Patsy Adam-Smith's "The ANZACS" : a popular memory

Author:
Clarke, Sally

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PATSY ADAM-SMITH'S "THE ANZACS": A POPULAR MEMORY

by

Sally Clarke

Submitted in partial fulfilment for the
MA (Pass) Degree
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University College
University of New South Wales
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S.C.

ABSTRACT

The historical basis of Pasty Adam-Smith's *The ANZACS*, a narrative which deals with Australia's involvement in World War I, has prompted its evaluation as an academic history. Such an evaluation exposes problems with the organisation and arrangement of material, lack of references, errors of fact, and other considerations crucial to a text supposing to deal with a matter of historical importance. It becomes clear that *The ANZACS* represents another aspect of the way an event of such significance may rest in the minds of a society, apart from academic history. The letters, diaries and interviews that lend strength to this text, came about as a result of the overall event of World War I and represent the expressions of some who were there. As such they are private memories of that war, collected together and made into a narrative. The author, a non-academic, born after the event, but having gained some understanding of it through her own family's experiences, has added her interpretation to explain and background the personal narratives contained in the letters and diaries. That she had to undertake enormous research in order to do this is evident, but the author's style, and her emphasis on the personal story, make this less of a history and more of a popular narrative about the war. The popularity of this text rests with its familiar subject, the endeavour of Australian soldiers at Gallipoli and on the Western Front, already enshrined in the legends of Anzac. A narrative such as *The ANZACS*, poses questions about how the legend was generated and where the text rests in matters of value and style. The text also prompts evaluation of the letters, diaries and interview transcripts and other stories contained in the book, and an examination of the way the author has used these to promote her sympathetic view of the Anzac. The author's autobiographical input adds another personal element to the text which, with her emphasis on personal accounts, points to this as a story of the people, private memories of World War I brought to public notice in *The ANZACS*.

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If the French Revolution were to recur eternally, French historians would be less proud of Robespierre. But because they deal with something that will not return, the bloody years of the Revolution have turned into mere words, theories, and discussions, have become lighter than feathers, frightening no one. There is an infinite difference between a Robespierre who occurs only once in history and a Robespierre who eternally returns, chopping off French heads.

Let us therefore agree that the idea of eternal return implies a perspective from which things appear other than as we know them: they appear without the mitigating circumstance of their transitory nature. This mitigating circumstance prevents us from coming to a verdict. For how can we condemn something that is ephemeral, in transit? In the sunset of dissolution everything is illuminated by the aura of nostalgia, even the guillotine.

Milan Kundera
The Unbearable Lightness of Being

INTRODUCTION

Patsy Adam-Smith is regarded as a popular Australian author. Her award winning book, *The ANZACS*,[1] was first published in 1978. This popular narrative has achieved large sales and reached an even wider audience through association with media adaptations of texts written about Australia's involvement in World War I.

Much of the criticism surrounding *The ANZACS*, comes from the assessment of it as a 'popular' history and judgement by academic historians of its value as an historical record of The Great War. In this sub-thesis I want to show that the popularity of this text, as proven in its publication history, has much to do with its nationalistic theme, and I will illustrate how this caused the book to be associated with a general awareness of nation apparent at the time of its

publication. I also want to show that although academic historians tend to judge the text for its historical content, this version of what happened at Gallipoli and beyond, lies outside the realm of academic history. The personal accounts, and Patsy Adam-Smith's involvement with her text, point to it as a memory that rests in the minds of the people, and which existed in family records until they were gathered together and brought to notice in this publication. Patsy Adam-Smith's identification of the personal accounts as "the only major writings of the working-class man this country has", (pp. 72/73) aligns the text with a form of writing that emerged during the 1970s, a way of recording the past through memories held in the community.

In my first chapter I will examine these points in relation to the popularity of the text, looking first at its publication history, then at value judgements made generally about popular literature, judgements made about this book, and values expressed in the text. Finally, I will discuss Patsy Adam-Smith's style as a factor contributing to the book's popularity, but also as providing a point for criticism of the text.

The ANZACS is based on personal letters, diaries and interview transcripts, accounts given by some Australians who fought at Gallipoli and in Europe. These accounts impart an air of authenticity to the story being told, and allow the reader some contact with World War I events. In my second chapter I will look at the difficulties surrounding the use of personal accounts and factors involved in their production, such as the vagaries of memory and recall, the need for letters to reassure people at home, and

the desire to tell an acceptable story about what happened to Australian soldiers in World War I. In this chapter I will discuss how official accounts and versions of the Anzac story, relating to the myths and legends of Anzac, became 'acceptable' stories because of the way they helped to alleviate nationwide grief for the loss of Australian troops. The grief Patsy Adam-Smith felt in her own family can be related to her desire to present a sympathetic view of the Australian soldier. I will also discuss how the author selects accounts that invoke feelings of pity and sorrow for the soldier, and avoids others that may show him in a poor light. Finally I will discuss the selection of accounts in relation to Adam-Smith's use of the statement at the beginning of the book that 'War is Hell'.

While using the soldiers' accounts to tell the Anzac story, Patsy Adam-Smith makes her own links with World War I by relating her family's war experiences. The personal element in her writing contributes to the perception of *The ANZACS* as a history of this war that rests in the minds of the people. My final chapter considers autobiographical impulses behind the writing of *The ANZACS*, as illustrated in the book's autobiographical element and in Adam-Smith's autobiography of childhood, *Hear the Train Blow*. The theme of survival against difficult odds, evident in much of Adam-Smith's writing, is apparent in her autobiography of childhood as she describes her family's efforts to survive well by the side of the railway. The family involvement in World War I, personal conflicts which lead to her perception of life as a battleground, and her interest in the survival theme can all be seen as influencing Patsy Adam-Smith

towards the writing of a narrative about what happened to Australian soldiers in World War I. To this are added the clearly nationalistic and patriotic messages contained in her childhood, including the masculine image provided by her father and his gang of fettlers. *The ANZACS* is only one of her books that seeks to explore the lives of men who appear to fit another myth, that of the stereotypical Australian male.

