THE BELLS WERE ringing, the pipes were playing. Crowds lined the streets to watch the corriage of gun carriage and coffin pass by. The organ played another verse of ‘I vow to thee my country’, and the congregation filtered out of St Stephen’s church into the bright Sydney daylight. The Governor-General could be seen, as could the Prime Minister, with most of the Federal cabinet. There were men in uniform with shiny medals. It was a red letter day for the whole country, Tuesday 16th December 1997 — the State Funeral for Albert Edward Matthews, the last Anzac.

Ted Matthews had been the last survivor of those who landed at Anzac Cove on the first day of the Gallipoli campaign, and his death was a significant moment in the national history of Australia. The moment, as the Prime Minister acknowledged in his funeral oration, of “the severing of the final tangible link between ourselves and the dawn of 25th April 1915.” The paradox of Matthews is that he was not famous for anything he did during the war, nor yet for any momentous achievement in his life. If a tragic early death in sacrifice is the kernel of the Anzac legend, then Matthews is the inverse of this. In fact, he never fired a shot at Gallipoli. He was a signalman, not an infantryman — a factor, he wryly acknowledged, that helped ensure he survived while others died. Throughout his life he worked at various itinerant jobs, and spent seventeen years in Florida to be near his daughters who had both married American soldiers after the Second World War. So Matthews is special only because he lived the longest, fêted because of the deaths of all the others. At the funeral, this irony was largely irrelevant. It might have been Ted Matthews who died — but it was a State Funeral for the Last Anzac.

The whole event was broadcast live on national television. The following day’s newspapers gave it extensive coverage, with pictures and
editorial leaders: “Australia honours Anzac Ted, the last of the first,” said the front page banner on the Melbourne Age; “Nation salutes last Anzac Day digger,” announced the Sydney Morning Herald (17th Dec. 1997). As part of the service the celebrating minister Dr Scott McPheat gave an address on the horror and waste of war. Matthews’ nephew Kevin gave a simple speech to honour his uncle, and his country. There were also orations from the leaders of the nation, the Prime Minister John Howard and the Governor-General Sir William Deane. Both of these speeches considered the nexus between the image of Anzac and the national spirit. Significantly, both men quoted from C.E.W. Bean, Australia’s Official Historian of the Great War.

For William Deane, Ted Matthews is to be remembered not for his deeds, his character, or himself, but as an exemplar of the national psyche. In his opening remarks, Deane commented that Matthews “lived his life against the backdrop of the whole of our history as a nation.” He noted that Matthews was born just months before the first Constitutional Convention of 1897, and was four years old when “our nation came into being on 1st January, 1901.” He spoke of Matthews’ experiences in the Depression and the second war, and of his return to Anzac Cove in 1990 for the 75th anniversary of the Landing. Matthew’s long life is thus charted and measured by its witness to the history of the Commonwealth.

William Deane quoted Manning Clark on the significance of Anzac as “something too deep for words.” Deane himself suggested Anzac was “the meaning, the very essence of our nation.” He quoted Charles Bean on how, during the eight months of the Gallipoli campaign, “Every man, woman and child was tied to those few acres of Turkish hillside.” In the hyperbole of the occasion, the Governor-General finished by proclaiming Matthews “the quintessential Australian.” At his State Funeral then, Ted Matthews the individual is subsumed within the symbolic order of the Anzac myth; he becomes a talisman of all that is Anzac. The Governor-
General's speech was reproduced in full on the front page of the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Prime Minister Howard began his oration by acknowledging that the funeral was about more than the memory of one valiant soldier:

> Today we honour the Anzac spirit of which the World War I historian C.E.W. Bean wrote, “In the end Anzac stood and still stands for reckless valour in a good cause, for enterprise, resourcefulness, fidelity, comradeship and endurance that will never admit defeat.”

Like William Deane, Howard talked of honouring the Anzac spirit, “a spirit born on the cliffs of Gallipoli...a spirit which draws Australians together in time of need.” There was more than a hint of Rupert Brooke’s ‘corner of a foreign field’ in the reminder that, “a bit of Australia remains on Gallipoli to this day.” The Prime Minister deferred to Matthews’ oft-quoted refrain — “Politicians make up the wars; they don’t go to them” — but he was also prepared to claim a positive legacy from war:

> What we also honour today is Australian nationhood itself, forged that April morning on the battleground of a foreign shore through the sacrifice and struggle of our diggers.

This is more than just rhetoric of the moment. Here we see a paraphrase of Bean’s famous last words of the second volume of the *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–18*, claiming that the consciousness of Australian nationhood was born on the 25th of April, 1915 (II: 910). Deane and Howard’s invocation of Bean is important not just for the sentiment, but that it reinforces Bean and the *Official History* as the central and paramount referent to Anzac and Gallipoli. Howard continues to quote Bean in many subsequent speeches on Anzac affairs or simply national identity. He paraphrases passages from the *Official History* or Bean’s abridged volume *Anzac to Amiens*: With the “severing of the final

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1 *E.g.* "I don’t think that the Anzac tradition has been better described than in the words of the great World War I historian Charles Bean...” (*Speeches*, 21st Apr. 1999).
tangible link,” memory yields irrevocably to secondary sources. And as these speeches imply, now more than ever, Bean becomes the touchstone, the index to this moment of the nation’s history.

I begin this thesis with the death of Ted Matthews not just because he was the ‘last Anzac’, for a state funeral is more than a formal commemoration of the subject it honours; it is a cultural ritual that affirms the link between death and the imagining of national identity. And so in this introductory chapter I examine the discursive relations by which the themes of death and nation coalesce in the myth of Anzac. I trace these relations to the ancient Greek and Hebraic literatures which provide the ur-myths for the western cultural tradition of which Australia is an inheritor. Further, I examine how topics and images from an ancient text like the Iliad surface in the Official History, and I consider how such texts participate in the production of both myth and history.

