

# SACRED AUSTRALIA

POST-SECULAR CONSIDERATIONS



EDITED BY MAKARAND PARANJAPE

'... a fascinating mix of personal encounter and scholarly meditation.'—PAUL SHARRAD

SACRED AUSTRALIA A

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To

Vin D'Cruz (1933-2008)

co-author (with Richard Steele) of *Australia's Ambivalence  
Towards Asia: Politics, Neo/Post-colonialism, and Fact/Fiction*

and

Vijay C. Mishra

co-author (with Bob Hodge) of *Dark Side of the Dream :  
Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind*

two outstanding scholars of Indian origin  
who have loved, lived in, and contributed immensely to an  
understanding of Australia

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ANZAC: THE SACRED IN THE SECULAR<sup>1</sup>

Graham Seal

The sacred is commonsensically defined as that which is held by many to be inviolable, sacrosanct through reverence for a particular imputed significance. But as a recent consideration of the subject suggested (Burns Coleman & White 2006), it is still an often-vague concept, applied by all sorts of people to all sorts of places, states, experiences and concepts. In Australia, the conceptual complex of history, folklore, commemoration and place known as 'Anzac' is a talismanic mythology powerfully associated with dominant concepts of nation and cultural identity. Anzac is routinely referred to in the media, by politicians and public servants, in the tourism business and on the World Wide Web as 'sacred'. But despite this sacralisation Anzac is, in contrast with the rendering of national commemorative ideals in other countries, light with signifiers of standard religious rhetoric, observance and dogma. Instead, this characteristically Australian mode of public observance and the considerable state and military apparatus and popular sentiment that surrounds it has been invested with the sacred through the concept of nation rather than through religion. While we embrace the notion and the power of the sacred in Anzac, we mostly refuse its religious dimensions. This ambivalent situation is characteristic of Australian mythologising. It can be seen in both the tangible and intangible representations and expressions of Anzac, in the history of the term and its uses, in the folklore, rhetoric and rituals associated with Anzac and Anzac Day, and in memorials that commemorate and focus these many meanings.

The historian Ken Inglis drew attention many years ago to the sacralisation of the secular that has taken place as an important aspect of Anzac (Inglis 1965, 1970). He has continued this approach, most notably in a well-

<sup>1</sup> This paper appeared in a slightly different form as 'ANZAC: The Sacred in the Secular', *Journal of Australian Studies* 91, 2007.

known study of war memorials and their significance, *Sacred Places* (Inglis 1998). Inglis initially began researching and writing at a time when Anzac and its observance was subject to widespread disinterest and at times trenchant criticism from a generation brought up on the notion 'make love not war'. But since then, and particularly over the last fifteen years or so, there has been a strong swing back towards the popular observance of Anzac Day, not only in Australia but also in such originary locations as Gallipoli and the Western Front, on the Kokoda Track and at Long Tan. The Australian War Memorial regularly attracts the largest number of visitors of any tourist attraction in the country and the numbers of Australians and New Zealanders, especially the young, cramming the restricted area of the Gallipoli landings has become a major concern of both the Australian and Turkish governments (Scates 2006). This recrudescence of interest has only served to emphasise the strongly secular nature of Anzac and its centrality to widespread notions of Australian nationalism.

## THE SACRED AND MYTHOLOGISATION

The sacralisation of the secular is one important element of the larger mythologisation of Anzac, which also involves the folkloric stereotype of the digger and the political-military imperatives of successive national governments. Like all cultural constructs, Anzac is a conflation of history and myth. The history is that of Australia at war from 1914 and over subsequent conflicts. The myth involves more complex and older processes of the romanticised pioneering experience of the mainly nineteenth century, political and military imperatives, popular notions of national identity and the central role of the larrikin digger.

The general shape of the mythologisation process is a familiar one that can be briefly outlined. An event, or events, occurs which is invested with unusual, in this case national, significance. The event and its aftermath are the subject of not only historical scrutiny and discussion but also of politicisation, romanticisation and folklorisation, drawing both on pre-existing cultural elements and perceptions as well as the real or imagined aspects of the originary event. As the confluence of history and myth endures it is further strengthened—in this case by its observance each Anzac Day; and by iteration of its establishing circumstances—in this case in a subsequent world war and a number of other conflicts including Korea, Malaya and, most notably it now

turns out, Vietnam. Because of its growing power, this mythologisation also draws into itself disparate, sometimes antagonistic elements and players in the cultural script produced. In the case of Anzac, these players include children, women and even old enemies.

