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National Versions of the Great War: Modern Australian Anzac Cinema

1 The Anzac Legend as National Narrative

While many nations generated myths of loss and tragedy from the Great War, Australia has forged a positive myth of identity, built on the national narrative of the Anzac legend which encapsulates what it means to be truly Australian (cf. Seal 6–9). The Anzac story has become seminal to the Australian identity since the landing of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. The Anzac soldier, or 'digger,' has drawn together the salient features of earlier national mythic archetypes such as the convict, squatter, selector, bushranger, gold digger and sportsman, as neatly encapsulated in Russel Ward's influential classic *The Australian Legend*. Seal argues that from a "private, spontaneous and authentic" digger tradition, the Anzac myth has been "invented […] [as] a deliberate ideological construct which, in collusion with the digger tradition, operates hegemonically within Australian society" (3–4).

The Anzac legend therefore did not spring fully formed from the beaches of Gallipoli. It has its own history, and its progression is vital in understanding the nature of the potency of the legend in Australian post-memory, for its origins were in many ways far removed from its modern form. It evolved from a pre-Great War desire for a unifying national story more potent than the petty politics of the federation of the Australian colonies in 1901, one which would confirm the contemporary theories of the superior British race in the Antipodes through the crucible of war. The publication in May 1915 of English journalist Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett's colourful report of the landings of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) at Anzac Cove offered such a narrative, prompting an enthusiastic response from the Australian public and authorities, and it soon found its way into the school curriculum, was credited with boosting recruitment, and inspired the nation's first Gallipoli movie. *The Hero of the Dardanelles* (dir. Alfred Rolfe) was released in July 1915 to capitalise on the popularity of the story and to boost recruitment in line with government pressure on the film industry. The Anzac hero promoted in this film was an upper-class

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city boy in the best British mould, about as far removed as possible from the modern iteration of the ideal Anzac (cf. Reynaud, *Celluloid Anzacs*, 21–22). What they had in common was that they defined the ideal Australian male for their generation.

Federal and state governments seized upon the embryonic legend, shaping and promoting it to their purposes to enhance the war effort (cf. Beaumont 150–151). The Anzac image they fostered was fiercely loyal to the Imperial ideal, with few Australian qualities at all. Wartime cinema was tightly controlled to ensure support for the British Empire's efforts. No fewer than nineteen war dramas were released during the war, the majority of the commercially successful ones in the first eighteen months of the war, before war weariness shifted the market towards bush comedies and, for a brief time, war documentary (cf. Reynaud, "The Effectiveness of Australian Film Propaganda"). While Australia had had a booming pre-war movie industry, with an emphasis on local legends such as bushrangers, wartime war movies lacked distinctively Australian characters, and many of them featured no Australian subjects at all, such was the deference to an Imperial British outlook. By the end of the war, the local cinema had been largely displaced by American films (cf. Reynaud, *Celluloid Anzacs* 53–54, 80–82).

After the Great War, conflict over the legacy of Anzac emerged. In fact, in contrast to the smooth rhetoric of unity in the modern post-memory of Anzac, the war was a deeply divisive event, provoking conflict within and between social classes, political parties, religious faiths, generations, racial origins, national and imperial ideologies, and categories of war service or non-service, and these wounds remained sensitive for decades, lasting more or less as long as there was living memory to sustain it, or at least until the handful of survivors were too old to fight the ideological battles. Conservative governments exerted strenuous efforts to eliminate unacceptable versions, particularly those advocated by returned soldiers of radical republican, pacifist or larrikin persuasion. Government censorship helped sanitise undesirable representations, including the negative books and films emanating from a disenchanted Europe (for instance Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* was banned), and official support for the conservative Returned Soldiers and Sailors Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA, now known as the RSL) in conflicts with anti-war groups ensured its triumph as the sole surviving organisation officially representing veterans (cf. Donaldson & Lake 72–88). The tradition of Anzac Day marches grew during the interwar period, and became entrenched by the 1930s. However, it was still a divisive issue, and many veterans refused to take part in Anzac Day marches.