Because these themes intersect on many planes my argument is of necessity circular rather than linear. It also evidences a degree of discursive parataxis, indicative of the apposite relations of the subheadings I employ; Myth, History, and Nation — ideas which are examined in greater theoretical detail in following chapters. I want now to look more closely at the publication that is the Official History, and at its position in Australian cultural history.

* The Official History of Australia in the War 1914–18 comprises twelve volumes under the general editorship of C.E.W. Bean, published by Angus & Robertson in Sydney between 1921 and 1942. (A digest of the volumes is set out in Appendix A) Each volume is demy octavo (5½" x 8½"), averaging about 800 pages. The numerous impressions are hard bound in varying shades of dark red — best described in the words of Hamilton’s review as, “the colour of dried blood.” Of the twelve volumes, Bean wrote six, co-edited another, and acted as general editor for the rest.
Despite the multiple authorship and disparate subject matter, under Bean's editorship it remains legitimate to consider the twelve volumes as a consolidated work of historiography. Certainly it is Bean who is commonly regarded as the author, and it is his six volumes that are quoted and fêted in the public domain. This perception is reinforced by his central role in remembrance of national military history as the founder of the Australian War Memorial and writer of much of the rubric for Anzac Day services.

Initial print runs of a few thousand copies per volume were followed by multiple impressions. Total sales of all volumes exceeded 150,000. By the publication of the final instalment in 1942, the first volume had been reprinted twelve times and sold more than 21,000 copies; Harry Gullet's heroic narratives of the Light Horse at Beersheba yielded twelve editions of volume seven, with sales over 20,000. The Photographic Record alone went to sixteen impressions in twenty years, and sold more than 27,000 copies. Of course, the volumes reached a far larger audience than just the numbers sold — they were read in libraries, huddled over at RSL clubs, handed down within families, bought and sold in second-hand bookshops. Copies in public collections evidence frequent annotations by keen and careful readers. Bean's phrases have continued to resound in yearly newspaper tributes, in school history books, and of course, in politicians' speeches.

Bean's history has made an indelible imprint in the cultural map of Australia. In a poll conducted in 1984, the Official History of Australia in the

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2 Hill, 'Bean's photographic record', n. 3. Publication figures are found in Australian War Memorial (AWM) 782/5/2. Anecdotal evidence from second-hand booksellers suggests the Photographic Record of the War remains the most popularly traded volume.

3 To cite just one example, in an 'Australia Day' supplement published in the Australian newspaper (25th/26th Jan. 1997), Paul Kelly ('A nation reborn') quotes Bean, "the famous Anzac chronicler," on the character of the Australian soldier at Gallipoli. The text is supported by Steven Siewert's picture of Ted Matthews, captioned as the (then) oldest surviving "first wave Anzac."
Great War was among the works selected as the ten ‘greatest-ever’ Australian books. On the ABC television literary review program ‘Between the Lines’ in 1997, a visual out-take shows a bookshelf with Bean’s 1946 condensed history Anzac to Amiens holding down one end, a pillar of Australian literary heritage as it were. And there are many other examples of the lasting, indeed growing, presence of Bean’s texts fifty years and more after they were written. His diaries have been published as Gallipoli Correspondent (edited by Kevin Fews:ter), and his wartime writings anthologized in Making the Legend (edited by Denis Winter). Bean’s six volumes were re-issued by University of Queensland Press in 1981, and are still in print. All this for a new readership, the majority of whom were born after the Official History was first published.

Bean’s words thus continue to shape the Anzac myth across the cultural spectrum. A brief example will serve to demonstrate how the Official History extends into various discourses and over generations. An image that will be familiar to many Australians is the final scene of the 1981 film Gallipoli, in which Archy Hamilton (Mark Lee) sprints toward the Turkish lines and into deadly machine gun fire. Archy meets his death as if breasting the tape at the finishing line of the 100 yards dash. Emphasized by a long, slow fade-out, the scene is a powerful combination of the Australian ethos of sport, sacrifice, and the male body. But this iconographical image is not a fiction created for the film — it recreates a passage from Bean’s Official History. Here we read how Archy’s death is based on the figure of Wilfred Harper, a Western Australian Light Horseman killed at the Nek; who as Bean writes:

was last seen running forward like a schoolboy in a foot-race, with all the speed he could compass. (II: 618)

4 Age, 7th January 1984, ‘Saturday Extra’, 8. From a panel of seven commentators, Bean was nominated by Brian Johns and Frank Moorhouse — both men, and both cultural critics rather than historians.
The film's makers Peter Weir and David Williamson acknowledge Bean as a source, but also state how their main reference work was Bill Gammage's *The Broken Years*, a book based on the letters of Great War veterans. Gammage likewise acknowledges that his greatest debt is to Bean, and to his "incomparable Official History" (Gallipoli, 5-11). Thus the *narratives* of Gallipoli, the individual units or events of syntactic narrative that are put together to make a story, are successively retold: by Bean, by Gammage, by Williamson, by John Howard. I return to the film in later chapters to examine how Weir and Williamson select and manœuvre elements of the story to create a specific ideological slant to the Anzac legend — in particular, the emphasis on the bush origins of the A.I.F., and the reification of anti-British sentiment. But we can see immediately how Bean's *Official History* has a life beyond the dusty confines of war memorabilia, and well beyond academic heritage; it continues to live in mainstream political rhetoric and in popular mass culture. Originally a metanarrative on the war, the *Official History* has become inextricably part of the Anzac myth itself; and it is this relationship between history and myth that I turn to now.

'Myth'
Every nation wants to believe that it is unique, that its character and stories are its alone. And while every nation is unique and individual, this truism extends only so far. For example, the story of the Greeks and the Trojans can be told in the following way:

* A long time ago there were two peoples, Us and Them, and there was trouble between the two. So the men of Us got in their ships and went across the water to fight the men of Them.
* Now they fought for a while, and some of the men of Us even went to other lands and fought other battles, but eventually they came home. All that happened was made into a great story about the whole affair, and in time, this story became a national legend.
The story is familiar. It was told thousands of years ago, and it was told yesterday. The details of the story may change a little each time, but the song remains the same; for it is a timeless story, a universal story. It is, of course, a mythical story.