The ability of a mythology to continually renew itself in this way is an infallible sign of its health—that is, its propensity to retain significance (not necessarily the same significance) for large numbers of groups and individuals within the community that originates and maintains it. There are early indications that Anzac is absorbing, if controversially, the commemoration of the civilian victims of the Bali bombings through the adoption of the Dawn Service observance for the annual remembrance activities. Whatever the ultimate role of such latter elements in Anzac, the mythology has rarely been stronger in the Australian community, except perhaps during and immediately after the two World Wars.

This mythological sacralisation of the secular involves a number of rhetorical, iconographic, ritual and textual elements interacting with the motivating imperatives of national identity to create 'Anzac' as we currently understand it.

#### ANZAC—FROM ACRONYM TO ICON

The term 'Anzac' was originally the acronym 'ANZAC'<sup>2</sup> derived from the telegraphic code for 'Australian and New Zealand Army Corps'. As with the origins of most significant terms, and in keeping with its mythologisation, the term—like 'digger', another iconic element of Anzac—has a contested etymology. What is certain, though, is that the word was sufficiently deployed in the vernacular of the First AIF to be applied to the area of the Turkish coast where Australian and New Zealand forces landed on 25 April 1915. It was immediately taken up at Gallipoli and the neologism quickly became a widely used term, at first in the speech of the 'Anzacs' themselves, and then in the broader Australian population. So rapidly did the word diffuse and so quickly did it attain its powerful charge of nation that the Australian government moved rapidly to enshrine its usage in law and so protect it from everyday use, effectively imbuing it with a special status that further impelled its ascent to the

<sup>2</sup> Properly, the acronym of the telegraphic address should be 'ANZAC' and other uses of the term as simply 'Anzac'. This is how the terms are used here, though usage elsewhere is extremely varied.

sacred. From 1 July 1916, a regulation was enacted that forbade the use of the term 'Anzac', or anything resembling it, 'in connection with any trade, business, calling or profession ...' (Gammage 1990, p. 3). The 28 July edition of the *Anzac Bulletin* for the same year noted that a Senator Lynch had recently proposed changing the name of the nation's proposed capital to 'Anzac' (*Anzac Bulletin*, No.9, 1916, p. 2). On 20 October 1916, the War Precautions Act was proclaimed. Part of the Act forbade the use of ANZAC, or any words resembling ANZAC, as the name, or part-name, of any private residence, boat, vehicle, or charitable or other institution. The penalty for so doing was a fine of one hundred pounds or six months imprisonment (*Anzac Bulletin*, No. 62, 1916). The decidedly secular processes of parliamentary government were employed to protect and sanctify the word and the powerful notions of sacrifice, commemoration and nation that it denoted and connoted. As early as December 1915 the Melbourne *Argus* quoted an army officer referring to Gallipoli and Anzac as 'sacred' and the term was being routinely applied by 1916 (Ziino 2006, pp. 1,161). Thus the word and its significations were given sacred status at both the folkloric and the formal levels of Australian society at a very early moment in the history of 'Anzac'.

The rhetoric that came very quickly to be the standard evocation of Anzac—and continues to be so—also contributed to the sacred status of the term. The 'Anzac spirit' or 'the Anzac legend' (a word originally meaning a story of a saint's life) were and are commonly used intensifiers that connote the sacred through privileging of the secular qualities associated with Anzac and the broader concepts of national identity, while avoiding or marginalising the explicitly religious. Other terms that were early applied to and continue to be deployed in relation to Gallipoli and Anzac include 'pilgrimage', 'spirit', 'legend' and, at a slightly further level of connotation, 'ritual' and (controversially outside academia) 'myth'. It is also common to read or hear the word 'sacrilege' used when an individual or group feels that some aspect of Anzac has been misused or abused.

