory proper to the practice of civil religion", expands the concept of civil religion.<sup>9</sup> It is:

an aspect of religious practice. ...[a] discipline coming to terms not only with one's confessional identity, but also with one's class, national, and racial identities with their moral and historical burdens and their relationship with God.<sup>10</sup>

Tilley's secular context and Shanks' theological context are not dichotomous, but represent divergent aspects of the one concept.

The definition of religion is problematic. "Definitions cannot, by their very nature, be either 'true' or 'false', only more useful or less so. For this reason it makes relatively little sense to argue over definitions."<sup>11</sup> This exploration would be hampered by restricting the meaning of religion too precisely. Overall, the approach will be consistent with Berger's attitude to religion as both a social and anthropological phenomenon with the proviso that a sense of Otto's numinous must be present.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, using Berger's context, this construction of Australian civil religion embraces theoretical elements from Rousseau, Bellah, Durkheim and Otto, framed by Shanks and Tilley. It comprises those practices undertaken by society through its civic and social institutions, and its stories and myths, where the numinous distinguishes it from the secular. Ultimately, civil religion can be simply defined as a nation's desire to worship itself.<sup>13</sup>

Civil religion without the numinous is just secular society and could not inspire the heroic expression of civil religion presented by Weir in *Gallipoli*. *Gallipoli* is a manifestation of Weir's 1976 visit to the Gallipoli battlefields. "I had no more than a vague idea of making a film about the Gallipoli campaign, and thought a visit to the location might give me some ideas."<sup>14</sup> After meandering around the site where he "felt like an archaeologist wandering through the ruins of some earlier Australian civilization", Weir was "overwhelmed by an emotion I could partly understand".<sup>15</sup> He had discovered that sense of the numinous the Anzac myth instils in many Australians and draws them in increasing numbers to the Gallipoli shore.<sup>16</sup> In effect, Weir had visited Gallipoli as a tourist, bought into the Anzac myth and returned as a pilgrim with a desire to express it in film.

In a *Cinema Papers* interview, Weir agreed that the title, *Gallipoli*, referred to an idea rather than a place.<sup>17</sup> This reflected Weir's vision of the Anzac myth rather than its historicity, leading to the conclusion that *Gallipoli* explores aspects of Australian civil religion through an

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<sup>8</sup> Elspeth Tilley: *Space, Memory & Power in Australia: The case for No Nation*, Australian & New Zealand Communication Association Conference, July 10-12, 2002, <http://www.bond.edu.au/hss/communication/ANZAC/papers/EtilleyPaper.pdf>, accessed 23 March 2005 (no longer available). The 'national symbolic' is defined by Lauren Berlant as the "political space of a nation" that "is not merely juridical, territorial...genetic...linguistic or experiential, but some tangled cluster of these". (Tilley, citing Lauren Berlant, *Ibid.*)

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Shanks: *Civil Society, Civil Religion*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers Inc, 1995, 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Berger: *The Social Reality of Religion*, Hammondsworth, Penguin University Books, 1973, 177.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 179-180.

<sup>13</sup> This is a nation's expression of Ivan Karamazov's pronouncement in Feodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, (Bk. 5, Chap. 5, 1880): "Man, so long as he remains free, has no more constant and agonizing anxiety than to find as quickly as possible someone to worship."

<sup>14</sup> Peter Weir: 'Gallipoli: The Inspiration', in Bill Gammage and David Williamson, *The Story of Gallipoli*, Ringwood, Penguin Australia, 1981, 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Geraldine Doogue: 'Gallipoli Pilgrimage', *Compass*, presenter Geraldine Doogue, Sunday, 23 April 2006, ABC Television, <http://www.abc.net.au/compass/s1612549.htm>, accessed 14/05/2009.

<sup>17</sup> Peter McFarlane and Tom Ryan: 'Peter Weir: Towards the Centre', *Cinema Papers, September-October, 1981*, reproduced in 'The Peter Weir Cave' by David Nicholson, <http://www.peterweircave.com/articles/articlep.html>, accessed 14/05/2009.

understanding of the origins of the cult of the Anzac that symbolises Australian ideas of nationhood and national identity.<sup>18</sup>