In similar fashion then, we might tell a story of the Australians and the Turks like this:

\[\text{Not so long ago there were two peoples, Us and Them. There came a time when the men of Us got in their ships and went across the water to fight the men of Them.}\]

\[\text{Now they fought for a while, and the young men of Us even went to other lands and fought other battles, but eventually they came home. All that happened was written down into a great story about the whole affair...and the rest is history.}\]

It is the peculiar nature of myth to be hailed as preserving eternal verities, in the same breath as being denounced for consisting of fables and lies. The story of the people of Us is both true and false: it can readily be mapped onto the histories of a number of societies, and at the same time it is perforce a fabrication, the fancy of the present author.

The two words History and Myth have an attraction for each other. One moment they are contrary terms, opposed in a search for Fact and Truth; the next they are complementary notions, combining as opposite terms in a discursive account of memory. One moment valorized, the next censured. Myth and history, myth/history, mystery. Myth and history have a chiastic relationship, a crosswise arrangement which sees the two terms forever wrestling with each other for primacy, and swapping places.\(^5\) Lord Raglan says, “There is no good reason to believe that a myth has ever embodied a historical fact” (The HERO, 90). But writing in the same year as Raglan (1956), Peter Munz declares: “Myth and history are interdependent. They fertilize each other; and it is doubtful whether

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\(^5\) As I shall discuss in Chapter One, myth also enjoys a chiastic relationship with both Reason (λόγος) and Ritual.
the one could exist without the other" (History and myth', 1). Independence versus interdependence; opposition versus apposition.

Both 'myth' and 'history' resist stable definition. Wherever the semantic limits are placed, however, the two terms converge in a common reliance on narration, for it is through narratives that history and myth are preserved and circulated. Identifying the role of narratives in the dialectic between myth and history reinforces the idea that narration is central to the transmission of 'facts'. Furthermore, narration demands a narrator and a narratee, a teller and a hearer, and each separate narrative generates new meaning. Thus history, like myth, becomes as polysemic as the number of its tellings. At the same time, myths have a centripetal power; they gather many narratives into themselves. And these many are subsumed into a master narrative — ten individuals become one character, ten places become one scenario, and ten stories become one myth. Most importantly, the new stories we tell of recent events are inevitably inflected by the narrative models that have condensed over history.

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_In the Iliad, Homer tells how the city of Troy on the south side of the Hellepont was besieged by an invading force from across the sea._

Is that history or myth?

_In the Official History, C.E.W. Bean tells how the peninsula on the north side of the Hellepont was besieged by an invading force from across the sea._

Is that history or myth? — or both? Just as the interpretation of narratives changes and evolves between different readers and different epochs, so too the generic status of texts is reinterpreted and re-evaluated. Bean's text is not simply an account commissioned by a government to detail the acts and experiences of its citizens; the Official History's place in the pantheon of Australian writing will continue to change according to the values and concerns of the society that reads it.
The same goes for the *Iliad*. It is by turns an account of city-state rivalries, and a nationalist epic; it is a triumph of fictional imagination and verse making, and a repository of archaeological truth and history. Above all, its reception shows how societies and communities look to literary and artistic representation to imagine themselves. The historical veracity of the tale of Troy has always been debated, never more so than when Heinrich Schliemann dug up the ruins of old Troy at Hissarlik in the 1870s. But whether or not the *Iliad* is accorded any place in ‘history’, since its writing the story has always been inextricably part of Greek cultural memory. It was being taught in schools and debated by scholars two and a half thousand years ago. Like the more accredited battles of Salamis and Marathon, and later Granicus and Issus, the sack of Troy was testament to the superiority of the Greeks.

But the nationalist reading of the *Iliad* ignores the textual evidence that the host which ventures to Troy is not actually ‘Greek’, but a composite force of “many nations of men” (*Iliad*, II: 91). The famous ‘Catalogue of ships’ in Book II lists the Spartans, Athenians, Aitolians, Kretans, Rhodians, the Arkadians and so on — those who at other times were busy fighting amongst themselves, rather than against a common enemy across the water. The Trojans, too, are a conglomeration of peoples: “there was no speech nor language common to all of them,” says Homer (IV: 434). But the two sides are culturally akin to one another. They share the same customs, worship the same gods, follow similar cultural codes. As Hilary Mackie observes, “In the *Iliad*, Greek and non-Greek are not absolutely exclusive categories” (*Talking Trojan*, 9).

Greek (*Hellen*) is not an entirely appropriate term in the first place, of course. As Thucydides is at pains to make clear, Homer uses the

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6 Among the ancients, Herodotos asks “whether the story the Hellenes tell about Illos is true or not” (*Historie*, II: §118); Thucydides says Homer naturally exaggerates because he is a poet (*Peloponnesian Wars*, I: §10); Aristotle appreciates the art of the poem but disbelieves the story: “The absurdity is veiled in the poetic charm” (*Poetics*, 1460a).
collective names 'Achaens', 'Argives' or 'Danaans' for the invading force (*Peloponnesian War*, 1: §3). By contrast, 'Hellene' refers only to "those that came with Achilles out of Phthiotis." But the Matter of Troy was too great a story not to generate chauvinist interpretations — first for the Greeks, and later the Romans, who astutely resurrected the noble lineage of Troy and harnessed it to their own imperial ideology (*cf. Vergil’s Aeneid*). Homer’s apparent even-handedness and delicate portrayal of the Trojans not as barbaroi but as xenia (i.e., strangers, pertaining to the relationship of host and guest) was too subtle for the boisterous Hellenism of his descendants. Inevitably, inexorably, Homer became the national poet of the Greeks, and his poems the sacred texts of Hellenic culture. The transition (in terms of hermeneutic reception) from literary to political epic is almost unavoidable when one considers the subsequent history of Greece from the eighth century onward. With the ongoing hostilities toward Asia Minor, the *Iliad* provided just the necessary framework into which to read a mythic ancestry of Hellenic supremacy.