However, there is a significant gap between the rhetoric and the main public honouring of Anzac, the observation of Anzac Day itself. The following extract from the program of the 2006 National Anzac Day ceremony at the Australian War Memorial is characteristic:

ANZAC Day—25 April—is the day Australians remember the original landing on Gallipoli in 1915. The spirit of ANZAC, with its human

qualities of courage, mateship, and sacrifice, continues to have meaning and relevance for our sense of national identity.<sup>3</sup>

While such statements are infused with the sacred ambience long conveyed in Anzac rhetoric, the observation of which it was a part was almost completely secular in character. No religious representatives were officially present at this event, which included the Prime Minister, representatives of the Commonwealth, the defence forces, the RSL, Legacy and so on. Although two hymns were sung, the robustly militaristic 'Oh, Valiant Hearts' and the sombre 'Abide With Me', these were the only religious components of the ceremony, apart from a mention of the Salvation Army and a Right Reverend member of the Council of the Australian War Memorial in the Acknowledgments section. Notes were included on the significance of the Last Post/Silence/Rouse bugle calls, the laying of wreaths and the floral symbolism of various plants, including red poppies. Likewise the fourth verse of Binyon's poem 'For the Fallen', referred to as an 'Ode', the flying of flags at half-mast, and the catafalque party. None of these explanations alluded to any religious significance, dwelling instead on mourning, commemoration and duty. The meaning of the Unknown Soldier was also explained in the process of describing the Australian Unknown Soldier, first placed in the Memorial's Hall of Remembrance in 1993. While the British Unknown Soldier lies in the consecrated precincts of London's Westminster Abbey, the Australian equivalent lay firstly in state at King's Hall in Parliament House and then, finally, in the secular shrine of the Australian War Memorial.

Another indication of the means by which Anzac became infused with the sacred was the considerable public and political controversy over the appropriate way to observe Anzac Day. This proceeded intensely through the 1920s in particular and has been revisited sporadically ever since. During the debate, Anzac Day itself came to be called, significantly, 'the 53<sup>rd</sup> Sunday'.

#### THE 53<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY

Even before the war ended, official war correspondent Charles Bean, soon to be editor of the *Official History of Australia in the war of 1914–1918*, was thinking about appropriate ways of commemorating the great sacrifices that

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/anzac/program2006.pdf>. Accessed December 2006.

had been made and the great gallantry displayed by Australian troops. Nor was he alone. Politicians and the diggers themselves were soon to turn their minds to the same problem and it was not long before the lines of conflict were drawn up. On the one hand were those represented most powerfully by the Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA) who wanted 25 April to be seen as a national day and to be a 'close' holiday, meaning one during which all activities not related to commemoration would be suspended. A variety of commercial and some political interests opposed this. The 1920s featured the playing out of these differences in state and federal parliaments as the apparently conflicting impulses to commemoration of the dead and celebration of the birth of the nation were resolved.

The first state to officially declare Anzac Day a public holiday was Western Australia. In 1919 the briefly reigning National Party Premier, Hal Colebatch, declared that returned soldiers in the employ of the state should be given the day off work with full pay. Anzac Day was made a statutory Public Service and Bank Holiday later that same year by the James Mitchell National–Country Party coalition government, though exactly which day it was to fall on and how it was to be observed was not stated. In 1921 Prime Minister William 'Billy' Hughes had suggested at the Premiers' Conference for the year that the numerous and various observances of 25 April taking place in venues large and small around the country might be regularised in some way (Wilson 1974, p. 203). At the 1923 Premiers' Conference, in Melbourne, it was recommended that Anzac Day should be Australia's National Day, that it be celebrated on 25 April, that each state would take whatever steps were necessary to implement the day's observance, and that the morning would be religious and commemorative, while the afternoon would be devoted to various appropriate addresses and the inculcation of Anzac into children (Sekulesk & Reece 1986, p. 48).<sup>4</sup>

These recommendations were in line with the general opinions of the returned soldiers' organisations and most of the digger periodicals. As early as 1920, for example, the peacetime continuation of the diggers' newspaper *Aussie* had suggested that Anzac Day be called 'Australia Day'.<sup>5</sup> In 1924, as it had in previous years, Anzac Day again received considerable attention at the State Conference of the RSSILA, and *The Listening Post* wrote of the need to make

<sup>4</sup> See also AWM Research Note No 546 (2nd series), 2 April 1952.