Although *Gallipoli* is grounded in history, Weir's reconstruction of events invokes the Australian stereotype through themes of the outback, the Bushman, mateship, anti-British sentiments and the irreverent larrikin. His reconstruction portrays what had become accepted mythology in the post WW1 years, something that was fading away with the post-WW2 generations and questioned by the anti-Vietnam sentiments of the 1960s and 70s. This period is represented in the contemporary subtext provided by Frank's role as the antithesis of the national character. However, it can be said that by casting Frank as a shiftless Irish-Australian, he is just reinforcing a Protestant stereotype. Bill Gammage's *The Broken Years* (1974) and C.E.W. Bean's *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918* (1921-1942) provided the basis for the script. *The Broken Years* provided many of the accounts Weir and screenwriter, David Williamson, used to characterise the cast. Bean's reports from Gallipoli as Australia's official war correspondent and his official histories are said to have formulated the legend.<sup>19</sup> Gammage imbues the legend with the concept of sacrifice and innocence betrayed. Gammage differs from Bean in that *The Broken Years* is a tragedy, whereas Bean's *Official History* is an epic.<sup>20</sup> *Gallipoli* adopts Gammage's theme and is presented as a tragedy, rather than an epic. It also differs from Bean in that Gammage's anti-British sentiments, present in *The Broken Years*, were adopted and accentuated by Weir, reflecting the continuance of populist anti-British sentiment.

Weir's direction reflects a personal involvement in his films that he is not always conscious of, but considers important; "that kind of connection with a story is important for me; a feeling that it is somehow part of me..."<sup>21</sup> For example, Frank receives a parcel from home containing "soap, ointment, lavender water, um... talcum powder, Eno's fruit salts..."<sup>22</sup> These recall items Weir discovered on his revelatory trip to Gallipoli: "In Shrapnel Gully – [I picked up] an unbroken bottle of Eno's fruit salts..."<sup>23</sup> This connects Weir directly to the film and to Frank. Frank is an expression of the anti-war sentiments of the film, giving rise to speculation that Frank is also an image of Weir. Frank's character as one fearful of war is out of character to the man of the myth, the polar opposite to Archy's innocent, sacrificial, heroism. Where Frank is the cynical hindsight of those who would come to condemn Anzac, Archy is the mythical prototype of those who venerate it. Together they represent the opposing views of Weir's generation that questioned the value of the Anzac myth in light of the experience of the Vietnam War.

*Gallipoli's* linear narrative is told in three acts, Australia, Egypt and Turkey, through the linking theme of the desert that gives the film a surrealistic sense.<sup>24</sup> The narrative style is reminiscent of earlier iconic Australian films, notably Charles Chauvel's *40,000 Horsemen* (1941), and shares with Harry Watt's *The Overlanders* (1946) its breadth of scope and its depiction of the national character combating the unique Australian landscape.<sup>25</sup> These films depict the development of the national character that Russel Ward says was embodied in the drovers, stockmen, shearers and other pastoral workers of the nineteenth century, reflecting

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<sup>18</sup> Inglis, *op cit.*, 2. Inglis believes the "cult of Anzac warrants the name of civil religion..." (see p. 471)

<sup>19</sup> Bill Gammage: 'Anzac' in John Carroll (ed.), *Intruders in the Bush, the Australian Quest for Identity*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1982, 63. Gammage says Bean "more than anyone, gave the Anzac tradition substance and direction." *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Inglis, *op cit.*, 439.

<sup>21</sup> McFarlane and Ryan, *op cit.*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> David Williamson: 'Gallipoli: The Screenplay', in Bill Gammage and David Williamson, *The Story of Gallipoli*, Ringwood, Penguin Australia, 1981, 135.

<sup>23</sup> Weir, in Gammage & Williamson, *op cit.*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> The scenes of Archy and Frank walking across the salt lake; the mock battle in the dunes of Egypt as children try to sell them oranges; the many scenes at Gallipoli such as soldiers calmly walking about as they are being shelled, combine to present a surreal depiction of people out of place in their environment.

<sup>25</sup> *Gallipoli*, like *40,000 Horsemen*, is also set in the desert and depicts war as a foundation for mateship, however *40,000 Horsemen* is an epic rather than a tragedy (Inglis, *op cit.*, 440). *The Overlanders*, like *Gallipoli's* Australian scenes show the developing influence of the land on the national type; the drover and stockman.

the evolution of the Australian character.<sup>26</sup> However, Weir extends these earlier narratives and translates the Australian 'type' into the mythological Anzac, concurring with Weir's belief that myths are a way of explaining the unexplainable and invoking the numinous that inculcates the Anzac myth.<sup>27</sup>