Thucydides is of interest here with his observation that the various states “did nothing in common” before the Trojan War, but then sent a ‘common force’ of ships (1: §§3, 10). Bearing in mind that he has just finished explaining that Hellas as a country didn’t exist at the time, and that many of the smaller states were probably bullied into participating by Agamemnon, Thucydides presents this overseas campaign as a motivating factor in Hellenic union. The subsequent war then becomes a founding moment of national identity.

There are modest though obvious parallels to be made here with the Federation of Australia and the effect of the Great War. The six Australian colonies found as much to disagree over as to unite themselves. They had squabbled over everything from trade tariffs to railway gauges.

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7 A scan of the Ancient Greek CD-ROM database suggests that the first recorded use of 'Hellene' as collective for "Greek" is in Hesiod (*Works and Days*, 653).
Thus Bean writes of the infant Australian nation in similar manner to Thucydides' assessment of the Hellenic states:

When the A.I.F. first sailed it left there a nation that did not yet know itself...The people of the six states which formed the Commonwealth were very much divided...In numerous respects they were still six colonies rather than a single federated nation. (VI: 1094)

But by the "doings" of the A.I.F., Bean concludes that, "the Australian nation came to know itself" (VI: 1095). There is something of the Delphic maxim "Know thyself" in Bean's formula here. Yet the Official History insists that for nations, this process can only be achieved through "the test of a great war" (VI: 1095).

The fundamental topos of war is death. Behind Ted Matthews' observation that politicians make wars but do not go to them is the terrible inversion of the natural order where the young die before the old. Rhetorically this is called hysteron proteron, where the latter takes the place of the former. War brings the reversal of Oedipal logic, for in war the son dies to maintain the position of the father. A.D. Hope gave voice to this in his bitter criticism on Vietnam conscription: "Go tell those old men safe in bed, / We took their orders and are dead" ('Inscription for any War'). In the Great War, facing the unimaginable loss of a generation of young men, such sentiments were only too prevalent. Even Rudyard Kipling, the "Poet of Empire," was forced to grapple with his paternal conscience, in this couplet on the pointless death of his son in battle: "If any question why we died, / Tell them, because our fathers lied ('The common form').

Perhaps the most poignant expression of this paradigm is Wilfred Owen's 'Parable of the old men and the young', in which the poet takes up the story of Abraham and Isaac to question the necessity of sacrifice. Owen frequently engaged with classical images and forms, and in this poem he inverts the well-known story of the 'Binding of Isaac' (the
‘Akedah’ from the Elohist strand of the Pentateuch to condemn the ‘old men’ of Europe:

…Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,
And builded trenches and parapets there,
And stretched forth the knife to slay his son.
When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad…
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.
But the old man would not so, but slew his son,
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

In the original Genesis story Abraham is rewarded for his obedience, becoming ‘the father of the nation’. Owen, on the other hand, sees only death and barrenness.

The Akedah is used to entirely different ends by Erich Auerbach in the first chapter of *Mimesis*, where he juxtaposes the Jewish text with Homer’s description of Odysseus’ scar (“Readers of the *Odyssey* will remember the well-prepared and touching scene in Book XIX…”). As Auerbach explains, in Homer everything is fully expressed, all thoughts and feelings are externalized. By contrast the Elohist text suppresses such narrative elements, and is “fraught with background” (12). Owen’s poem likewise eschews all reason and explanation.

Auerbach goes on to espouse a host of differences between Hellenic and Hebraic literary practices, concluding that “The two styles, in their opposition, represent two basic types” (23). Yet despite Auerbach’s convincing argument, there nevertheless remains a degree of cultural commonality between the societies, in this case the ritual offering of a firstborn child. For just as Abraham is prepared to sacrifice his child to gain favour with his god, so too Agamemnon is willing to sacrifice his child Iphegenia to appease the goddess Artemis. As told in the *Kypria*, and

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8 “Akedah” is the Hebrew word for “binding,” traditionally used to refer to the whole passage in *Genesis*, XXII.
later in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Agamemnon's offering enables the Achaean fleet to sail to Troy, and the long war begins. In both cases of course, the sacrifice is incomplete, and the victim is spared; but the show of obedience satisfies and appeases both deities, Elolhüm and Artemis. In this sense they are fully *ritualized* sacrifices, in that they are ultimately only symbolic.

Lévi-Strauss argues that repetition is endemic to mythography, and that mythological analysis should consider all variants of a given myth. The narrative of filial sacrifice is a universal paradigm, typically involving the victim(s) being offered on behalf of a community. The logic of sacrifice relies on the fear that without some reflected benefit to the community, the death is otherwise useless. The greater the scale of loss, the greater the reciprocal benefit must be. In the case of the Anzacs, the balance claimed is the birth of a nation.

**'History'**

And when rosy-fingered Dawn appeared, child of the morning, then they set sail for the wide camp of the Achaians; and Apollo the Far-darter sent them a favouring gale.

That's Homer, in Walter Leaf's translation from the first book of the *Iliad* (I: 477–79), describing how Odysseus returns to the Achaean camp after accompanying Chryseis back to her father.

Through the night the convoy moved without the least interruption. The exquisite rosy-fingered dawn found every ship still in its place, exactly as every other morning found it.

And that's Bean, in his first book (I: 103), describing how the A.I.F. steams across the Indian Ocean to the wide camp of the British at Mena, in Lower Egypt. Homer is a gentle Muse to Bean throughout the *Official History*, a companion in style, form and rhetoric. Having studied Greats
at Oxford, Bean was thoroughly at home with the epic and historical literature of the classical era. The ‘Bean Study Collection’ at the Australian War Memorial is a substantive representation of Bean’s library. It includes a Greek edition of the *Iliad*, Pope’s translation of the *Odyssey*, copies of Herodotus and Thucydides in Greek and English, works by Livy and Cæsar, and a Greek New Testament. Given Bean’s familiarity with Homer, it is no surprise to find these allusions in his writing. The question is whether such intertextuality is a casual trope for occasional stylistic effect, or whether it suggests a more insistent ideology of purpose. It is impossible to use the combination “rosy-fingered dawn” without invoking Homer, and the parallels in situation here suggest that Bean’s use is deliberate. The details of Bean’s debt to Greek epic and historical literature will be addressed further in Chapter Six.