<sup>5</sup> *Aussie*, 2:15. 15 May 1920, p.12.



representations to the Premier regarding Anzac Day being made a 'sacred day'.<sup>6</sup> By 1925 the ninth annual federal Congress wanted Anzac Day to be treated as a Sunday.

By the decade's end Anzac Day was gazetted as 'the 53rd Sunday', not only in the west but in all states and territories of the Commonwealth. The states of Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania and Queensland enacted legislation in accordance with the League's objectives: by 1925 in New South Wales under JT Lang's Labor government; by 1927 in Tasmania; by 1928 in Victoria under John Allan's National-Country Party coalition (though not instituted until 1930); and by 1930 in Queensland under AE Moore's National-Country Party coalition.<sup>7</sup> Although there were some differences of detail between these states, the effect of each one's legislation was to turn 25 April into a uniform or 'close' public holiday comparable to the Christian religious days of Good Friday and Christmas Day.

Since then Anzac Day has continued as an event that is at once a celebration and a commemoration. It is a celebration of the ideals and aspirations of the Australian people and nation and also a commemoration of those who have given their lives for those ideals and aspirations. The nation state is a secular entity, while the need to commemorate the fallen demands the discourses of the sacred. In the context of the strong popular Australian reluctance for public displays and strong avowals of religious adherence, the religious aspects are minimised and marginalised. But commemoration requires sacralisation and if it is not available through the usual formal religious modes and rhetoric it can still be achieved through other cultural processes that elevate the secular 'Anzac' to an almost holy term.

This occurs through many of the ritual aspects of Anzac Day. The pre-dawn meal and drink that is a semi-private observance at a number of veterans' associations is symbolic of the original Anzacs' last meal before landing at dawn on 25 April 1915. It is a ritual that also resonates inevitably with Christian beliefs regarding transubstantiation. A folk custom on Anzac Day in Perth involves participants at the dawn service climbing the hill, Mt Eliza, on which the State War Memorial stands in a deliberate folk re-enactment of the original

<sup>6</sup> *The Listening Post*, 24 Oct 1924, p.14? (inside back cover).

<sup>7</sup> See AWM Research note No 546 (second series), 2 April 1952. Also Hills, op. cit., pp. 56-8; *League Post*, 1 Oct 1932, p. 23, discussing Anzac Day celebrations in Queensland from 1930. South Australia had instituted the Anzac Day holiday in 1922, by accident, it seems. See Robertson J, *Anzac and Empire*, p.251.

landings on the hilly beaches of Gallipoli. However, the most widely observed element of Anzac Day is the ceremony at dawn itself.

#### THE CEREMONY AT DAWN

In 2004 the commemoration for the Australian victims of the 2002 Bali bombings took the form of a 'dawn service'. This characteristically minimalist Australian ceremony has its origins in and after World War I as the nation sought to find commemorative modes appropriate to memorialise the sacrifice of its soldiers and the emotional sense of nationhood the Gallipoli campaign had engendered. Since then the ceremony at dawn has been both an important discrete element of Anzac Day as well as a vital component of the other activities that take place each 25 April. The ceremony is therefore crucial to any understanding of Australia's most powerful and, so far, enduring mythology of nation.

Despite its centrality to the Anzac tradition and popular constructions of nationhood, the origins of the ceremony at dawn are unclear and the subject of ongoing controversy, yet it is the one element of Anzac Day that has continually attracted significant numbers, even at those periods when the Anzac Day march itself has been in apparent decline as a national spectacle. In some of the earliest reports of the event—and associated claims for originary status—the compelling character of the ceremony at dawn is already clear:

... It needs the pen of a master to portray the strange wonderment of scene and the deep impression created [by the dawn laying of wreaths]. One had to be there to understand. It was expected that a few representative war veterans only would be present to lay wreaths, but diggers and the public turned up in their thousands. The ceremony at dawn has not only come to stay, but it is our opinion that next year it will be extended throughout the country...<sup>8</sup>

The ceremony at dawn has demonstrated an ability to adapt to changed circumstances, as evidenced by its adoption for the Bali commemoration and the importance of the ceremony in the increasingly popular 'pilgrimages' being

<sup>8</sup> *The Listening Post* (WA RSSILA) 24 May 1929, p.7.

made by Australians to Gallipoli, the Western Front, the Kokoda Track and Hellfire Pass.