Weir and Williamson combine to frame Australia's foundational myth as an expression of civil religion much in the same way that Tilley and Shanks framed the earlier theoretical discussion of civil religion. Gammage noted the difficulty in translating this to film alluding to the contentious nature of the Anzac story in the Australian psyche as it journeyed into myth.<sup>28</sup> By the late nineteen-fifties, attitudes towards the Anzac legend had become divisive. This period spawned Alan Seymour's play 'The One Day of the Year' which argued "the essential hollowness of the Anzac Day maunderings" across three generations of Australians.<sup>29</sup> These attitudes continued into the sixties and seventies, fuelled by the anti-war sentiment towards Australia's participation in America's Vietnam crusade. The seventies was the gestation period for *Gallipoli*. "He [Weir] wanted to understand it, but only recently has a middle course opened up between those who defend and those who condemn Anzac."<sup>30</sup> In hindsight, *Gallipoli* visualised the spiritual reawakening of the Anzac myth in Australian society. It may be argued that *Gallipoli*'s popularity is indicative of its effect as an instigator of this spiritual reawakening, but Gary Bouma's view that secular society was seeking the spiritual outside the established religious organisations and found it in other expressions, such as Anzac, is persuasive and therefore *Gallipoli* can best be considered a timely visualisation.

I think what's happening is that in the secular society the religious and the spiritual has moved out from the control of the churches, synagogues, mosques, and other official religious organisations, and it's quite alive and bubbling away out there. ... Same thing's happening to Anzac. I mean, that's growing, and it's another kind of very foundational spiritual exercise.<sup>31</sup>

The film's backgrounding is historical but its foregrounding depicting the Anzacs' journey into myth through the mateship of two young Australians is fictional designed in part to reinforce the anti-British attitude that inculcates the Australian psyche. It is a revisionist re-creation of the national myth that provides a positive contemporary understanding of the myth's evolution whilst avoiding its contentious history.<sup>32</sup> *Gallipoli* is not an exploration of its history, but the effect on national identity through its spirituality learnt through Archy and his comrades, demonstrating religious expression through film and nationhood. "Weir's attempt to pinpoint the type of men who went to the war becomes a mythic exploration of the country that produced them."<sup>33</sup> *Gallipoli* was a timely expression of the coming relevance of the myth to a new generation of Australians, visualising the spiritual reawakening of the Anzac myth in the national symbolic.

Spiritual expression in *Gallipoli* is apparent from the opening preface: "It's not the arriving at one's destination but the journey that matters."<sup>34</sup> This signifies the direction the film takes, becoming a story "more about the journey than the destination, about people rather than events."<sup>35</sup> The Australian scenes establish the heroes' character as a set of polarities between country and city, individualism and mateship, bravery and fear "embodying perceptions and interpretations of the Anzac myth."<sup>36</sup> The first reflects C. E. W. Bean's view

<sup>26</sup> Russel Ward: *The Australian Legend*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1958, 2.

<sup>27</sup> McFarlane and Ryan, *op cit.*, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Bill Gammage: 'Gallipoli: The Anzac Experience', in Bill Gammage and David Williamson, *The Story of Gallipoli*, Ringwood, Penguin Australia, 1981, 8. Bill Gammage was military adviser on *Gallipoli*.

<sup>29</sup> Alan Seymour: *The One Day of The Year*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1962, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Gammage, in Gammage & Williamson, *op cit.*, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Gary Bouma: 'Panel discuss Christianity, multiculturalism in Australian society', AM, presented by Caroline Jackson, ABC Radio, Saturday, 26 March 2005, ABC Online, <http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2005/s1331891.htm>, accessed 14/05/2009.

<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Rayner: *Contemporary Australian Cinema*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000, 116.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>34</sup> Attributed in the film as a "Chinese Proverb". It appears in the DVD rental version prior to the menu.

<sup>35</sup> Weir, in Gammage & Williamson, *op cit.*, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Rayner, *op cit.*, 113. Rayner uses the term "cowardly" rather than fear. However, while Frank demonstrates fear, his cowardice is never established.

that rural Australians were better soldiers than city Australians.<sup>37</sup> The themes of rugged individualism and mateship that are integral to the national myth are apparent in both heroes. The Australian General, Sir John Monash, expounded these traits, saying, “the Australian Army is proof that individualism is the best and not the worst foundation upon which to build up collective discipline.”<sup>38</sup> Archy is from the bush and represents youthful exuberance and naïve innocence, eager to join his mates in the great adventure of war. He is an allegory for the young Australian nation, longing for the great adventure of mateship that represents the nation’s need to prove itself to those that gave it birth. Archy’s journey into manhood is Australia’s right of passage into nationhood. In contrast, Frank is urban and worldly. His dark cynicism and unwillingness to enlist stand in contrast to Archy’s blond innocence.<sup>39</sup> Frank enlists for reasons of post-war advancement, yet he too will submit to the cult of mateship. Frank’s role is to bear witness to the futile heroism of the Australian experience. He is the survivor who returns to tell the tale and invoke the myth.