1 Patsy Adam-Smith, *The ANZACS*, Thomas Nelson Australia Pty Ltd., Melbourne, (1978), 1979. Further references will appear in the text by page number.

CHAPTER ONE

Popular Narrative

In this chapter, I will examine the popularity of *The ANZACS*. Through its publication history, I will show how the book's nationalistic themes related to discussions taking place at the time of its publication. I will also look at value judgements as they apply to popular literature generally, how this book has been judged by academic historians in opposition to the assessment of it as a folk history, and consider other values expressed in the text. In the final section of the chapter I will discuss the author's style in relation to the book's popularity. My aim is to show that the popularity of this publication lies with the values it expresses and the author's particular style but, most importantly, with its subject, a war considered to have contributed to Australian national identity, as told in the words of some who were there.

Popularity and Publication

By all the criteria of modern publishing, *The ANZACS* is a 'success'. It has run into multiple editions and sold well. Patsy Adam-Smith writes prolifically on a variety of popular subjects. From the publisher's point of view this means there is always another book to read and sell and her name is often in the public eye.[1] With the publication of her book *Australian Women at War* (1984), Patsy Adam-Smith's publisher described her as "one of Australia's most well-known and best-loved authors",[2] giving her a comfortable Australian identity and implying that she writes books that Australians like. Prior to *The ANZACS*, her autobiography of childhood, *Hear the Train Blow*, (1964) described as "The classic autobiography of growing up in the bush",[3] had received popular acclaim and her *Folklore of Australia's Railmen* topped 1969's bestseller list.[4]

The ANZACS was published in 1978 with assistance from the Literature Board of the Australia Council. The first edition, presented in large, hardback format contains numerous black and white photographs and reproductions of World War I posters and illustrations of the period, making this appear an easily accessible text, an appealing narrative. The dust jacket, a reproduction of the Norman Lindsay recruiting poster *Fall In!* depicts boyish-looking, Australian soldiers marching, presumably to war. This *Boys Own* image, conveys sentiments that exist around the Anzac story, depicting war as a big adventure, boys playing games, though those who understand what happened at Gallipoli may detect some apprehension in the expressions on the mens' faces. Two reprints of the edition were issued

in 1979, and further editions appeared in 1981, 1985 and 1991. During the first year of its publication, *The ANZACS* was serialised in *The Age* and serialisations and excerpts appeared in newspapers around the country.

In December of that year, "best-selling author" Patsy Adam-Smith, shared *The Age* 'Book of the Year' award with Christopher Koch. The award, then in its fifth year of presentation, was intended to go "to the author whose book best expresses the Australian identity and is judged to be of outstanding literary merit". Clearly, neither work satisfied both criteria. Christopher Koch's *The Year of Living Dangerously*, a story about an Australian journalist caught up in political events in Indonesia, was judged as handling "complex themes, characters and plot with great skill". *The ANZACS* was deemed to make "an original and important contribution to the reinvestigation of history and questioning of our national spirit and identity which is particularly evident at the moment".[5]

The "moment" referred to in the award's citation may have been the sixtieth anniversary of the Armistice, signed on 11 November 1918 between the Allies and the Germans at the end of World War I, with which its publication coincided. But of more significance were events of the previous decade that had represented a period of change in Australian politics. Heightened political awareness was demonstrated not only by activities of the Anti-Vietnam War Movement, but also by the Women's Liberation Movement which closely allied itself to the former.

Five years before *The ANZACS* was published, Australian soldiers had been withdrawn from Vietnam. More than a

decade passed before the 1987 'Sydney Welcome Home March' was held, an occasion claimed to be "...the first move on a national scale of acceptance of the veterans of Vietnam back within the folds of the nation's mythical self-images and identities...".[6] *The ANZACS*, a popular version of Australia's involvement in World War I, valorises the Australian Digger and his efforts during that war. The book's appearance at the end of the 1970s can be seen to strengthen Australian mythical self-images and identities, in contrast to attitudes of non-acceptance associated with the Vietnam conflict and its veterans at that time. There is in the book, however, a certain questioning about war and its effects on society which I will discuss later.

The constitutional coup of 11 November 1975, and perception of Australia's growing multicultural population, contributed to the heightened awareness of nation apparent at the end of the 1970s, and brought support for renewed moves towards republicanism.[7] *The ANZACS* shows how Australia's involvement in World War I was based initially on allegiance and loyalty to the British Empire, but like other writing about Gallipoli, it often implies criticism of that allegiance to Britain. This can be related to a similar questioning taking place within the Australian community in the late 1970s.

Other representations of World War I events offered across the media about the same time, focused on this Australian national awareness that spanned the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. The 'new nationalism' had emerged during the late 1960s and the 1970s, and one of its manifestations appears to have

been "most evident in the commercial exploitation of images distinctively Australian".[8]

With its title, the depiction of slouch-hatted soldiers on the cover and, in the case of the 1981 paperback, claiming to tell "The true story of the young men who went to Gallipoli",[9] *The ANZACS* presents a readily identifiable Australian image. Its subject, the Gallipoli campaign and Australian involvement in World War I, is bound up with perceptions of Australian national identity. The Anzac myth, the legend of Gallipoli, grew out of the appalling losses experienced on the Gallipoli Peninsular, and became a way of facing grief felt in families throughout Australia.[10] "The squat stone monuments" that went up in each town and city, "some at crossroads where it is difficult to imagine a squad of men having lived at any time", (p. 356) became an outward manifestation of the grief shared by many Australian families. These stone monuments are there for everyone to see and form part of every Australian's life. The publication of a book such as *The ANZACS* could be expected to attract a wide audience because of national awareness about its subject.