There has been general consensus that the style and structure of the *Official History* evokes the genre of Epic. A review in the London *Observer* (Feb. 1922) states the case unequivocally, proclaiming “The book is Australia’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.” Robin Gerster speaks of “Bean’s epic”, and places it “within a tradition that has its roots in Homer’s archetypal war epic” (*Big-Notes*, 68, 62). How much does Bean mould his material in order to achieve this; how much does he leave in, and how much does he take out? When comparing the *Iliad* and the *Pentateuch* in the essay on Odysseus’ scar, Auerbach suggests that the difference between legendary and historical writing is obtained in the textual structure; legend simplifies its material, whereas the historical event “runs much more variously, contradictorily, and confusedly” (*Mimesis*, 19). The historian typically aims for clarity and orderly argument; is this an imposition on the riot of history? Auerbach concludes that, “To write history is so difficult that most historians are forced to make concessions to the technique of legend” (20).

This comment prefigures the later debate about historiography, and its homologous relations with the fictive genres of narrative. Hayden
White provides the opening polemical gambit here: "I treat the historical work as what it most manifestly is: a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse" (Metahistory, ix). As will be examined below (Chapter Five), White's method of tropological analysis and his theory of historiographical styles are particularly apposite to a study of Bean. Likewise Michel de Certeau's assertion that historical writing constructs its discourse according to a process of 'narrativization' encourages us to look beyond the mass of sentimental detail in the History, to consider the motivation of emplotment in the story (Writing of History).

Bean's text is in fact much more than an account of the strategies and tactics in a military campaign. As the full title plainly declares — The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918 — it is not the history of a war, but of a nation. Bean's subject finally is not the war, but the Australian soldier. Throughout he addresses the question of what it is about 'being Australian' that makes the Australian Anzacs behave differently to other imperial troops. He refers this back to the structure of Australian society — the bushmen, the squattocracy, the larrikins and city professionals. This slippage between military history and nation—narrative is nowhere more manifest than in the conclusion to Volume II, the epilogue to 'The Story of Anzac'. First published in 1924, this passage has become part of the collective national imagination:

In no unreal sense it was on 25th of April, 1915, that the consciousness of Australian nationhood was born. Anzac Day — a national celebration held on the anniversary of the Landing — is devoted to the memory of those who fell in the war. (II: 910)

Peter Stanley declares these words to be "Bean's greatest historiographical legacy" ('Reflections', 5), and Ken Inglis believes Bean was "one of the first" to state the link between Gallipoli and national consciousness ('Anzac tradition', 29). This is the passage that Howard invoked at the State Funeral for Ted Matthews. Notice that while contemporary defenders of Anzac and Remembrance Day services stress that the ceremonies
do not glorify war, but ‘commemorate’ the fallen, Bean describes Anzac Day as a ‘national celebration’.

The very word ‘Anzac’ takes on a holy resonance in Bean’s work. He goes into minute detail to explain its origins from the name of the force, the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps:

The clerks had noticed the big initials on the cases outside their room — A. & N. Z. A. C.; and a rubber stamp for registering correspondence had also been cut with the same initials. (I: 124)

When he stipulates that the code word was “according to most accounts” first suggested by the clerk Lieutenant A.T. White, his unfailing desire to acknowledge anyone involved leads him to add, in a footnote:

The word had already been used among the clerks. Possibly the first occasion was when Sgt. G.C. Little asked Sgt. H.V. Millington to “throw him the ANZAC stamp.” (I: 125, n.10)

Hardly what one expects to find in an Official History, but Bean’s scrupulous honesty and fair-mindedness do not allow him to ignore such details. (One might add that Bean was probably keen to show that the word was not coined by White, an Englishman, but by Sgt. Little, a New Zealander, in conversation with Sgt. Millington, of New South Wales.)

Bean observes that the word came only slowly into use, and even at the Landing “many men in the divisions had not yet heard of it.” Later he elaborates on the genesis of the names Anzac Cove and Anzac Gully, and how the term ‘Anzac’ came to signify the whole sector of operations (I: 545). The first two volumes of the History are subtitled ‘The Story of Anzac’, and Bean also published The Anzac Book and Anzac to Amiens. During and immediately after the war the Australian Government passed two laws to control and proscribe the unsanctioned use of the word.

The intensity of feeling that ‘Anzac’ continues to generate brings to mind Todorov’s dictum that words themselves may become more important than the things they were supposed to reflect (Poetics of Prose, 80).
Todorov also states that, "words do not signify the presence of things, but their absence" (101). This is particularly true with Anzac, which on one level acts to fill the void of those who never came back, and at the mythic level supplements the sense of a ‘lack of history’ in the Australian psyche. This dichotomy of presence and absence is also at the heart of the Anzac Day march, which I will consider further in Chapter Two.

The Anzacs' reputation was not solely in Bean's hands of course; many other voices contributed, and not always in unison. When Brigadier-General Cecil Aspinall-Oglander came to write the British 'Official History' of the Gallipoli campaign, he found a few skeletons in the closet. Writing some years after Bean, Aspinall-Oglander was unable to reconcile his witnesses' testaments of the Landing with the published Australian accounts. As he wrote in a private note:

the truth about the Australians has never been told and in its absence a myth has sprung up that the Anzac troops did magnificently against amazing odds.9

In the draft chapter on the Landing at Anzac Cove, Aspinall-Oglander suggested that in the afternoon of the first day, "a well co-ordinated attack could scarcely have failed to...carry the line to its objective." But there was a large number of "stragglers," he alleged; an endless stream of unwounded men who had lost morale were choking the gullies returning to the beach. In such circumstances a concerted attack was impossible, and the chance of immediate victory was lost.