The mateship theme is demonstrated in the Egyptian scenes when Frank and Archy consecrate their friendship with a race to the top of the pyramids. This transforming event echoes their original meeting in a foot race back in Australia, and is symbolic of the journeys that reunited them. They cement their friendship in a traditional Australian ritual, the defacing of an historical artefact, as they carve their names into the pyramid, “Frank and Archy, A.I.F., 1915”.<sup>40</sup> The ritual is completed with an echoing “cooee” across the pyramids. From former antagonists they have cemented a bond that is to sustain them in their trials ahead.

In the Gallipoli scenes, when the troops learn they are going into battle, Archy has the opportunity to avoid battle by becoming a runner for Major Barton. Archy complains that: “I’ve come a long way to be in this. I don’t want to miss out now”.<sup>41</sup> He instead offers Frank as a runner in his place. On the face of it, Archy can be seen as just offering up Frank in order to pursue his own (fatal) ambition. However, a closer examination of this scene reveals it as the ultimate expression of mateship. “But mateship was a particular Australian virtue, a creed, almost a religion. Men lived by it. ... They died by it and it could become their finest epitaph.”<sup>42</sup> Archy feels responsible for Frank’s reluctant enlistment and tries to help Frank, understanding his fear.

ARCHY: I’m the one who really got him into this. He wanted to start a bike shop.

BARTON: Is he scared?

ARCHY: No sir... well just a little bit <sup>43</sup>

This wonderfully subtle, and distinctively Australian, expression of sacrifice positions their mateship, as Rayner puts it, “to emphasise the national significance of their sacrificial role.”<sup>44</sup> When Frank is told he is “off the hook”, he knows it is Archy who has arranged it. Another ritual is enacted with a reversal of voices recalling the time when they parted after their dual enlistment failed:

ARCHY: Half your luck. Mahleesh – fate.

FRANK: Yeah.

FRANK: Well, I’ll see you when I see you.

ARCHY: Not if I see you first <sup>45</sup>

Both know this is unlikely. The scene’s significance is in the way it is underplayed. The language gives nothing away. There is no physical contact beyond a handshake for to show more emotion would be unmanly, un-Australian. The emotion is in the facial expressions. The relationship between Archy and Frank is emblematic of the concept of mateship that is integral to the Australian psyche.

<sup>37</sup> Richard White: *Inventing Australia*, Sydney, George Allen and Unwin, 1981, 132.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-134.

<sup>39</sup> Rayner, *op. cit.*, 113.

<sup>40</sup> Williamson, in Gammage & Williamson, *op. cit.*, 126.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 138

<sup>42</sup> Gammage, in Gammage and Williamson, *op. cit.*, 57.

<sup>43</sup> Williamson, in Gammage & Williamson, *op. cit.*, 138.

<sup>44</sup> Rayner, *op. cit.*, 113.

<sup>45</sup> Williamson, in Gammage & Williamson, *op. cit.*, 139.

The Gallipoli myth, as Weir said, is about the men who went. The ancient myths had heroes, preferably immortal, sustained by a sacred cult. Weir appears conscious of this, drawing on classical mythology to root the Anzac myth into classical myth by creating an immortal hero upon whom to centre a cult. It has connotations to Virgil's *Aeneid*. Virgil used Greek mythology to provide the heroic and divine links to create a foundation myth to justify the Roman people and Empire. Archy is first encountered in the desert; he is an athlete, a runner, being coached by his Uncle Jack. He runs for personal glory, characteristics akin to the vainglorious heroes of mythology: "His apparent destiny to represent his country at the Olympics."<sup>46</sup> Archy is not a recreation of any particular Greek hero, but a reflection of Uncle Jack, Archy's mentor, who imparts the Heroic values of personal glory onto Archy, but in his heart is a nobler cause, a higher sense of duty toward his country and nation.<sup>47</sup> Williamson's sparse script differentiates Archy's higher cause from Uncle Jack's: "Running is not all there is to life."<sup>48</sup> In this, he reflects the next evolution of the hero. In the *Aeneid*, Virgil connected his hero, Aeneas, to the Homeric Hero, Herakles (Hercules), but gave him Roman values of piety and duty to his people. Like the mythical heroes, Archy must undertake a journey though hell before becoming immortalised in death and, like all good mentors, Uncle Jack provides Archy the sacred weapon he will need to face death. Aeneas had his shield, and Archy had his mantra.