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Australian cinema of this era, struggling to compete with Hollywood, sought out local topics, including a handful of war stories, which strove for the middle ground in representing Anzac, both to avoid censorship and to maximise potential audiences. In the process, they made archetypical Australian characters central to their narratives. Three actors in particular, Arthur Tauchert, Pat Hanna, and Chips Rafferty, came to embody the Australian bushman Anzac, fixing the screen image of the Anzac permanently to that of a resourceful, comic, irreverent, unsophisticated but fundamentally decent and loyal mate. The British characters who featured in films such as *Diggers* (dir. F. W. Thring, 1931), and *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (dir. Charles Chauvel, 1940) were different from the rank-and-file Australians, but shared honourable qualities with the Australian officers, and the films themselves were able to promote Australianness without disrupting the Imperial connection. They began the process of smoothing over and reconciling differences in how the Anzac legend was viewed, the first step to a myth which could be truly unifying across the nation (cf. Reynaud, “The Influence of Dramas” 15).

The Second World War saw a temporary rise in the profile of the Anzac legend to boost the new war effort, followed by a post-war eclipse driven by the marginal impact of Australian troops in the war (especially its later phases), the popularity of British and American war stories, particularly in the cinema, and the Imperial outlook and policies of Prime Minister Robert Menzies. After the hardships of two world wars and a great depression in the preceding three decades, the peaceful prosperity of the extended economic boom and growing anti-war sentiment made the populace less interested in wartime myths (Thomson 188–190). This period saw the virtual disappearance of Australian cinema and, naturally with it, Australian war cinema.

A revival of Australian nationalism only began to be felt as the restless baby boomer generation emerged into young adulthood in the 1960s, eager to throw off the social restraints of the conformist Menzies era. The 1970s saw the consolidation of an overt nationalism that, in its attempts to shake off paternalistic Britain, often targeted it as its antithesis. Two cultural features benefitted and then in turn contributed to this: first, a revived and updated Anzac legend profiting from its relative invisibility over previous decades, and from the rapid removal through death of Great War veterans’ living memories, and second, a reinvigorated national film industry. Fostered by historians, government, the RSL and the Australian War Memorial, a new Anzac legend was aggressively championed which successfully fused potentially disparate qualities. Fashionable anti-war attitudes and anti-British sentiment integrated seamlessly with the heroic

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larrikin, the laconic and egalitarian bushman, and the unsoldierly digger who was a fighter of natural and incomparable skill, embodying all that was good and great about Australia (cf. Thomson 190–193; McKenna 113). While the late 1960s and 1970s sowed the seeds of these changes, they came to rampant bloom in the cinema of the 1980s, with Anzac movies and television productions forming a significant element of the jingoistic period cinema which dominated the decade. Preceding the Anzac productions was a string of hit films and television programmes that glorified the 'Ocker' Australian, presenting him (the typical Australian was always male) as egalitarian, uncouth, naive yet savvy, woman-shy, and addicted to beer. Films such as *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (dir. Bruce Beresford, 1972) popularised the archetypical Australian larrikin, who would make repeated appearances in later Australian war films as the archetypical digger.

2 The Classic Anzac Films and Miniseries of the 1980s

Anzac film and television of the 1980s played an important role in the development of the Anzac legend, interacting with political and social factors to promote a version of the legend best suited to the nationalistic aspirations of the times, and for the first time presenting one around which there was widespread consensus. There were nine movies and television productions in the decade 1981–1990 which centred on the First World War, with three other mini-series devoting some attention to it. Two representations in particular dominated the period and have remained as the normative, even definitive representations since then.

Preceding the two was a film about the Boer War proto-Anzac legend, Bruce Beresford's *Breaker Morant* (1980), a well-crafted film based on real characters that successfully articulated the key themes of the new Anzac legend: the Australian larrikin bushman-soldier as the epitome of Australianness, and the injustice of the class-bound British high command. The film perpetuated some of the popular misconceptions about Morant that have proved difficult to change, and set the tone for the first movie-length representation of Gallipoli since 1916.

Peter Weir's defining film, *Gallipoli* (1981), was a magnificent and moving piece of cinema. *Gallipoli* presented to Australian audiences a readily acceptable version of the Anzac story and remains to this day its best-known representation. Its story contrasts two young Western Australian runners, Frank, a town man with values a little corrupted by his background, and Archy, a pure and innocent country lad, who become

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friends at a race, enlist, meet again in Egypt, and end up as Lighthorsemen on Gallipoli. At the battle of the Nek, Frank unsuccessfully tries to stop a futile attack, and Archy becomes the sacrificial lamb, shot down running toward the Turkish lines. Weir's film captures with clarity the key Australian themes of egalitarian mateship, practical bush values, larrikinism and the virtue of unvarnished and unpolished characters over those of metropolitan Britain, with its superficial class distinctions and snobbery, and failure to deal with reality. The film makes strong visual links between Anzac and Australia: both the Egyptian desert and Gallipoli peninsular landscapes feature heavily, and the similarities to the Australian outback, also featured, help make it feel natural that Australians identify with Anzac Cove. Of course, the naturalisation of the 'Turkish' landscapes of the film is largely because they are actually Australian, with a variety of South Australian locations standing in for the Gallipoli Peninsula.