This awareness was heightened when in the late 1970s and early 1980s there was a spate of productions around the familiar theme of Australia's involvement in World War I. *The ANZACS* was associated with some of these. The 1981 edition, published in paperback with fewer photographs, emerged with a different appeal from that of the early hardback editions. Though apparently not connected to the screenplay, this edition was launched to coincide with the screening of the film *Gallipoli*,[11] "advertised as the film which will make you 'proud to

be Australian'",[12] followed by Jack Bennett's novel of the film.[13] The military adviser for this film was Bill Gammage whose book *The Broken Years*, also based on World War I letters and diaries, had been launched in 1974.[14]

Later editions of *The ANZACS* were published to coincide with other World War I anniversaries, coincidences clearly representing the publishers' anticipation and some commercial manipulation of public interest. In 1984, Patsy Adam-Smith was the story consultant for the $6.5 million television series *ANZACS*,[15] a further spin-off from her work. The book of the series, written by Godfrey McLeod,[16] contains incidents that resemble some in *The ANZACS*, but this is clearly a shaped fiction rather than an attempt at a realistic version of what happened based on the accounts of some who were there.

With its widespread acceptance, serialisation in major national newspapers, and *The Age* 'Book of the Year Award' citation, firmly placing it as a book "that expresses the Australian identity", *The ANZACS* is tied to Australian national attitudes. That it may have had an "an original and important contribution" to make to debates occurring around the time of its publication, acknowledges the role which popular literature can play in the creation of national identity, and in the formation of national memory.

There is some opinion that publishers, "historically always have been crucial to the forming of popular memory and popular consciousness".[17] This acknowledges that publishers, through their selection of texts for publication, are able to exert a certain power over

popular perceptions. This can be related to the publication of *The ANZACS*. Between the years 1971 and 1986, Thomas Nelson published six other titles written by Patsy Adam-Smith, all but one of which looked at an aspect of Australia's past. Many of these were also taken up by other publishers but the Nelson interest appears to have been in national themes of a conservative nature such as a reissue of Adam-Smith's autobiography of childhood, *Hear the Train Blow*, in an expanded, illustrated edition (1981), and *The Shearers* (1982), Adam-Smith's telling of the Australian rural legend that exerted its own influence on the Anzac story.

The *Age* award, *The ANZACS'* serialisation and the clever manipulation of publication dates, indicates that a well-organised commercial and marketing machine, a successful publishing company, lies behind the success of this book and its popular author. The popular publication, one which achieves acclaim through large sales, cannot, however, succeed unless it "expresses and feeds certain needs in the reading public".[18] Though media 'hype' and modern advertising techniques complicate the presumption, this assumes that the book would not sell if the public was not ready for such a publication.

A book built on the legend of Anzac, with its acknowledged relationship to Australian national identity, was assured of a sympathetic reception at the time of its publication, not only because of the story it tells about Australian soldiers in World War I, but also because of the way this related to the climate of general debate about Australia's Defence role, and nationalistic sentiment apparent at the time. Added to

this, the personal accounts as told in letters and diaries of some Anzacs, and interviews with World War I survivors, bring a sense of reality to the book further ensuring its popular appeal.

Popularity and Value

Some judgements of popular literature tend to view such work as inferior, and its readers as being arrested in their understanding or unduly manipulated by what they read. Such ideas derive from discussions on the value of popular literature that go back to the 16th century when popular literature of the time, ballads and songs, "proclamations, religious documents, handbills and advertisements", published in broadsides, jest books and narratives, was criticised for its content.[19]

Throughout the history of popular literature, price has dictated availability. In the 18th and 19th centuries, literature thought to have a radical content was deliberately priced out of the reach of members of the working class. In early 19th century Britain, popular literature became available in serialised form, issued in parts at regular intervals at a cost of one penny or twopence. The scurrilous nature of some of the material caused the publications to be known as 'penny dreadfuls' or 'twopenny trash'. Not all books so serialised were poor fiction or of questionable value, but the association of price with content, 'cheapness', was made. With the production of any literature judged as 'popular', the association has been difficult to overcome. [20]

The principal 20th century source of the elitism that surrounds the judgement of literature as 'worth reading' or 'popular' is F.R. Leavis's pronouncement, "The great English novelists are Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad". Leavis made such a remark in order to "promote profitable discussion" and establish a "tradition", but in so-doing he dismissed much worthwhile writing, as in his rejection of the Victorian novel.[21] This sweeping dismissal of a large body of writing denies the opinion of the general reader. Leavis's wife, Q.D. Leavis, was not so dismissive. Her opinion about popular fiction was:

> ...since having been read with pleasure by so many it must tell us something important about the formation and taste of the reading-public...books widely read though of no permanent literary merit provide evidence as to the quality of living and enable us to ask pertinent questions about the nature of a community or society.[22]

Her remark distinguishes between a 'serious' literature in opposition to a 'popular' literature. The understanding that a large body of writing read by a majority of the population cannot be ignored, has led to the acceptance of genre fiction and popular writing as an area of legitimate study.

Value judgements which inform assessments of writing as 'worthwhile' or 'popular' are apparent in reviews of Patsy Adam-Smith's work. Criticism has come particularly from academic historians with expertise in the field, who stand back and judge the way facts have been gathered and presented. They are critical of methods used, errors that occur and assessments that

have been made, but often finish with some appreciation of Patsy Adam-Smith's effort.

Bill Gammage, author of *The Broken Years*, which is also based on the personal stories of World War I soldiers, recognises *The ANZACS* "as a book...which will be impossible to forget". [23] But, as one familiar with the area under discussion, he comments on errors of fact, unfortunate *faux pas*, some naive acceptance, and various areas of confusion. As an historian with specialised knowledge he brings his own perceptions to the text, judging it as academic history. There is an extensive bibliography and index but Gammage criticises the lack of formal referencing, a point that appears as a glaring omission to an academic historian or critical reader.[24] Not all readers may agree, it could be that this lack makes the text attractive to a wide section of the reading public.