As with other aspects of Anzac, the dawn service downplays the religious in favour of a sombre marking of the dawn landings of 1915. The term 'dawn service' itself implies religion even though there may be little or no formal religious observance or utterance at these events. It is a 'service' that is not a service, yet is replete with observances that resonate of religious commemorative forms, including wreath-laying, the playing of the 'Last Post', and the one or two minutes silence, a prayer-like moment in which no prayer is uttered, though Laurence Binyon's widely used dedication 'For the Fallen' is effectively a secular credo:

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning  
We will remember them.  
Lest we forget.

#### MEMORIALS

The nation's most significant war memorial was designed both as a shrine and as a museum.<sup>9</sup> It is a place of remembrance and of commemoration but not of religious display. The man who played the greatest single role in the creation of the national mythology, Charles Bean, also referred to Anzac's tangible locus, the Australian War Memorial, as 'sacred'.

The Hall of Remembrance in the Australian War Memorial is spiritual but without religious symbolism. While intended to recreate the atmosphere of a cathedral and utilising a domed cruciform layout, there is nothing explicitly or even implicitly religious in Napier Waller's mosaics, which instead refer to classical and even art deco mythological and architectural traditions rather than to Christian symbology. The fighting men and women are honoured 'with the west window embodying the social qualities of Australian service men and women—'comradeship', 'ancestry', 'patriotism', 'chivalry' (to the defeated) and 'loyalty'. The east window represents AIF fighting qualities—'coolness' (in

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.deh.gov.au/heritage/national/sites/war-memorial.html>.

action), 'control' (of self and others), 'audacity' and 'decision'. (AWM 1961, 1984) As a historian of the Memorial has noted:

Bean's notion that the relics were 'sacred', that they required a 'final resting place', that the men of the AIF needed to be 'worshipped', and that the names of the fallen should be recorded on the walls of the building imbued the Memorial with the same quasi-religious sentiment. Irrevocably linked with the Anzac mythology, these ideas became firmly embedded not only within the precincts of the Memorial, but also within Australia's national consciousness.<sup>10</sup>

Less exalted local memorials also partake of the secular sacred. In a study of the Canning war memorial in Western Australia John Stephens discovered that the families of deceased ex-servicemen were having their ashes interred in the gardens that formed part of the memorial precinct. As Stephens notes, 'this enhances the idea of sacredness'. His investigations revealed that the practice was being carried out at other memorials in metropolitan Perth.

Stephens's research also uncovered a developing example of the Anzac mythologisation process investing war memorials with the secular sacred. Among those interviewed for the research project, a number claimed that the practice of interring ashes at memorial sites was further stimulated by the rise to prominence of Aboriginal land rights, and the understanding of Aboriginal claims to the land as sacred through the interred presence of their ancestors. 'In this context the Canning memorial takes on the added role and meaning of a war cemetery—a landscape that could be considered twice sacred and a landscape that morphs from a memorial into a shrine.' (Stephens 2006).

Here, further layers of complexity are being added to the sacred significance of such memorials as Anzac continues to be mythologised at formal and folkloric levels and at national and local sites. These layers are commemorative of wartime sacrifice for the nation; they represent the Anzac spirit; they are tangible markers of national identity, reinforced and reaffirmed each year through the dawn service (and cognate events, such as Remembrance Day); they are war graves; and they are sacred sites, both in terms of their

<sup>10</sup> Millar A, 'Gallipoli to Melbourne: The Australian War Memorial, 1915–19', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, no. 10, April 1987, p.41. See also Inglis K, 'A sacred place: the making of the Australian War Memorial', *War & Society*, 3:2, 1985.

relationship to Anzac and, whatever the overtones of cultural appropriation, to the absorption into Anzac of indigenous concepts of the sacred (Gelder & Jacobs 1998).

#### FOLKLORE, FILM AND LITERATURE

Other folkloric customs and traditions associated with Anzac are not religious but have sacralised status, such as the placing of poppies next to the names of fallen ancestors in the Wall of Remembrance at the Memorial. The wearing of a sprig of rosemary on Anzac Day, primarily derived from the presence of this plant around Anzac Cove, is also usually said to relate to ancient Greek funerary traditions. In keeping with the processes of mythologisation, this effectively draws the hallowed heroic past into the mythic complex in the same way that the language of Homeric epic was almost immediately deployed in describing the Gallipoli experience (Ely 1985).