The influence of the movie is difficult to overestimate. One critic considered it potentially the definitive film not just of Anzac, but of Australia in the period (cf. Stratton 22). It was popular with audiences and most critics alike, although some noted that it merely restated the Anzac legend without asking any hard questions about it (cf. Lawson 11). It is probably the most widely discussed Australian film of all time, and is the subject of a formidable body of work, both scholarly and popular. Anecdotally, it appears to have influenced the understanding of many Australians about the Gallipoli campaign, evidenced by Prime Minister Bob Hawke's visit to the Nek in 1990 (cf. Burness 156–157). In all likelihood, probably more people have seen this film than have read any of the major books on Gallipoli. In any case, the emotional impact and memorability of moving image over text means that it has probably been a more significant shaper of contemporary Australian attitudes to Gallipoli than any written text.

However, there was nothing leading up to its release which made its success appear inevitable, as post-Vietnam anti-war sentiment was strong and knowledge of, and perhaps therefore interest in, the Anzac legend was weak amongst the post-memory younger generation (who had been subjected to World War Two stories, but relatively few from the previous war), but a convergence of influences made it a timely film. It touched a generation seeking for an alternative to the staid and insipid imperial culture of their parent's generation, and offered a robust, oppositional view of their identity, not as a derivative outpost of the empire, but as a proud and fiercely independent nation with its own identity clearly in contrast against that of Mother England. It featured the collaboration of an

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Anzac historian (Bill Gammage), a young director with a vision for telling significant Australian stories (Peter Weir), and a screenwriter with a reputation as an incisive observer of Australian society (David Williamson). The film was inspired by Weir's own visit to Gallipoli, was partly financed by Rupert Murdock, whose own father had played a critical role in the anti-British sentiment growing out of the campaign, and its famous final image was drawn from a line of Bean's official war history (cf. Reynaud, *Celluloid Anzacs*, 186–195). And it did not act alone, forming part of the increasingly pervasive presentation of the Anzac legend through popular media outlets, school curriculum, Anzac Day events, war memorials and RSL clubs, political rhetoric and popular discussion, each largely reinforcing each other. And as awareness developed that the last of the surviving Great War veterans were passing away, a nationalistic post-memory nostalgia grew around their legacy.

The other influential representation of Australia in the Great War was *Anzacs* (dir. John Dixon, George Miller, Pino Amenta), screened on Channel Nine in 1985. The five-part mini-series followed a platoon in the 8th Battalion of the AIF, largely drawn from rural Victoria. Choosing to represent a rural battalion continued the trend of portraying the Anzacs as bushmen, begun by C. E. W. Bean, who in his monumental official war history emphasised the bush influence in forming the distinctive characteristics of the Anzacs – this despite the fact that about 80% of the Anzacs were town or city men. The characters of the mini-series reflect some diversity of representation, with a couple of Danes, some Englishmen, a German-Australian, and some cowardly and dislikeable Australians (for example "Dingo" Gordon). However, in the best Bean tradition, these exceptions are kept as exceptions, and the true Australian spirit of the Anzac legend is the overwhelming theme (cf. Thomson 197). For example, issues of class distinction are present, but they are smoothed over, typified when the squatter's son Martin Barrington forms a relationship with working-class girl nurse Kate Baker. In a similar vein, while "Dingo" Gordon is an unpleasant character, he is presented as atypical of the true Anzacs, the exception that proves the rule. Perhaps the most memorable figure in the series is that of Pat Cleary, played by Paul Hogan. The character embodies all of the clichés of the archetypical Australian: an anti-establishment Irishman, drinker, resourceful scrounger, gambler, sideline entrepreneur, loyal mate and 'fair dinkum' bloke. Hogan played the character as an extension of his already popular Hoges television persona, soon to be subsumed in the character of Crocodile Dundee, and the spiritual heir to the mantle of Chips Rafferty.