Gammage defines Adam-Smith's viewpoint as that of,

> ...a sympathetic civilian...vague as to exactly what happened but alert to the power of the place names and to the momentous transformation in the men and women most directly involved.[25]

Criticisms that Gammage and others make, do place some doubt on Adam-Smith's work, pointing to an unquestioning acceptance of the material she uses. This does, however, confirm her own assessment of her work as folk history.[26] For instance, she quotes without any hint of doubt, the myth that French peasants moved horses or washing around the fields to signal allied troop movements to the enemy. (p. 183) Fussell believes that such a thing was never proven and he places it with other examples as part of the "fantasy of folk espionage" that surrounded the war.[27]

This points to the fact that, despite the historical evidence of photographs and quotes from official records, Adam-Smith's version of what happened at Gallipoli and beyond is a narrative which exists apart from academic history, finding its place in family stories told about the event.

During an interview conducted around the time of *The ANZACS'* publication, Patsy Adam-Smith was quick to point out that *The ANZACS*,

> ...was not a history of the Australian forces in the Great War, but the story of that war as told in the diaries and letters of the soldiers, sailors and airmen who fought, and of the women who nursed them.[28]

The author's insistence is that she presents a view of The Great War as it appeared to some who were there. As one who was born after the war she adds her own interpretation of what it was all about. The historical basis to the work obviously prompts comment from historians, but the personal accounts found in the letters, diaries and interview reports, point to another aspect of national memory, a sense of the past in a society that rests not with academic historians but within the minds of the people.[29]

The author claims the letters and diaries as "the only major writings of the working-class man this country has". (pp. 72/73) Adam-Smith thus identifies this text not only as an attempt to look at Australia's involvement in World War I, but also as putting forward a particular point of view, that of the working-class citizen caught up in national events. Her own autobiographical input emphasises this view, as she tells what it was like to be part of a family living with the after-effects of that war.

This places *The ANZACS* within a particular form of writing that emerged during the 1970s. At that time, there was a move to "lessen the distance" between the historian and the subject of the history, to make history-writing a product of the people, apart from academic history, more accessible. This move resulted in writings such as "popular autobiographies, orally based histories, histories of communities, and other forms of popular writing".[30] Inevitably, questions were raised about the accuracy of this writing, and there was controversy about its strengths and weaknesses.[31] The influence of the time these writings came into being has as much to do with their production as the time they are written about.[32] Writing that looked back to a past Australia was no doubt prompted by the 1970s climate of questioning and radical activity, using past events as a reference point, but at the same time indulging a national nostalgia.

The value judgement of writing as 'popular', also often implies criticism of the ideological implications such writing imparts. *The ANZACS* and other versions of World War I events appearing in the late 1970s and early 1980s, depict a conservative Australia where King, country and duty were uppermost in the minds of Australians, and acknowledge close ties that existed with Britain. Against this Imperialistic loyalty is set Australian national sentiment which acknowledges a prevalent, but not necessarily universal, perception of the time that the sacrifice Australians made at Gallipoli and in other World War I battles had to be made, "as the blood-sacrifice of a nation". (p. 8) In popular adaptations of the Anzac story, nationalistic

sentiment leads to the glorification of the Australian soldier and unavoidably, the glorification of war.

In *The ANZACS*, although Patsy Adam-Smith seeks to draw a positive view of the soldier, she does try to disassociate herself from the glorification of war. Through descriptions of wounded survivors, and her own childhood observations, her Preface questions the war and contains General Sherman's comment "War is hell". (p. vii) But then, she makes an impassioned plea that "in our attempt to denigrate it [war], to outlaw it", (p. vii) we do not also castigate the men who fought in the war. In this she appears to refer to attitudes to returned soldiers that existed in the community after World War I and persisted even to Vietnam and beyond. Her compassion is for the men, and in her emphasis on their individual stories, she wishes to promote her own feelings of pity and sorrow for Australian soldiers who fought in World War I.

In recent interviews (1992) Adam-Smith rather naively states that her "aim is to end war".[33] A further aim is to "somehow write a fiercely anti-war book, but not let anyone know you're doing that. You must write a book that is anti-war but 100 per cent for the men".[34] In *The ANZACS*, and in her later book *Prisoners of War*, (1992)[35] this depends on her view of the soldier as innocent victim who is directed by generals playing war games. (p. viii)

It is, however, a difficult proposition to valorise those who go to war, yet divorce them from their part in the act of war. There remains a sense in which writing about war can be seen to celebrate the event, and keep the idea of war alive, no matter how

passionately the writer declares her purpose as otherwise. This is illustrated in the chapter entitled 'The Great Adventure'. (pp. 20 to 37)

The chapter foreshadows what lies ahead, alerting the reader to sorrows and dangers apparent before the fighting starts, with descriptions of parting as soldiers leave for overseas, "the tear-dimmed eyes of the women and girls", (p. 31) and the possibility of troop ships being attacked by enemy cruisers. But, amid scenes of preparation for war, details of pay, uniform and allotments, there is the eagerness of soldiers and nurses to get to the war before it ends. Adam-Smith adds her own understanding of the excitement of train travel as she describes how,

> ...the 13th, set off to war by train,...the whistling of the train engines brought farmers and families and townspeople out to wave and cry 'Good luck!' They roared on through the vineyards of the Murray to where the ladies of Albury had food awaiting them and the townspeople gave them a rousing farewell.(p. 33)

This illustrates an emotional involvement not only for the men but also for those at home, and glorification of those who go to war, at least in the initial stages. It becomes clear that any depiction of war presents a wide range of emotions including, as the chapter title points out, a sense of adventure.