UNCLE JACK: What are your legs?

ARCHY: Springs. Steel springs.

UNCLE JACK: What are they going to do?

ARCHY: Hurl me down the track!

UNCLE JACK: How fast *can* you run?

ARCHY: As fast as a leopard.

UNCLE JACK: How fast *are* you going to run?

ARCHY: As fast as a leopard.

UNCLE JACK: Then let's see you *do* it.<sup>49</sup>

Uncle Jack's depiction as mentor is central, because "he is the one who guides the hero through hell."<sup>50</sup> Thus, Archy is characteristic of the heroes of classical mythology and by the end of his journey, like the greatest of the heroes, is immortalised in death.

Mythological associations continue with Weir's portrayal of Archy and Frank landing at Gallipoli, symbolising the crossing of the River Styx into the Underworld. Its likening to a "ghostly funfair" is inspired by historical record, but its depiction also reflects Weir's affection for the surrealism of Salvador Dali.<sup>51</sup> This descent into hell, from the confidence and optimism for the utopian future of the new nation of Australia into the apocalyptic dystopia of Gallipoli, signifies the psychological effect the Great War had on western societies.<sup>52</sup> Melvyn Bendle describes this transformation as "a Promethean faith in human self-determination to an Augustinian conviction of human sinfulness and weakness."<sup>53</sup>

Weir uses myth to cope with otherwise unexplainable themes.<sup>54</sup> *Gallipoli* can be seen in this light as part of a wider movement towards remembering our stories in film:

[Myths] are an essential part of civilisation and it's [sic] given us particular problems as displaced Europeans who chose, for some extraordinary reasons, to leave our myths behind. I think our films in this period are, at

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<sup>46</sup> Rayner, *op cit.*, 114.

<sup>47</sup> In his youth, Uncle Jack had run away from home seeking travel and adventure. Williamson, in Gammage and Williamson, *op. cit.*, 93. This is imbued in Archy and is reminiscent of the journeys of Jason and Odysseus in the Homeric epics.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>50</sup> Antonio Sanchez-Escalonilla: 'The Hero as a Visitor in Hell: The Descent into Death in Film Structure', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, January 2005, 153.

<sup>51</sup> Rayner, *op. cit.*, 133. McFarlane and Ryan cite Evan Williams, of *The Australian*, as the originator of the depiction "ghostly funfair". Weir agreed with the depiction. McFarlane and Ryan, *op cit.*, 6.

<sup>52</sup> Melvyn Bendle: 'The Apocalyptic Imagination and Popular Culture'. *Journal of Film and Popular Culture*, Volume XI: Fall 2005.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>54</sup> McFarlane and Ryan, *op cit.*, 6.

times, an attempt to rediscover them or to reinvigorate them or even to create them, as the Americans have done.<sup>55</sup>

The allusion to classical mythology is visualised in the recruitment scene following Archy's defeat of Frank in the footrace. "A lone drummer walks past as men of the Light Horse ride by pulling a large wooden horse."<sup>56</sup> The wooden horse is constructed to resemble the Trojan horse. This provides another link to ancient mythology in two ways. First, Troy is believed to be in Turkey, on the coast not far from Gallipoli. The tale of the Trojan War in Homer's *The Iliad* tells of a time when the Greek states formed an alliance to attack and destroy Troy, just as later, Britain and her allies were to do. The Greeks found the walls of Troy to be impenetrable, and so the cliffs of Gallipoli proved to be. The analogy differs only in that Troy was to fall to trickery whereas Britain and her allies returned home defeated. Defeat is anathema to a foundation myth, but tragedy is not. Many Anzacs were mortified that they were to leave without victory. "Australians absolved themselves from any blame for their defeat, but they suffered it with the rest, and they felt the disgrace keenly."<sup>57</sup> In some ways, the anti-British sentiments coming out of the Gallipoli campaign rationalises the acute sense of loss and defeat, "we all feel extreme disgust at K[itcheener]'s army..."<sup>58</sup> For the proud Australians, the unbearable defeat at Gallipoli was transformed into the heroic tragedy that is the focus of *Gallipoli*. As one veteran, invoking the numinous, aptly put it; "the thought of having to leave these sacred spots to the mercy of the enemy made the spirit of the men revolt and cry out in anguish at the thought of it."<sup>59</sup>