Despite the character simplifications and stereotypes, *Anzacs* was a

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huge ratings success, and garnered some critical approbation as well. It has also aged well, proving to be a popular DVD purchase into the twenty-first century, with recent customer reviews on an outlet website consistently rating it five stars, with comments such as “a simply wonderful series-scripting, acting, production values are just marvellous” (ABC Shop). While this is true of much of the mini-series, it fails to recognise its tendency to soap-opera and its adherence to the popular peddling of mythic versions of the Anzac legend. The serious issues are dealt with superficially and the heritage of the war, as portrayed in the final post-war reunion, is saturated with warm nostalgia, reducing the actual war’s legacy of tensions, strife and division to virtual non-existence and leaving a feel-good mood perfectly pitched to the modern unifying national myth of Anzac.

Several other productions of the period align with the portrayal of the classic Anzac legend, but failed to create the same impact, partly due to lapses in quality and partly due to increasing audience fatigue with flag-waving period pieces. One of these was *The Lighthorsemen* (dir. Simon Wincer, 1987), an earnest attempt to produce a film that was both entertaining and historically accurate, yet which ended up somewhere in between. It has many fine moments, but did not ignite audiences. Another was “Private John Simpson,” an episode from *Willesee’s Australians* (1988), made for the bicentenary celebrations. It abandons history almost entirely to create an exaggerated retelling of the legend of John Simpson Kirkpatrick, but its excesses also failed to persuade (cf. Reynaud, *Celluloid Anzacs*, 231–233).

3 Negotiated Representations

Such was the output of Anzac productions that one critic complained that “most desperate of all, we seem to be averaging one Gallipoli saga every year” (Glover 18), while several historians bemoaned the uniformity of those representations, concerned that they were useless for interrogating the myth of Anzac (cf. Beaumont xix; Clancy 4–5; Thomson 196–197). While their fears held some truth in terms of how the productions were received, they are not fair in terms of how certain productions provided a level of balance in representing the legend, and how some even interrogated it. In particular, two mini-series showed a much more even-handed approach to the story of Anzac.

The first of these was *1915* (dir. Chris Thomson and Di Drew, 1982), a seven-part series screened on ABC TV, with a screenplay by Peter Yeldham

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that refused simplistic approaches to Anzac. While many of the clichés of the Anzac legend were present (humour, egalitarianism, making hand grenades from jam tins, and medics with donkeys), they were subtly undermined or counterbalanced by other features. The hero Walter Gilchrist ended up in a Turkish prisoner-of-war camp, while Billy, the other lead character, went mad from a head injury. Mateship was represented, but major conflicts were shown between the Anzacs themselves, and anti-British rhetoric was largely absent. The tone of the series was gritty and realistic, with little romanticism or glorification of Anzac. In particular, it showed how the stress of war made victims of everyone, leaving no real heroes at the end. Overall, it was a well-made mini-series which was popular with audiences and critics, most of whom however failed to read the nuances and saw it as a continuance of *Gallipoli*'s themes (cf. Reynaud, *Celluloid Anzacs* 203).

The second production that exhibited subtlety in its representation of Anzac was *A Fortunate Life* (dir. Marcus Cole and Henri Safran, 1986). The four-part mini-series screened on commercial television, and did justice to the text it adapted, Albert Facey's artless autobiography of his harsh childhood and youth, with the fourth episode depicting his time on Gallipoli. In focusing on one man's story, showing both the positives and the negatives, it demonstrated an even-handed, unsentimental approach that makes it one of the best representations of Anzac in Australian cinema. There is the expected heroism and mateship, as well as the belittling of the British. But there is also boorish racist and sexist Australian behaviour which is not excused or even glamorised as mere light-hearted larrikinism, and there are depictions of inter-Australian conflicts and incompetent Australian leadership. Facey's actions on Gallipoli would befit a hero, but are refused that status by the narrator's dry, undercutting statements. And surprisingly, Facey is both a teetotaller and a non-smoker, qualities most usually associated with dour wowsers, not Anzac heroes, in Australian cinema.

These productions had the capacity to qualify the more simplistic and extreme features of the popular version of Anzac, but their nuances were lost in the increasingly hegemonic Anzac legend. Audiences and critics alike saw what they wanted to see. With their subtleties ignored, they merely became two additional texts in propagating a legend free of ambiguity and tension.