Patsy Adam-Smith seeks to counter this in her overall aim to let it be known how war affects people. Her choice of letters and diaries written by men from the ranks, not officers, is important to this attempt. Her awareness of the consequences of war comes out of her childhood. Her descriptions of what World War I veterans experienced when they returned home, and in

the years after the war; their physical and mental frailty, unemployment, the unworkable Soldier Settlement Scheme, and the effects of the Depression, are written with a knowledge gained through her own working-class family's experiences. (pp. 345/356) After the war, her father worked as a navvy on the railway.

> He knew he was lucky...He'd had odd jobs when he got back, the best one had been shovelling coal on the railway coal stage at Warragul, sixteen hours a day mostly, but of course he was still a very sick man and he got sicker so when he got on the railways he hung on to it. Within a few years, for every returned man carrying rails on the line there were five trying to get their job...I learnt plenty from the diggers we brought in for a cup of tea and a bite as they humped their bluey through the countryside like a lost army searching for a leader. (p. 351)

Her view of the soldier comes from her family's awareness of the plight of some returned soldiers, a view that holds pity and sorrow. Implicit in this is her knowledge that for such men, the aura of glory is ultimately lost, though in *The ANZACS* she seeks to re-establish it.

In her desire to reach a wide audience Patsy Adam-Smith provides a commentary to *The ANZACS*, background information for those with no previous understanding of World War I events. Insight into the way war affects people is gained through the soldiers' accounts of what happened to them, with emphasis on the anecdote and personal voice bringing some understanding of what it may be like to go to war. Presentation of the work, initially in a large, well-illustrated (coffee-table) book and later paperback editions, places it in the tradition of popular culture, making an appeal to those

who may not pick up a non-popular history book. For an audience content to rest with the impression created in this book there is a strong nationalistic message, containing old-fashioned values. There is some questioning of war as an event, but there is also an appeal to the emotions.

Popularity and Style

Patsy Adam-Smith's style is colourful and journalistic. This is apparent from the first sentence of *The ANZACS*.

> We children of the nineteen-twenties and thirties didn't need to be told by our parents that the angel of death had been abroad throughout the land; we had almost heard the beating of his wings. (p. 2)

The statement seeks to conjure up a vivid picture emphasising the sense of loss experienced by Australian families that communicated itself to children growing up in the years between the wars. Also acknowledged is a certain silence about what had happened. There is, however, something fanciful about the concept, for World War I had finished some years before, and the majority of deaths occurred away from Australia. This supernatural explanation, softens rather than exposes the horror she describes and thus sets the tone for her retelling of the Anzac legend.

Patsy Adam-Smith's passionate style has no doubt contributed to commentators' questions about her accuracy, attention to detail, and conclusions drawn in her analyses.[36] All this is of concern in writing which claims to present certain truths about historical

and well-documented events. If unsubstantiated facts and errors are found, such inaccuracy can cast a shadow over the whole book. But the fact that Patsy Adam-Smith has written widely about important aspects of Australian life as she perceives them, in such a way as to claim a large audience, makes it impossible to dismiss her work lightly.

Her claim to serious consideration lies in the enormous amount of research needed to produce impressive detail and unearth the numerous photographs and accounts included in her books. Through letters and war diaries and in interviews conducted with survivors, Adam-Smith claims to have made an emotional contact with World War I soldiers. Her often-stated desire is to get the stories while survivors were still, 'alive and alert', before they got too old or died. (p. vi.) This places her work within the realm of oral history, with the attendant understanding of possible inaccuracy.

Yarns, stories, tales, and even romance, are words often used in introductions, dust jacket blurbs and reviews of Adam Smith's work. This exposes the difficulty with assessing the place of her books about the Australian war experience. In a 1982 interview she preferred to be called an author-historian, "Some people put me down as a social historian. I don't know what that means [*her not uncommon response to academic interpretation of her work*] I like folk history". Defining the audience she is writing for, she says, "I would rather write for the general public which is fortunate because the general public reads me".[37]

Her emphasis is on the sort of account that fathers and grandfathers would hand down to their children,

probably embellished in the telling but conveying a sense of the past. Through personal stories, Adam-Smith depicts the emotional side of war that gets lost in the facts and figures and analyses of events; the way war affects people. She prefers to see these as ordinary people, young men and women, sent to fight the wars created and arranged by older politicians.

In relating *The ANZACS*, it is her easy-to-read, journalistic style, with its emphasis on emotional content and personal anecdote, which gives the uncritical reader a chance to become involved with the text. Such is the requirement of the reader of popular literature. Pierre Bordieu defines this as the 'popular aesthetic', claiming that the "popular audience delights in plots that proceed logically and chronologically towards a happy end, and 'identifies' better with simply drawn situations...".[38]

The overall plot of *The ANZACS* is provided by Australia's involvement in The Great War. The continuing narrative is about the way that conflict affected men who fought in the war, the women who nursed them and those at home. It is mainly written by some who were there, with a roughly chronological movement towards an ending of that war. The Armistice may be seen as providing a satisfactory outcome, though not a 'happy ending' for the families of those killed or many of the survivors. Accounts written or told by people who were there impart a sense of authenticity to the reading experience.

> In the flurry of battle Erneck Janssen scrawled a few words in a diary. 'Sunday 25 April: Arrived at our first landing place. Started a fearful battle. Went ashore early in the morning under fearful shrapnel fire.

> Started fighting as soon as we landed. We went waist deep in the water getting ashore. Carl [his brother] was hit with a piece of shrapnel getting out of the boat'. (p. 70)

We are told later that Carl was killed by that piece of shrapnel. The immediacy found in this diary entry, gives readers an opportunity to identify with the efforts of soldiers taking part in a well-known event which occurred in Australia's past.