This version of events was subtly but importantly different from the Australian published Official History. Bean, too, mentions the "stragglers" who "began to find their way into the valleys behind the firing line" (I: 453). And he acknowledges that "unwounded or slightly wounded men

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9 Aspinall-Oglander Papers, OG/112 no date, Isle of Wight Country Record Office. The details of Aspinall-Oglander's papers were uncovered by Alistair Thomson, 'Vilest libel of the war?'. Other accounts of this affair are found in Williams, Quarantined Culture, 184–189; and Davie, 'The beginning of doubts'.

were assisting the more heavily wounded to the rear.” But, anxious to protect the feelings of the soldiers, and preserve the reputation of the A.I.F., he also claims that, “Strong and brave men lay in torment out in the scrub, racking their brains for some pretext for retirement sufficient to satisfy their own consciences.” Bean quotes a report that, “a considerable number of unwounded men were leaving the line”; but maintains (in typical Bean syntax) that, “By no possible extension of their meaning could the terms ‘thoroughly demoralised’ be truthfully applied to the troops at Gaba Tepe that day” (I: 462). He admits there were “some of weaker fibre,” but asserts “here was nearly always present some strong independent will.” The qualifications ‘truthfully’ and ‘nearly always’ speak loud in Bean’s protestations.

As was customary, the drafts of the British history were sent to Australia for comment. Not surprisingly, the allegations about the Landing were not well received, and a flurry of letters ensued. In July 1927, Bean wrote to the Defence Department saying that if printed as it stood, the draft would “undoubtedly cause an outcry in Australia.” Major-General Sir John Gellibrand MP wrote to Bean in agitation saying that the manuscript had the potential to convince the civilian reader that, “a large proportion of the glory of Anzac is mere propaganda.” Bean also wrote to Aspinall-Oglander complaining about the implication in the draft of ‘shirkers’ amongst the Australians, and suggesting that Aspinall-Oglander had underestimated the difficulty of the terrain. The two official historians subsequently exchanged a number of letters negotiating points of fact and interpretation.

On 7th Oct. 1927 the dispute hit the press in Australia with the headlines in the Sydney Daily Guardian “ANZACS ‘RABBLE’ SAYS HISTORIAN” and “VILEST LIBEL OF THE WAR.” The Australian pride was pricked, and generals, MPs, and the RSSILA all mobilized in defence of the Anzac

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10 Quoted in Thomson’s article. The extracts are from letters held among Bean’s papers at the Australian War Memorial; 3 DRL 7953, item 27.
reputation. As the affair escalated towards a diplomatic incident, the British took the expedient action of censoring their own official account to make it consistent with Bean’s. They were concerned that Bolshevik propagandists might use the wrangling to create ill-feeling between the Mother Country and Dominion. As Thomson observes, “in this case the accuracy of historical reputation was of less concern than the maintenance of imperial goodwill” (633). As it was, when Aspinall-Oglander’s volume on Gallipoli was published the following year the reviews were enthusiastic on both sides; the ‘vile libel’ had been forgotten, suppressed by the vigilant Whitehall bureaucracy.

The incident foregrounds one of the many paradoxes in Bean’s attitude to his subject. During his time as Official War Correspondent, Bean’s despatches were often subject to censorship; but he accepted the necessity for military secrecy during the war, and stoically suffered these impositions on his reportage. When it came to writing the Official History after the war however, he agreed to do so only on the express condition that he would be free from Government censorship and interference. This he proudly announces in the Preface to the first edition:

for the absolute freedom from all censorship; for every possible assistance towards elucidating the truth, both as editor and writer, [the author] is indebted to the Government of Australia. (I: xxv)

We can only wonder how Bean would have reacted to a request from the British Government to alter his wording and suppress his observations to accommodate official policy. But as a British staff officer, Aspinall-Oglander knew how to play the game. We quietly filed away his protest in his private papers — to be found some sixty years later by an antipodean researcher, Thomson. For his part, Bean took the chance to ‘reply to his critics’ in an addendum to the Preface to the third edition of 1934. Here he reiterated his defence of the ‘stragglers’: “It was too readily assumed that a crowd of dishevelled men, sitting in no apparent order, was a body
of shirkers...The particular crowd of stragglers proved to be the Beach Party," he concluded (1: xxiv).

Within the purposes of this study, the 'truth' is neither here nor there; Bean was always the A.I.F.'s greatest advocate. Bill Gammage pays homage to Bean when he says, "it pained him to speak ill of any man" (Broken Years, vi). But it is probably more accurate to say that in regard to the reputation of the A.I.F., Bean was generous to a fault. He would brook no criticism — especially not from British staff officers. It is not unfair to say that Bean's fulsome dedication to the Anzacs allows him to sacrifice rogue facts to the maintenance of the overall narrative. The case of Aspinall-Oglander's suppressed criticism shows this much about Bean; but it says a lot more about institutionalized historiography, and the nexus between propaganda and myth. Should we expect a nation's Official History to be independent and non-chauvinist? Perhaps not; but the more influential it becomes within society, the more it demands to be analyzed and criticized. And so, the following section will examine a selection of some of the more persistent legends about the Anzacs.

The first legendary trope to be considered concerns Australian casualties in the Great War. Official statistics show that relative to other belligerent Commonwealth nations, Australia suffered the highest casualty rate among its soldiers; almost 65% of troops sent overseas were killed, wounded or taken prisoner. This compares to 59.6% for New Zealanders and 47% for metropolitan British troops (see Appendix B). Why such

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11 The double standards obtaining in the Official History to the various staffs was identified by the Times Literary Supplement reviewer in 1922: "There is throughout a prejudice against the General Staff and the Staff College graduate, although not in the case of Australian officers thus qualified."