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4 Counter Narratives

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There were three productions late in the decade which went further than merely qualifying the legend; they represented the Great War in ways that suggested shame or farce. Two mini-series were screened on the non-commercial broadcasters in 1988, *Always Afternoon* on SBS (dir. David Stevens), and *The Alien Years* on the ABC (dir. Donald Crombie). Both focused on the xenophobic treatment of Germans in Australia during World War One, and neither shied from the uncomfortable truth that Australia had mistreated its Germanic residents, many of them Australian born and bred. *Always Afternoon* explored the relationship between a German musician and an Australian girl, noting the tensions in divided loyalties when loved ones belonged to each of the Australian and German camps in wartime. Partly funded by German finance, it was hardly surprising that it took a balanced approach to the issue, but this does not detract from the merits of its portrayal of wartime Australia. *The Alien Years*, again with a script by Peter Yeldham, was broader in historical scope and more melodramatic in treatment, though lacking the restraint of *Always Afternoon*. However, it also openly showed the ugly politics behind the demonising and incarceration of German Australians –the need to whip up paranoia in order to encourage recruiting. The attitudes it portrayed are frighteningly like those fostered by wartime Prime Minister Billy Hughes' extremist rhetoric, and reminded modern audiences of the blatant racism of White Australia that underpinned the nation's participation in the First World War, an attitude elided from modern memory of Anzac. While *Always Afternoon* garnered excellent reviews, and *The Alien Years* moderately good ones, neither attracted huge Australian audiences. These two productions attacked some of the comfortable myths on which the Australian identity reposed, which may have affected their capacity to appeal to broader audiences, but they also screened to an audience weary of rose-tinted Australian period drama, which had reached a saturation point by the bicentennial year, and they screened on non-commercial channels with smaller niche audiences.

The other mini-series to attempt to deflate the Anzac legend was *The Private War of Lucinda Smith* (dir. Ray Alchin, 1990). The third of Yeldham's forays into Anzac television with a twist, it was the most startlingly different from anything ever attempted before. Gone was the heroic treatment, the reverence for the Anzac legend, the central role for the bronzed Anzac from the bush, and even any attempt at a credible historicity. Instead in came a bawdy story of an Australian chorus girl leading a German and an Englishman in a merry dance to compete for her very evident favours, in German New Guinea at the outbreak of the war. It was the visualisation of every Great War recruiter's nightmares: female

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sexual charms keeping men from their military obligations. Ironically, the film *Satan in Sydney* (dir. Beaumont Smith 1918) had been made during the Great War warning specifically against this very scenario (cf. Reynaud, *Celluloid Anzacs* 76)! *The Private War of Lucinda Smith* poked fun at everything. It offered a feminist heroine, but its nudity was in stark contrast to the usual prudishness evident in Anzac literature and film. The Anzac platoon in the story better resembled the buffoonery of *Dad's Army*, as overweight officers ordered incompetent soldiers around, and national stereotypes, both German and Australian, were exploited for humour. The flagrant lack of interest in historicity was emphasised by anachronistic attitudes and dialogue, and the casting of Polynesian Samoan extras (where it was filmed) as the natives of Melanesian New Guinea. The light-hearted mini-series was designed to be a ratings blockbuster, and while performing well enough, it was not the hoped-for hit. Perhaps it touched too many sensitivities: it was too much of a period piece for those weary of them, and not reverential enough for those who still hankered after that. The bawdiness could not compensate for the slap in the face of Australian manhood.

Just as the subtle screen versions of Anzac were subsumed into the larger, simpler picture, so also did these three potentially disruptive productions sink in the popular imagination, leaving not a ripple on the surface. Having told stories that offered alternative interpretations of the Great War for modern Australia, the series have not been revived and form no ongoing part of the public dialogue about Anzac. The modern Australian popular memory of the First World War is proving to be remarkably resistant to any change that might lessen its role as idealised definer of the best of what is truly Australian.

5 Post 1990 Screen Anzac Silence and Renewal

While the 1980s produced Anzac pieces of varying quality and success, there is no denying that the legend had been given a thorough public airing and had at times achieved stunning popular and critical acclaim and impact. In particular, *Gallipoli* and *Anzacs* continued to fare well in repeated screenings and then in video and DVD sales. What is curious then, is the total absence of new Anzac-related cinema or television for two decades afterwards. In part, it can be explained by an audience reaction against period cinema, having overindulged on the surfeit of the 1980s.