The inclusion of these accounts contributes to what Maurice Dunlevy describes, as "a delightful read from beginning to end". But, in his review of Adam-Smith's later book, *The Shearers*, he recognises the book's 'bagginess' as a "compilation of undigested facts and unrelated anecdotes without a coherent perspective".[39] In his criticism, Dunlevy recognises the appeal and all the problems in Patsy Adam-Smith's writing. Her conversational style and enthusiasm for her subject, set alongside individual accounts of people who were there, produces a 'good read'. However, the text's organisation runs into difficulties with the wide ranging view she chooses and her refusal to leave out anyone or anything. It is a feature of her work that she spreads herself widely in a need to explain and explore.

In her research for *The ANZACS*, Adam-Smith claims to have read almost eight thousand contemporary diaries and letters, (p. viii) and conducted many personal interviews with survivors. She also consulted official histories of individual battalions, squadrons and ships; newspapers and periodicals from all states, dating from 1880 to 1939, as well as official and unofficial service publications. (p. 361) She uses these sources to provide background and add explanation

to the letters and diaries. She attempts to tackle the broader scene, from an explanation of Australia's involvement through to homecomings in May 1919, going beyond Gallipoli and Europe to Palestine.

The ANZACS purports to tell "The True Story of the young men who went to Gallipoli",[40] but is not confined to this event. The writing depicts life on board submarines that supported the Gallipoli campaign; looks at the formation of the Australian Flying Corps and the story of the Red Baron; discusses social issues, such as the incidence of venereal disease, and shows what happened when soldiers returned home.

The enormous canvas and inordinate number of players often prove difficult to organise with some resultant untidiness in the text. This wide-ranging view does, however, allow Adam-Smith to show a decline in attitudes and a general weariness attached to the business of war, as in the chapter about the 1918 mutinies.

> There is a good deal of dissension at present in the Brigade, owing to long period in the line and hard time being experienced...Our strength is now very low...All the boys full up and done up. Hope they do not refuse to go forward as 59th did yesterday. (p. 319)

She demonstrates attitudes that prevailed when the soldiers arrived home, "They would be accused of going to war for self-seeking reasons, 'to have a good time', 'to get out of doing a days work'". (p.352) And she uses the Soldier Settlements to illustrate the despair some soldiers and their families experienced when they returned home.

> The family were in an awful way and he was a terribly sick man, wounds and shell shock made him often useless, but they both struggled on trying to make a go of it until the place was seized for debts. (p. 353)

This passage demonstrates how the author emphasises the poignancy of a situation, becoming passionately involved with the events she describes, using more than one image or description in order to enlist the reader's sympathy. This is seen again in illustrated editions of *The ANZACS*, when she associates Simpson's death with Mary Gilmore's poem, *War*, and places the poem next to a photograph of a muddy battlefield strewn with bodies and a reproduction of a telegram reporting a missing soldier. (p.80) Such over emphasis can leave the thoughtful reader feeling a little incredulous.

Technically there are criticisms to be made about Patsy Adam-Smith's writing. Her journalistic style is often sentimental, which detracts from the text. In her organisation and arrangement of the material, she asks the reader to be uncritical, to read in the same headlong fashion as she has written. This means accepting the soldiers' personal accounts, interspersed with official reports and the author's bridging comments as if they are a continuous description of the happenings. There is confusion when text from apparently official reports is not identified. Some referencing and identification of a changing voice would also be helpful, for instance off-setting quotes from letters and diary entries, or giving them a different type-face.

It is, however, the overall easy-to-read style and personal tone of her writing, with the sense of

involvement imparted to the text through personal accounts of what it was like to be at Gallipoli and in Europe in The Great War, that ensures this book's popularity.

Popular Narrative

1 Ken Worpole, *Reading By Numbers: contemporary publishing and popular fiction*, Comedia, London, p. 19, 1984.

2 Patsy Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War*, Thomas Nelson Australia, Melbourne, 1984, back flap of dust jacket.

3 Patsy Adam-Smith, *Hear The Train Blow*, Penguin Books Australia Limited, Ringwood, (1964), 1981, Front cover.

4 Patsy Adam-Smith, *The ANZACS*, Thomas Nelson Australia Pty Ltd, (1978), 1979, back flap of dust-cover.

5 "Thirty-three publishers submitted sixty-one books for the award...The four judges were Ms. Nancy Keesing, author and former chairman of the Literature Board, Mr Dennis Douglas, senior lecturer in English at Monash University, Mr Geoffrey Hutton, author and critic, and Mr Stuart Sayers, literary editor of *The Age*". (*The Age*, Melbourne, 2 December 1978, p. 4.) Both prizewinners were published by Thomas Nelson.

6 Jeff Doyle, 'Short-timers' endless monuments: comparative readings of the Australian Veterans' National Memorial and the American Vietnam Veterans' Memorial' in Jeffrey Grey and Jeff Doyle eds, *Vietnam: War, myth and memory: Comparative perspectives on Australia's war in Vietnam*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards NSW, 1992, p. 108.

7 Stephen Alomes and Catherine Jones, *Australian Nationalism, A Documentary History*, Collins, Angus & Robertson Publishers Pty Limited, North Ryde, 1991, pp. 351 to 385.

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9 Patsy Adam-Smith, *The ANZACS*, front cover.

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23 Bill Gammage, 'War Recalled', in *Quadrant*, April 1979, pp. 66 to 68.

24 ibid.

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27 Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, (1975), 1977, p. 120.

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32 Roger Bromley, *Lost Narratives, Popular Fictions, Politics and Recent History*, Routledge, London, 1988, p. 26.

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CHAPTER TWO

Personal Narratives

In this chapter I will show how Patsy Adam-Smith became involved with the letters and diaries. I also want to discuss problems and difficulties arising from the use of personal narratives, the complex processes of memory and selection involved in the production of these accounts, and show how the author's interest in the small personal stories often causes difficulties with organisation. My second section discusses the need to tell an acceptable story that will not shock the audience, a consideration that Patsy Adam-Smith admits to in her writing of *The ANZACS*. Acceptable stories, as found in personal and official accounts, may provide consolation or even be used manipulatively to political ends. A further influence on the text is the author's decision to present a sympathetic picture of the Anzac, selecting accounts that invoke an emotional response. In my final section of this chapter, I will discuss Adam-Smith's use of the statement, "War is Hell", and show how she uses the diaries, letters and interviews in support of the quotation.