Weir's direction visualizes the numinous in the Anzac myth. His depiction of the attack on Lone Pine demonstrates the way he does this.<sup>60</sup> He eschews using graphic depictions of carnage, reflecting his belief that "the more you show, the less real it becomes."<sup>61</sup> Instead, only the sounds of battle are heard, machineguns and men dying, as a lone soldier stands in a cemetery among the crosses of the dead. It is the most poignant moment in the film and one that marks a change in direction for the protagonists. The adventure is over and only the war remains. This is the point of Archy's climactic run.

Archy's run is transformative, signifying the metamorphosis of the individualistic loner of colonial times into the national archetype. Archy achieves a dual immortality, echoing both the veneration of the Hero and the crucifixion of Christ. As the third wave prepares its suicidal charge, soldiers are depicted making their peace with God, writing out last wills, leaving behind personal belongings and reciting prayers. Archy also makes his final preparations. It is not a Christian prayer that fortifies him, but Uncle Jack's mantra that signifies his pursuit of personal glory.<sup>62</sup> The signal is given; the soldiers go 'over the top', and are instantaneously cut down. Archy is shown running - the last man - his gun is gone and he is sprinting as if in a race. Three things occur simultaneously. The sound of a machine gun heralds the end of Archy's mortality and the beginning of the immortality of the Anzac legend. Blood blossoms over Archy's shirt, symbolising the blood sacrifice required to enter nationhood, a metaphor for the nation's loss of innocence as the country faces the loss of its sons. As he dies, Archy throws out his arms "as though he has just breasted an invisible tape", but it is more than that.<sup>63</sup> Archy's ending reflects both classical mythology and Christian metaphor. "More precisely, the foregrounding of religious imagery and allusion suggests the symbiosis between religion and patriotism in the formation of national myth."<sup>64</sup> Classically, Archy begins his run as a hero. Heroes are mortal. "Only after death can the hero receive immortalisation

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 6

<sup>56</sup> Williamson, in Gammage and Williamson, *op. cit.*, 100.

<sup>57</sup> Gammage, in Gammage and Williamson, *op. cit.*, 65.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 65. Gammage cites Lt. Armitage.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 64. Gammage cites Pte. A. L. Smith, 25. Pte. Smith was killed in action in France, 1916.

<sup>60</sup> Whether he succeeds is arguable. Weir seems to be aware of this when he refers to similar aspects of *The Last Wave* (1979), saying his interest lay "in coming close to something and failing to achieve it". McFarlane and Ryan, *op. cit.*, 6.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>62</sup> Williamson, in Gammage and Williamson, *op. cit.*, 145.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>64</sup> Rayner, *op. cit.*, 123.

in cult and song.”<sup>65</sup> By invoking the mythological connection with Archy’s death, Weir has made his run an allegory for the creation of the cult of Anzac. Christian metaphor is present as Archy dies with his arms outstretched, his cruciform pose suggesting sacrifice and redemption. His sacrificial death redeems Frank, and on a higher plane, he dies so that others may live.<sup>66</sup> Weir uses the freeze-frame to visualise a moment in time that idealises the Anzac myth. Archy begins his run as a mortal, but the mythological connection and motifs of sacrifice and redemption become a veneration of the cult of Anzac. Archy departs the mortal reality of Gallipoli and enters the immortality of myth. *Gallipoli* then, is a continued mythologising of the Anzac legend, but as Ann Curthoys says, “it is a story about Australian identity, sacrifice and mateship ... inescapably a male story”, raising the question as to what extent the Anzac legend can be the core of a national civil religion or is just an Anglo-Celtic white man Dreaming.<sup>67</sup>

According to the 2001 census data, approximately forty percent of Australians were born overseas, or had one or both parents born overseas, inferring that a significant number of Australians are distanced from the cultural, generational and familial connections much of the population shares with the Anzac myth.<sup>68</sup> Therefore it can be argued that because of its essentially Anglo-Celtic colonial heritage, the Anzac myth is a form of ‘white man Dreaming’ that is not sufficiently cross-cultural in its scope to act as a unifying myth in an Australian national religion. Countered against that argument is the ever-increasing number of Australians buying into the myth. In 1998, former Governor-General, Sir William Deane, linked the Anzac story to his passion for multiculturalism. For Deane, Anzac established an “ethos that declared that the respect owed to a man or woman was determined not by creed or colour, class or condition but by their actions, their decency, their loyalty, their courage and their resolve.”<sup>69</sup>