More elaborated traditions include the legend of the Lone Pine seedlings. As with all folkloric narratives there are a number of variations on this story that need not concern us here. But the wide availability and planting of seedlings said to be descended from those brought back to Australia by survivors of the Lone Pine action, or their comrades, is another indication of the significance we place on what can be accurately referred to as the 'relics' of Gallipoli.

Trivial though some may consider such discourses of our underculture, they could not exist without the participation of significant numbers in diffusing and maintaining such traditions. They need to be taken seriously, both as authentic vernacular expressions and perceptions and as significant elements within the mythological structure of Anzac. When such discourses interact with the more formal and official imperatives of politics and military exigency, the resulting amalgam is a potent one, as demonstrated through the institutional legend of Simpson and the Donkey.

In this story the colourful 'Simpson' is redeemed through heroic self-sacrifice. Although barely acknowledged by the Anzacs themselves in a situation where such selfless gallantry was commonplace (Cochrane 1992), Simpson and his donkey's selfless actions were glorified by the media of the day and have subsequently been portrayed to generations of schoolchildren as acts in support of the greater good of the secular state and the sacred bonds of mateship. They inevitably resonate with the story of Jesus' flight from Herod

and the subsequent Christian folk belief that donkeys are especially blessed. In this, as in so many other ways, the Anzac myth manages to invoke the religious even without acknowledging it, let alone embracing it.

The collusion of the formal and the folkloric, the informal and the institutional in the creation and perpetuation of Anzac and its many meanings was well displayed in Peter Weir and David Williamson's celebrated film *Gallipoli* (1981). The narrative accurately crystallises and depicts these aspects of Anzac in its canonical retelling. As well as artfully weaving fact and folklore together in a visual representation of the Anzac mythology, *Gallipoli* steadfastly resists religiosity other than in a brief shot of soldiers at prayer and a few silhouetted crosses on Anzac graves as the film approaches its climactic moments. The last of these has the finest flower of Australian youth transfixed in almost-death in the final frame of frozen time. This everybloke becomes a secular martyr to the military ineptitude of the British 'brass', another favoured theme of the Australian version of Gallipoli and, more generally, as part of the anti-authoritarianism inherent in our broader notions of cultural identity.

*Gallipoli* well represents and reinforces the relationship of Anzac to other sacralised secularities of Australian mythology. These include the notion of mateship, as already mentioned, as well as the veneration of the bush and concomitant demonisation of the city. These are also fundamental elements of Anzac, particularly as mediated and represented by the stereotypical figure of the 'digger', a stereotype that includes a strong antipathy to clericalism and other formalised expressions and observances of religion. In this matter, as in many others, the digger is the twentieth-century heir to the nineteenth-century bushman.

The bush hero was romanticised positively by Paterson and negatively but just as effectively by Lawson, aided by hosts of other known and anonymous bush balladists and singers. From this literary and folkloric fusion came the image of a strong, bold nomad who lived life on his own terms, brooked no nonsense from bosses and was an independent and endlessly inventive improviser and survivor, skills that translated well into the requirements for a World War I soldier. The idealised bushman was also fiercely democratic, the origins of the continuing notion of 'a fair go', a brawler, a drinker and a gambler. His guiding lights were the collective solidarity of the union and unquestioning loyalty to his mates. It hardly needs saying that there was little room for more than any perfunctory observance of religiosity in this secular

creed, as depicted so well in Lawson's sparse short story 'The Union buries its dead', in which the presiding minister is referred to as 'the devil'.

These characteristics, together with the usually laconic humour of the bush, were drawn directly into the image of the digger that evolved so early in the war simply because it only required the swapping of billycan, swag and bush hat for the rifle, pack and turned-up slouch hat. The bushman's gambling became the diggers' game of two-up, his fighting became the diggers' legendary battle skills and his drinking transmuted into the larrikinism of the digger. The dislike of the boss became the diggers' reluctance to salute officers, and his unionised loyalty to his mates became the holiest of all digger attributes, loyalty to your mates. Just as his predecessor had little time for religion, so the digger relegated its representatives to 'sky pilots' and 'padres', the latter being given only grudging respect if they helped out with the fighting, as some did, or simply being tolerated if they performed their necessary duties discreetly and efficiently. As the essential hero at the centre of the non-religious Anzac mythology, the a-religious digger could only be represented in secular terms. It is one of the sustaining strengths of the Anzac mythology that it manages to negotiate the culturally necessary balance between the sacred and the secular in its powerful and monopolistic representation of Australianness.