12 Such a criticism was levelled at Bean upon publication of the first volume of the Official History, by an irate letter writer "X" in the Sydney Sun in November 1921. Taking issue with Bean's representation of the Home Service Army before the War, "X" (who presumably had some interest in the matter) complains that Bean "twisted history to suit his object."
variation? The assessment by Ernest Scott in his 1936 volume of the *Official History*, has become accepted wisdom: “This was probably due to the fact that the Australians were nearly all ‘front line’ troops, engaged throughout the war in heavy fighting” (XI: 874). The high casualty rate has been used to explain the strength of the war memorial movement in Australia following the war. More recently the discrepancy between the Australian and British rates has been pressed into service by chauvinists and republicans to imply that the British deliberately employed the Australians as shock troops while their own soldiers remained safely in reserve behind the lines.\(^{13}\) Sometimes this paradigm is also mobilized to prove that the Australians were the ‘best’ of the Commonwealth troops, and therefore used for the hardest attacks.

I don’t want to dispute these reasonings, which are a matter for historical debate and argument. But there are more stories to be told from these statistics. For example, a very different reason for the A.I.F.’s proportionately high casualty rate of troops in the field can be found implied in the *Official History*, which describes the indifference to danger adopted by many Australian soldiers. Bean discusses a ‘standard of behaviour’ at Gallipoli that, “no one must pay heed to shell fire by even so much as turning a head” (I: 547). Despite a senior British officer describing the practice as “absolute madness,” it was a matter of pride and honour amongst the Australians to disregard enemy fire. Bean describes how in the Turkish attack of 19th May, Anzac troops were hit, “mostly through exposing themselves too eagerly after daylight” (*Anzac to Amiens*, 130).

The Australian soldier typically scorned the Tommy for his over-cautious attitude to enemy fire, and made a point of demonstrating his own fearlessness. “This attitude cost many casualties,” admits Bean (I: 548). Such bravado even caused the death of the Australians’ Commander-in-Chief, Major-General Sir William Throsby Bridges, whose

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\(^{13}\) John Williams notes that this belief was leavened by sophisticated German propaganda on the Somme in late 1916 (*Anzacs, the Media, and the Great War*, 155–7).
“ordinary practice had been to expose himself without regard for danger,” but who was fatally shot at Anzac for just such behaviour (II: 129). Later in France, the desire by newly promoted 2nd Lieutenants to impress their command saw them frequently killed in their first engagement, giving rise to the adage, ‘One star, one stunt’. Bean’s own words, quoted by Howard at the funeral of Ted Matthews, show how much this attitude was part of the Australian esprit de corps: “Anzac stood, and still stands, for reckless valour in a good cause, etc.” (Anzac to Amiens, 181). Is this bravery, or arrogant conceit? In any event, it gives a totally different explanation for the Australian casualty rate.

After the War the figure “most proudly invoked” was the disproportionately high casualty rate (Inglis, Sacred Places, 92). It is still being trumpeted by politicians, as in Malcolm Fraser’s comment in 1992 that Australia’s casualties were, “for our size, greater than that of other nations.” Statistics will prove anything, but the figure that rarely gets quoted is that while Australia had the highest casualty rate (among Commonwealth nations), it had the lowest participation rate: 6.8% of the population were actually mobilized, compared to 9% in New Zealand and 11.2% in Britain. That the Australian army remained the only volunteer force throughout the War goes some way to explaining this, but it does not discount the relatively low involvement. The only figure that can offer some sort of objective understanding of the impact of losses suffered by nations is the proportion of deaths to population. Again, Australia has a low rate: 1.21% of the entire population were killed in the Great War, compared to 1.51% in New Zealand and 1.46% in Britain. In France and Germany the rate was well over 3%. Put in this perspective, Australia’s losses are in fact the least of all its companion nations. Such a comparison makes it even more significant that after the War Australia created the largest memorials to its dead of any nation in the world.

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14 Sun-Herald, (Sydney) 8th March, 1992. Quoted in Williams, Quarantined Culture, 86.
One further legend of the A.I.F. needs re-examining here; the image of the tall, bronzed Anzac towering over his fellow Commonwealth troops. Bean took great pleasure in watching the Anzacs in Cairo, noting that "the little pink-cheeked lads from the Manchester cotton-mills...looked like children when compared with the huge men of the Australian regiments" (I: 126). All the English writers, Masefield, Bartlett, T.E. Lawrence, commented on the physical appearance of the Anzacs, with a greater or lesser degree of homo-eroticism, for example: "this race of athletes" (Ashmead Bartlett, 'Australians'); "Their almost complete nudity, their tallness and majestic simplicity of line" (Mackenzie, Gallipoli Memories, 81). There is a common imperative to seize upon any distinction in the Australians, then to generalize and magnify it. For Bean especially, the apparent physical superiority of the Australians confirmed his ideas about the benefits of rural life compared to urban. The Australian environment and way of life had simply bred a superior physique.¹⁵

Significantly however, all these assessments (which are continually recirculated in the literature) stem from the descriptions of the first contingent of the A.I.F., either in Egypt or at Gallipoli. At this time the minimum height requirement in the A.I.F. was 5'6", and the medical fitness standards very rigorous. Ernest Scott writes in the domestic volume of the Official History that it was hardly surprising the physique of the first 20,000 Australians soldiers was commented upon, because the inspecting doctors "seemed to judge them as though they were selecting models for a Rodin or a Bertram McKennal rather than troops for war" (XI: 211).

It is well documented that many men were rejected in the first draft because of the stringent health and height standards, were later accepted

¹⁵ "The Australian came of a race whose tradition was one of independence and enterprise, and, within that race itself, from a stock more adventurous, and for the most part physically more strong, than the general run of men. By reason of the open air life in the new climate, and of greater abundance of food, the people developed more fully the large frames which seem normal to Anglo-Saxons living under generous conditions" (Official History, I: 4–5).
as the standards were relaxed. As the need for reinforcements grew, the
minimum height was successively lowered to 5'0" — while Scott suggests
that, “In the British Army by 1916 all standards except physical fitness
appear to have been abandoned” (III: 6, n.2; XI: 439, n.7). Robson also
makes the point (almost universally ignored), that nearly a quarter of
recruits to 1915 were not even Australian-born (Origin and character of
the First A.I.F., 744).