Anzac Day observance is growing and deepening in meaning. Writer, David Malouf, himself of Lebanese descent, noted the evolution of Anzac Day in the public consciousness. “Anzac Day as an idea has expanded out of the hands of the original owners, the Diggers, the RSL, into general ownership, where we have remade it in our own terms...”<sup>70</sup> Malouf put this history into a future context. “The fact that Anzac Day is now in the hands of Australians at large ... means that what it is now is not what it is likely to be in fifty or even twenty years from now.”<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, *Gallipoli* does not depict Deane’s tenuous connection to an inclusive Australian multicultural policy. The closest it comes is by including Frank’s Irish Catholic heritage, albeit a far from complimentary image. Malouf’s portrayal of Anzac Day’s continuing development does not acknowledge any multicultural aspects but it does provide the possibility of greater inclusiveness as observance of the day changes according to the needs of the people.

The Australian concept of civil religion in this essay is contextualised as ‘an’ Australian civil religion, specifically because of the worthy argument that a religion centred about the cult of the Anzac is a form of ‘white man Dreaming’. If Australians can practice a variety of religions

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<sup>65</sup> Gregory Nagy: ‘Concept of the Hero’, *Rediscovering Homer: Poetry and Performance*, Alumni College, Harvard University, 2000, [http://athome.harvard.edu/programs/nagy/threads/concept\\_of\\_hero.html](http://athome.harvard.edu/programs/nagy/threads/concept_of_hero.html), accessed 14/05/2009.

<sup>66</sup> Frank’s run to stop the charge of Archy’s third wave, twice exposed to Turkish machine gun fire, is an act of bravery. In effect, Archy’s sacrifice allows Frank to overcome his fear and redeem himself. Note that both men finish as they met – running.

<sup>67</sup> Ann Curthoys: ‘Whose Home? Expulsion, Exodus and Exile in White Australian Historical Mythology,’ *Journal of Australian Studies* 61, 1999. The origin of the phrase “white man Dreaming” probably derives from the title of W.E. Stanner’s *White Man got no Dreaming: Essays, 1938-1973*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1979. Inglis also cites writer Barry Oakley saying “it [Anzac] is the nearest we have to a Dreaming”. Inglis, *op. cit.*, 459.

<sup>68</sup> Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs: *The People of Australia, Statistics from the 2001 Census*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2003. [http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/people\\_of\\_australia.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/people_of_australia.pdf), accessed 5/08/2006 (no longer available). Additionally, 2.2 percent of the population are classified as Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islanders.

<sup>69</sup> Tony Stephens: *Sir William Deane, the Things that Matter*, Sydney, Hodder, 2002, 142.

<sup>70</sup> David Malouf: ‘The One Day’, in Peter Craven (ed.), *Best Australian Essays 2003*, Melbourne, Black Inc, 2003, 104.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 106

within a cohesive, religiously diverse, nation then it does not hold that a civil religion must be embraced by all Australians. It can be countered that for a civil religion to be justifiably national, it does not have to include every social strata, culture, or subculture, but only that of the dominant group. Richard White's assertion that images of national identity are influenced by those wielding economic power is pertinent. "The most influential images are those which serve the interests of a broader ruling class..."<sup>72</sup> In this case, the ruling class are the dominant white Anglo-Celtic majority that venerated the Anzac legend. If civil religion can be defined as the religious dimension of a society interpreted through historical experience then a civil religion does not have to be completely inclusive as long as it reflects the values the nation expresses through its government, laws, social, political and legal institutions.<sup>73</sup> It may also be that those outside the dominant group are still participating in a secular sense if Phillip E. Hammond's view of Durkheim's civil religion, "understood to mean that, to the degree a collection of people is a society, it will express a common ("civil") religion" is considered.<sup>74</sup> Ultimately, Australians will shape the myth according to their own values. Paul Kelly, in *100 Years*, noted the myth's capacity to be relevant to successive generations.

The Anzac story has revealed a capacity for renewal and self-reflection that transcends generations. Neither a glorification of war nor the monopoly of those who lived it, Anzac has become a spiritual force for inspiration and unity. It is interpreted and reinterpreted by each generation in turn. It is why 25 April and not 26 January is the true national day.<sup>75</sup>

Whether the myth continues to represent the values of the dominant group, or Weir's vision as portrayed in *Gallipoli*, Kelly is correct that its spirituality will continue to inspire and unite the Australian people.