In folklore, though not in fact, Gallipoli was also the locus of the term 'digger', a necessary mis-belief that connects the digger directly with the sacralised site of Anzac's birth. The term 'digger' as a descriptor for the Australian foot soldier was not used at Gallipoli. It probably evolved among Australian troops in Britain in late 1916 and did not become widely used until early 1917, long after the Anzacs and their allies had triumphantly retreated from the defeat of the Dardanelles (Seal 2004). Yet most Australians—certainly all those working in the media—believe that the Gallipoli campaign was conducted by soldiers who called themselves 'diggers'.

#### CONCLUSION

The overall effect of all these colluding, colliding and continuing traditions is to sacralise the secular in minimalist terms of Christian belief and observance. Anzac therefore becomes another, yet the single most powerful, manifestation of our ambivalence, an ambivalence that lies at the heart of our sense of national identity. This ability to hold jumbled, even contradictory perceptions together is an aspect of Australian culture that can be seen in national icon

Ned Kelly's simultaneous status as hero and villain (Seal 1980, 2002). It is also seen in our sense of kinship with Britain and the accompanying rivalry evident especially in cricket through 'the Ashes' tradition, as well as other international sporting competitions.

Australia has been referred to as the first post-Christian country, a misreading based on the extremely low-key nature of religious expression. With the partial exception of Manning Clark's Old Testament approach, Australian historians have often ignored religion as a significant aspect of our experience and attitudes. But as recent census results consistently show, around 75% of adult Australians describe themselves as religious, with most of the remainder being atheists, agnostics or simply not bothered. The high level of voluntarism that is characteristic of Australia, including volunteer bushfire fighting, surf lifesaving, charities and so forth, can be interpreted as another indication that the Christian value of good works is alive and well, even if rarely articulated in religious terms. As Kevin Rudd has argued, the Australian ideals of helping less fortunate others and the 'fair go' are a social gospel to which, whether they would use this term or not, many Australians relate (Rudd 2006). While Rudd was writing in the context of a developing political strategy over the issue of religion, the popular preference for any religious belief to be demonstrated through selfless acts rather than through conventional observations and expressions of piety is at the root of the sacred secular ambivalence of our central myth of nation.

The Anzac mythology is a balance of oppositions, a mediation of apparent contradictions. The tension produced by this interaction provides the energy that drives the cultural script it produces and which powers the values, attitudes and beliefs of the very large numbers of Australians who follow the ambivalent complexities of its plots and sub-plots. The invocation of the sacred through the doggedly secular is a characteristically Australian mode of observance.

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## A WORLD OF THE INVISIBLE

Claudia Terstappen

This essay refers to my personal observations and experiences of aspects of religious belief in contemporary life in Europe, the US, Japan and Australia. It will address how people deal with uncertainty, fear, illness, death, sorrow, fertility and the desire to predict their future and gain stability in a life that is characterised by unforeseeable changes.

Pictures, objects, rituals and places are intertwined in building a symbolical network that withdraws from logical argument. It is a world of materials that represent a world of the invisible. Altars, whether man made or natural, memorials for the dead, objects and rituals that connect us with the past and address the future; all of these are as contemporary as ever. It is uncertainty and emotion that drive people to believe, have faith and act in certain ways.

My observations evolve from my personal practice as an artist that explores a diverse range of contemporary expressions of religious beliefs.

The essay is accompanied by images of my artwork as well as photographs from my archive that have inspired my research<sup>1</sup>. I will address the following four areas:

- Altars and sacred places
- Memorials for the dead
- Objects and desires
- Sacrifice and gratefulness

<sup>1</sup> The photographs and images in this essay can be found at Claudia Terstappen's webpage: <http://artdes.monash.edu.au/terstappen/gallery/sacredaustralia>; or at <http://www.cloudsofmagellan.net/terstappen.html>.