Letters, Diaries and Interviews

Letters and diaries used in *The ANZACS*, came to Patsy Adam-Smith's notice when she worked as manuscripts field officer at the State Library of Victoria. In 1975, she mounted an exhibition of "World War I *memorabilia*: diaries, letters, reminiscences and photographs drawn from all over Australia".[1] In her Acknowledgements to the book, the author thanks Dan Webb of TV Channel 7 who "broadcast encouragement to these men to come to me". (p. vi) The response to this appeal for previously unpublished material relating to an event of importance in Australia's history, underlines the concept of a public memory of World War I, existing apart from official records or collections, in the minds of the people and in written records retained by families.

Talking about how she came to write *The ANZACS*, Adam-Smith tells how she saw two medal-bedecked, World War I soldiers walking to an Anzac Day march. Three youths blocked their path, taunting them and questioning their part in the war. Her response, she says, was to go home and start writing about what those two old soldiers had been involved in.[2] Clearly, Patsy Adam-Smith had become involved in the gathered material. That it also touched a chord in her personal life is evident in the autobiographical detail she adds to the story.

As Bill Gammage points out, Patsy Adam-Smith was not the first to base a book on the personal accounts of World War I soldiers. His work *The Broken Years* also claims to give "a horrifying yet moving portrayal of

men at war, based on their own accounts".[3] Like Adam-Smith he makes the point that his work was not a military history, but a study "based on the diaries and letters of roughly 1,000 Australians".[4]

Adam-Smith and Gammage acknowledge errors of fact contained in their gathered material due to its origin in the heat of battle, though Gammage is much more at pains to admit "statements no doubt genuinely believed when written, but not true, and hearsay evidence and tall stories cloaked as truth by soldiers."[5] Adam-Smith relies on the ability of, "The men and women [to write] about the war as they saw it", and pre-empts accusations of inaccuracy by saying their accounts, "were not always accurate because of the turmoil surrounding them".(p. vi) All of which indicates the difficulty of relying on letters and diaries to present a full picture of the events being studied, to which are added other factors. Gammage mentions that not all soldiers wrote letters or diaries and, as he says, "it may be that they [*those who did not*] differed from their more expressive comrades in their reactions to the struggle".[6]

Such built in selection is further complicated when authors set out to present their own opinion about the war, selecting material that illustrates their chosen point and, unavoidably giving only a partial view that reflects their own bias. Patsy Adam-Smith's view relies on her working class background and her need to promote a sympathetic picture of World War I soldiers.

She considers the soldiers' diaries and letters written during World War I constitute:

> ...the only major writings of the working-class man this country has...The artlessness of almost all the soldier diarists makes for a clarity that in turn transports us sixty years and twelve thousand miles into the heart and heat of the matter. (pp. 72/73)

Her assertion requires some examination about whether the letterwriter, diarist, or interviewee, is ever artless, able to capture an event at the time, or recall it later, with any real clarity or reliability. Memory is a highly selective process, selection occurring not only in what is included but also in what is left out.[7]

Paul Fussell discusses the difficulty of recording events at the time of their happening. He cites instances of people who looked back at what they had written and found the diary entries did not, "add up a very coherent picture of how it really was". Time had brought a different sequence of remembered events, and another emphasis not found in the earlier written account.[8] It appears therefore that there is a fictional quality about written attempts to capture something as it happens and also in later, remembered versions. But some memory of the original experience must be retained, for Fussell goes on to say, "Fear itself works powerfully as an agent of sharp perception and vivid recall". He quotes the British statesman, Oliver Lyttleton, author of *From Peace to War*, who believes that fear and dread soften the memory but

> ... the impressions are fixed like the grooves of a gramophone record, and remain with you as long as your faculties.[9]

The ANZACS contains descriptions of how soldiers, having repressed their worst memories for many years,

dream about them vividly in later life. Jackie Pearce, Adam-Smith's cousin, told her:

> We thought we managed alright, kept the awful things out of our minds, but now I'm an old man and they come out from where I hid them. Every night. (p. 356)

While fear may be an agent in reducing the impact of the original event, perhaps screening out unbearable pain and horror or consciousness of horrors committed, it appears that individual impressions and memories remain with special vividness, waiting to be written, spoken, or even dreamt, about.[10] Almost fifty years after the end of World War II, clinical evidence has shown that veterans of that war still suffer from "post-traumatic stress disorder, an anxiety problem which stemmed from [their] war experiences",[11]. The overall story may not be retained but what remains is a particularly personal impression of what happened, to which may be added layers of rationalisation and explanation that come out of later experience, reading or even film watching.[12] Such reminiscences emerge in interviews that Adam-Smith conducted with survivors.

I do not dispute the value of World War I letters and diaries, or survivors' reminiscences, for despite questions surrounding the picture they present, they make a connection with what happened in the Great War. Also, beyond the analysis of the origins and significance of World War I, they allow a glimpse into what it was like for some who went to Gallipoli or fought in the trenches of France.

As Patsy Adam-Smith found from her own experience, (p. 62) for the reader who knows how many soldiers were to be killed at Gallipoli, Fromelles, Pozières and in

other battles, lapsed time charges all the diaries with emotion. Written as he moved towards Gallipoli, every detail of Alfred Love's diary (p. 62) becomes a reminder of mortality. Day by day we hear about life on board ship, a burial at sea, a visit to the pyramids, a spot of AWL in Cairo, and finally, embarkation for the Dardenelles. Throughout is the longing for home and family, "Wednesday 3 March: ... Thinking of home and Glenora and Essie. Wish I was home with them tonight". (p. 63) On 21 April, we become aware of the lengthening gap, "120 days away from home now". (p. 64) He moves unremittingly towards 25 April, there is a feeling of relief as he passes that known date. 26 April. 27 April. And there the diary ends.