It takes the eye of an artist like George Lambert to see the distortion
for what it is: “You know,” he said to Bean, “we constantly picture
Australians as tall, wiry men, whereas the average Australian — if there
is one — is short and stout” (Gallipoli Mission, 110). By 1948 Bean can
admit this, carefully adding that, “the original Anzacs were big men.” But
the men of the first contingent have always been held forth as representa-
tive of the Australian male in general, and the comparisons made in 1914
and 1915 remain unchallenged as truthful and accurate. And today it is
not Lambert, Scott or the later, circumspective Bean who is quoted, but
Masefield, Mackenzie and the exuberant Bean of ‘The Story of Anzac’. In
his seminal article ‘The Anzac tradition’, for example, Ken Inglis quotes
extensively from the passage about the “little pink-cheeked lads.” Inglis
questions Bean’s valorization of the bush-soldier — but he accepts the
notion of the superior Australian physique without comment. Interest-
ingly, as Bill Gammage pointed out to the makers of Gallipoli, some of the
lead actors were probably too short to have been accepted into the A.I.F.
at the time, though they were obviously acceptable to the public as rep-
resentative Australians. Here then is the gap between myth and actuality.
It seems not to matter how often inaccuracies are debunked, the myths
of Anzac keep rolling happily along in the genre of popular story and
mass media. This is especially so in the homologies constructed between
the ‘Anzac spirit of sacrifice’ and the Nation — which leads me to the
final topic of my Introductory.
To conclude this chapter I want to return to the funeral of Ted Matthews, and to a comment made by John Howard in his oration:

Let us mark December 9, 1997 — the day on which Ted Matthews died — as the day Australia grew old enough to sometimes forget what happened that Anzac day, but determined enough always to remember.

What is John Howard saying here? Seemingly something simple; that the death of Matthews marks the break in living memory with the first Anzac Day, and that it is up to those now living to preserve the memory. Yet the rhetoric is particularly interesting in that it echoes the wording of a famous 1882 essay by Ernest Renan titled, ‘What is a nation?’:

But the essence of a nation is that the individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things... Every French citizen must have forgotten the Saint Bartholomew massacre, and those in the Midi in the thirteenth century. (‘What is a nation?’ 11)16

In this paper, Renan assayed a number of notions and prejudices about the idea of ‘nation’, a topic then “fairly new in history” (9). Renan’s comments throughout are sophisticated and provocative. He considers factors such as race, language, dynasties, history, religion — all fairly equivocally. Finally, he suggests a nation is “a soul, a spiritual principle” (19).

In the sentences quoted above, Renan speaks of the need for a nation to undergo a collective forgetting, in order to enjoy a common imagination. One hundred years after Renan, Benedict Anderson considers this very passage in relation to his theory of the nation, Imagined Communities. It is appropriate to revisit Anderson’s familiar definition (6):

I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community — and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.

It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. Renan referred to this imagining when he wrote that "Or, l'essence d'une nation..."

Anderson further elaborates on his four terms — 'imagined, community, limited, sovereign' — before concluding: "Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (7).

In the second edition of the book (published in 1991, eight years after the first), Anderson revisits Renan's essay. In an additional chapter titled 'Memory and forgetting', under the section heading 'The reassurance of fratricide', Anderson examines the function of civil strife in the construction of national consciousness. Specifically, he analyzes Renan's statement that 'every French citizen must have forgotten the massacres' — or as he translates it, is "obliged already to have forgotten" (200). Anderson finds Renan's statement extraordinary, that the unity of a nation rests in its ability collectively to forget past conflict. He queries why in the very formation of his thesis Renan is obliged to remind his countrymen of such massacres, of which they were probably unaware in the first place. He observes that, "Having to 'have already forgotten' tragedies of which one needs unceasingly to be 'reminded' turns out to be a characteristic device in the later construction of national genealogies" (201). Anderson then disparagingly makes comparisons with similar civil strife in England and the USA, and the way the narratives of the Norman Conquest and the American Civil War have been moulded for posterity into purely internecine conflicts ('reassuringly fratricidal'). He is obviously concerned at how 'fraternal imagining' can proscribe historical interpretation. In essence, the process Anderson calls 'remembering/forgetting', is really a
process of ‘reconciliation’. If a nation is to be a collective ‘imagined community’, it cannot refuse to remember its past.

John Howard would have Australians forget and remember Anzac and Gallipoli as the spirit of Australian nationhood. In the same fashion, Paul Keating had tried to relocate this topos to Singapore and Kokoda. But for Renan, the important things for national consciousness to remember/forget were not the external wars against foreigners, but the massacres within France that split the society assunder. What are the wars that Australia’s conscience must remember/forget for its collective soul? Not the ‘valiant and noble’ efforts on a beach ten thousand miles away. The place to examine the conflicts that have shaped the nation is the domestic history and landscape: the class divide between soldiers and convicts among the British who arrived in 1778; the struggles of non-white British migrants; the gender blindness which celebrates the deaths of men but ignores the stories of women. And finally, it must be the massacres of those ‘always already Australians’, the indigenous population.

The nation must be able to remember collectively the battles and skirmishes between settlers and Aborigines, and the deaths on both sides, in order then to forget collectively and become a single imagined community. This recognition of the importance of the black wars of the early nineteenth century is what Henry Reynolds has pursued in his work. It drives Andy Kissane’s poem ‘Reconciliation achieved’, which asks those who stand in RSL clubs across the country to honour the fallen “from that other Great War”:

the unknown warriors
who fell at Coniston Station
and Waterloo Creek…
in countless skirmishes
without date or legend…
Terra nullius: lest we forget.  

Similarly Hank Nelson says of the Prime Minister: “Howard want[s] no Australian to think that they were there at Myall Creek or rode with the police at Coristoon or joined the miners to harry the Chineses at Buckland River” (‘Gallipoli, Kokoda’, 216). Remembering these dead, on both sides, is not to substitute the memory of the Anzacs, but to add to it. Anzac speaks of none of these memories, just as it excludes women, and all those who have come after. And these other rememberings have implications for the legal, moral, and spiritual status of modern Australia, with far greater import than one battle on a foreign shore.