However, the absence of new Great War productions for twenty years

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does not point to any decline in the vigour and centrality of the Anzac legend in Australia. On the contrary, the legend continues to go from strength to strength, with rising numbers at Anzac Day dawn services, and on pilgrimages to the Gallipoli battlefields and cemeteries, while the topic constitutes a veritable publishing industry of its own in vibrant health, not to mention its popularity in various media. The absence of new screen Anzac representations will have to turn to another explanation. It can perhaps best be understood by the fact that *Gallipoli* and *Anzacs* remain for many Australians as definitive statements about the war, despite being more than three decades old. There have been no new productions because there remains nothing new to say about Anzac. This is a testament to the robustness of the version of the Anzac legend and the associated Anzac myth that emerged in the 1980s: for the first time in its history, it has achieved a stable form, with the only significant change coming in its increasingly pervasive penetration into all aspects of Australian society and public life.

Another silence in the Anzac legend on screen is the relative absence of representations of other wars, in particular World War Two, or of more recent wars such as Korea or Vietnam. The Second World War lacked the sheer volume of raw material that its predecessor offered. The Second AIF had just two notable battles that have passed into popular consciousness, the siege of Tobruk and the Kokoda Track, both in the first half of the war. The rest of the war was played out in trivial campaigns, sidelined by the spotlight-seeking American General Macarthur in the Pacific and by the big stories coming out of the European war. It took some effort to turn the defeat of Singapore into the heroic story of the prisoners of war, showing how much the Anzac legend had to evolve in order to accommodate its new generation of heroes. A handful of Australian productions gave the Second World War the same Anzac legend treatment as the First, but with the exception of the Kokoda track and perhaps Tobruk, none of these stories has entered into the popular Anzac imagination. This is evident in the movies made: only *Attack Force Z* (dir. Tim Burstall, 1982) and *Kokoda* (dir. Alister Grierson, 2006) are primarily Anzac stories. The others, *Blood Oath* (dir. Stephen Wallace, 1990), *Paradise Road* (dir. Bruce Beresford, 1997), and *Australia* (dir. Baz Luhrmann, 2008), feature the war either incidentally or are not specifically Australian stories. The Second World War plays relatively little part in Australia's war memory. Vietnam managed just one appearance on the big screen in *The Odd Angry Shot* (dir. Tom Jeffrey, 1979) and one extended and insightful exploration on television in *Vietnam* (1987), the Boer War has one as already noted, and the Korean War is entirely absent. These silences merely reinforce the

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centrality of the Great War in Australian memory and national consciousness.

But even the Great War Anzac had to wait over twenty years for a comeback on cinema screens with *Beneath Hill 60* (dir. Jeremy Sims, 2010), a feature film about an Australian tunnelling unit on the Western Front. Based on a war memoir, it offered some novelty in focusing on a unit other than the infantry or light horse, and was the first big-screen production about the Western Front since *Diggers in Blighty* in 1933 (dir. Pat Hanna). The film featured an unfortunate re-run of some Anzac clichés, including the condescending English officer, and the tough sergeant with a heart of gold, but it also moderated its rhetoric, so that the net effect is less strident than many of the productions of the 1980s. Its faithfulness to its source made it better history than cinema, but it was still on the whole a well-crafted film. It had modest success with critics and at the box office, and on the whole, sits comfortably enough inside mainstream views on Anzac without being totally conforming.

Great War Anzacs made their first fresh television appearance since 1990 in the tele-feature *An Accidental Soldier* (dir. Rachel Ward) on ABC television in September 2013. The story breaks bold new ground for an Anzac theme, as its central character, Harry Lambert is a baker pressured into volunteering, whose expectations of a quiet job behind the lines in a service unit are ruptured by an emergency call to arms after the German Spring Offensive of 1918. He deserts the front out of an unwillingness to kill, rather than from fear, and takes refuge with a French woman, Colombe Jacotot, who is mourning the death of her own son at Verdun after she talked him into returning to the front when he deserted. Her German Alsatian husband has disappeared, leaving her in trouble with the gendarmes who suspect her of spying for the enemy. The unlikely couple, neither speaking the other's language, find empathy with each other, their defiance of submission to the war effort bringing them together. Eventually Harry and Colombe are arrested by their respective authorities, and both are sentenced to imprisonment for their crimes. Economically told, with a handful of flashbacks to fill in Harry's military service in France, it is exquisitely filmed with "luminous simplicity" (Blundell 26), with the intimate lighting and camera work reinforcing strong performances from the cast. While producer Sue Taylor described it as more of a love story than a war story, lead actor Dan Spielman made a revealing statement about its military perspectives:

> The Australian military myth is a very powerful one; the notion of mateship, of camaraderie, of glory in battle has formed a big

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> part of our psyche. And I think it is a very exclusive myth in a lot of ways and there's not a lot of room allowed by the general Australian public to see all of the contradictions and mysteries within it. (Yeap)

Its overt engagement with the Anzac narrative is principally at each end of the film. It begins with an unfavourable portrayal of the social pressure placed on Australian men to volunteer, and closes with text describing the treatment of deserters in some armies of the British Empire. In between are moments showing the impact of war on soldiers and the attitudes of the Australian authorities to their deserters. One appreciative reviewer argues that "We have to understand [our wars] as a reality and not merely as national myth or a stereotyped piece of news reporting" (Blundell 26). Time will tell if Australian audiences are ready for this kind of interrogation and complication of the Anzac myth, where a pacifist and deserter can be a central hero in an Anzac narrative.

There is more Great War cinema to come, as Channel Nine has promised a new miniseries titled *Gallipoli*, which will form part of the 2015 centenary celebrations of the Anzac landings. Already in preproduction, it is touted as "the definitive dramatization of the battle that shaped the Anzac legend" (Channel Nine Gallipoli). Given the hype that already surrounds the centenary of the Anzac landings, it will be interesting to see what approach the mini-series takes and how it is received.

6 Conclusion

The Great War has always been given a prominent and positive construct in the Australian public memory. Since the first news of the landings at Gallipoli a combination of governments, veterans' organisations, war memorials, the media, historians and the public have worked in synergy to create a national narrative fulfilling the task of both legend and myth embodying what it really means to be Australian. However, it took about six decades to eliminate dissident voices and achieve a consensus, emerging only in the post-memory generation, where there was the creative space to shape the legend according to present need rather than the dictates of living remembered experience. There is much about the form of the post-memory Great War that is particular to Australia, although shared to some extent with New Zealand and even Turkey. Australia's memory of the Great War is one of pride, of national achievement and uniqueness; it has become central to the definition of

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what it means to be Australian, and is frequently invoked by politicians and the media. In a famously secular nation, many commentators have noted how the Anzac legend has become the new secular state religion, with its national cathedral (the Australian War Memorial), its provincial temples (RSL clubs and local war memorials), its holy day, 25 April, and its own rituals and celebrations that unite the nation. It has embraced those people and ideologies it formerly excluded, as Anzac Day marches feature non-military organisations, and non-white children are strongly represented in school bands playing at the marches in honour of a war that was fought for the freedom to keep Australia white, British and openly militaristic, yet whose memory is now celebrated in terms that are multicultural, anti-Imperial and generally anti-war.

Despite its troubled and contested development, Anzac has developed into “the most powerful myth of nationhood” (McKenna 111), backed by a strong popular consensus. Nowadays, a number of Australian historians are the main ones contesting the hegemony of the Anzac legend, but by and large, the discussions are literally and metaphorically academic, as their voices are having little impact in the popular dissemination of Anzac. Perhaps the elaborate memorial centenary celebrations planned for 2015 will lead to a backlash against the hype of Anzac, but on the other hand they may merely entrench it deeper into the national psyche.

A powerful contributing factor to the new Anzac legend has been the Australian cinema. Working hand in hand with other forces such as state, education curriculum, veterans’ groups, the press, and a number of historians, the cinema has created a limited variety of representations of Anzac, which had been further edited down in the public memory by an audience craving something black and white. Led by a few iconic productions, Australian film and television have offered an accessible, simplified, and easily digestible version of Anzac that has resonated with the modern Australian national imagination. Given the huge reach and impact of film and television, their version has played a key role in both shaping and reflecting what post-memory Australians wish to believe and remember about the Great War, a war shorn of its racism, Imperialism and legacy of strife and division in Australia, and refashioned as one of unity, Australianness and inclusivity.

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