Spirituality is also expressed in the film's score. Weir juxtaposes classical and contemporary music in a way that reflects the forward thrust of historical events into contemporary myth. Albinoni's funereal 'Adagio for Organ and Strings in G Minor' appears as a harbinger at key moments in the film. It accompanies the stark opening titles to create a sense of impending doom, then underscores the tense, surrealistic night-landing scenes, heralds Archy's fatal charge and, as the cast credits scroll like a Roll of Honour, returns to mourn Archy's sad fate. 'Adagio', Albinoni's most famous work, was reconstructed in 1945 by Remo Giazotto from six bars discovered in a fragment of another work.<sup>76</sup> This reconstruction of a whole piece from historical fragments is suggestive of the approach Weir has taken to the Gallipoli legend. Weir has included a number of historical fragments, such as newspaper cuttings, battlefield relics like the bottle of Eno's salts, along with personal histories of those involved to reconstruct an event that has strong historical connections but is, in the end, the product of an imagined reality informed by contemporary attitudes and personal experience.

A modern contrast to 'Adagio' is Jean-Michel Jarre's 'Oxygene', featured in the running scenes. 'Oxygene' was a significant advance in the development of electronic music, moving away from the sterile, robotic sounds and novel reinterpretations of other composers, to one where the music is laid out like a classical composition. It represents a modern reconstruction of a classical music form, much as *Gallipoli* itself is a modern reconstruction of historical events. In one sense, 'Oxygene' intrudes to foreground the score over the action that Rayner says, "stresses that Weir's film offers a modern perspective on past events."<sup>77</sup> However, its use only in the running scenes suggests a musical interpretation of the Chinese proverb that opens the film - it is the journey that matters. The running motif begins in the Australian desert and ends at Gallipoli. Combined with the modern music, it suggests a story that begins in history and ends in modernity.

In conclusion, Australian civil religion evokes motifs of war, sacrifice, mateship and nationhood, with a sense of the numinous in its practice. At its core is the sacralisation of the

<sup>72</sup> Richard White: *Inventing Australia*, Sydney, George Allen and Unwin, 1981, ix.

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, Robert Bellah: *The Broken Covenant*, New York, Seabury Press, 1975, 3.

<sup>74</sup> Phillip E. Hammond: 'The Development of Civil Religion' in Robert N. Bellah and Phillip E. Hammond (eds.), *Varieties of Civil Religion*, San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1980, 139.

<sup>75</sup> Paul Kelly: *100 Years, the Australian Story*, Crows Nest, Allen & Unwin, 2001, 11.

<sup>76</sup> Musica.co.uk, 'Albinoni Adagio', [www.musica.co.uk/recordingsusa/albinoniadagio.htm](http://www.musica.co.uk/recordingsusa/albinoniadagio.htm), accessed 14/05/2009.

<sup>77</sup> Rayner, *op. cit.*, 115-116.

Anzac myth that is an important component of the national and cultural identity. Peter Weir's *Gallipoli* is an expression of Australian civil religion that, although based largely on historical fact, is essentially a spiritual representation of Weir's pilgrimage to Gallipoli in 1976. When *Gallipoli* was released in 1981, it signified the passing of the legend into myth following a controversial period underscored by the Vietnam War and the anti-war movement. Despite this contentious evolution, the Anzac myth is becoming increasingly relevant to the population, particularly young Australians as they search for an identity outside organised religion. Weir is conscious of the role of myth in history and draws on a variety of sources to portray Australia's foundation myth. Weir was inspired by C. E. W. Bean, who was instrumental in the establishment of the cult of the Anzac, and Bill Gammage, who contributed much of the history and factual stories the writers used. Weir draws on classical mythology and Christian metaphor to enrich the story, but the most prevalent influence is the myth itself as it has developed in the national symbolic. Albinoni's reconstructed 'Adagio' is suggestive of Weir's reconstruction of history as myth, and when contrasted with Jarre's 'Oxygene', implies a story that begins in history and ends in modernity. Ultimately, *Gallipoli* demonstrates the combination of themes that inculcate Australia's charter myth, evoking the hero cults of classical mythology, Christian metaphors of sacrifice and redemption, and Australian virtues of mateship, sacrifice and nationhood, portraying a vision of the Anzac myth as the core expression of an Australian civil religion.