Patsy Adam-Smith calls this chapter "All Those empty Pages", a comment on the number of diaries that end in a similarly abrupt manner. There is an address and a not uncommon entry, showing the writer understood the fatal nature of his position, the burden carried by all soldiers on the battlefield; "In the event of my death I wish this book to be sent to my Dear Wife to let her know that my last thoughts were of her and Essie my darling daughter". (p. 65) In this case Patsy Adam-Smith leaves the diary entry to tell its own story. At other times she feels the need to add her own voice, backgrounding and providing detail but, as can be seen from Alfred Love's journey towards his end on Gallipoli, the soldiers' stories carry their own sense of the time and place, to which, of course, the reader adds a later understanding. There is no purpose to be gained by embellishment, only a transcription of the entries is needed.

Alfred Love's is only one of the accounts Adam-Smith selects to describe the period leading up to Gallipoli. She also uses the diaries of Sister Alice Kitchen who writes of the same period, including the stay in Egypt. Her accounts give only hints of problems dwelt on by Bill Gammage, whose Australian soldiers defy orders, behave badly, go Absent Without Leave and, later, stow away to get to the battle before it is over.[13] At Colombo, while Gammage's soldiers riot,[14] Patsy Adam-Smith's Carl Janssen writes, "how proud we all felt" that the Emden had been sunk, and tells about two-and-a-half-mile walks around the deck after church service. (pp. 44/45) Gammage's Australians are "dismayed" to land in Egypt,[15] while Sister Kitchen writes, "On the whole every one seems pleased that they are to go to Egypt". (p. 45) Such differing viewpoints about the same period show how Gammage and Adam-Smith set out along different paths, and this is reflected in the material they select. It becomes clear that Adam-Smith wants to show a different version of the Australian soldier from that of Gammage.

While Gammage dwells on disorderly conduct, emphasising the legendary undisciplined nature of the Australian soldier, Adam-Smith selects material to show the soldiers in a more favourable light. The battle of the Wazzir cannot be avoided but both authors tend to excuse the Australians' behaviour on the grounds of "a rise in price, bad drink, and an 'isolation compound full of our mates with V.D.'", (p.54) and boredom brought about as impatient men waited to get to the Front. Adam-Smith appears to criticise attitudes of the time but, despite her awareness that C.J. Dennis's verse about the event showed a "strange mixture of insight, naivete and the favourite games of the day,

chauvinism and ostrichitis", (p.56) her recounting of reports appears to echo a certain indulgent amusement at the incident.

Her sympathy with the soldier is confirmed and the letters and diaries she selects do much to support her view. But often the impact of the diaries, deriving from their sense of immediacy, could have been strengthened with more awareness of the total effect being achieved. The problem here is in the book's organisation.

Overall there is a progression through the war, but there is a looseness about this progression. The action mainly moves in the sequence of events encountered by the soldiers but often more than one diary or letter is quoted about the same happening. Repetition occurs within the battle sequence followed in the early part of the book but recurs with the author's decision to devote chapters to different characters and different groups, such as those on Simpson and his family, and 'T. P.' (The Padre).

Extensive detail of Simpson's life, contained in letters that passed between him and his mother, seems out of place towards the end of the Gallipoli section, especially as he and his donkey appear several times in earlier accounts of the Gallipoli campaign.[16] The Padre's diaries show what it was like on Gallipoli between the Landing and the Evacuation. They also allow insight into the thoughts of someone not involved in the fighting, given the task of burying the dead and writing letters to relatives. But there is yet another description of the battle of the Wazzir, a different viewpoint, but still repetitious, especially coming

just before the evacuation of Gallipoli.[17] Adam-Smith may have recognised the added effect of repetition as giving an increased impact to, or another view of the event being described making for more certainty, but the sense of backtracking is often tiresome and indicates that the author had some difficulty organising and selecting material.

Interviewed at the time of the book's launching, Patsy Adam-Smith admitted the difficulty. Her comments reveal an emotional involvement with her subject, focusing on the young innocent soldier and vulnerable boy, and making the ancient connection between love and war. "I began to fall in love with them...I felt dreadful that any boys should be taken out of it", she said. Some good editing would have strengthened the text, but it seems the editor, Sue Ebury, had the same problem.[18] It is clear the work's structure was sacrificed for the small narratives contained in the letters, diary entries and interview transcripts.

These small narratives, loosely gathered together in the larger narrative, provide the focus for Adam-Smith's work. Lionel Gossman noted:

> ...the simplest of events...is itself a story, the interpretation of which involves a larger story of which it is part, so that history could be envisaged as a complex pattern of stories and so on without end.[19]

In *The ANZACS*, the larger story is Australia's involvement in the conflict between Britain and Germany which took place in the years 1914 to 1918, and to which the Australian Government of the day unquestioningly committed its citizens. Within that larger story, Patsy Adam-Smith's emphasis on the small, personal stories, recorded in the letters, diaries and

interviews, conveys another story, an enquiry into how the lives of ordinary Australians were altered by that event.

Acceptable Stories

Letters and diaries, written with the idea that someone else is going to read them, present a considered version of what is happening. Letters appear to have been censored mainly for troop movements or place names[20] but there was always the need to reassure loved ones. Gerster points out the element of big-noting and "overbold bloodthirstiness" in some letters, saying:

> ...the bluster of the letter-writing combatant...was perhaps his way of reassuring his anxious family that there was nothing to worry about, that he was safe and in control of battlefield affairs.[21]

Letters and diaries also give a sanitised version of what is happening. For instance, those reproduced in *The ANZACS* display horror and give graphic detail but there is little of the swearing and profanity common in a soldier's everyday language.

In 1929, Frederic Manning's *The Middle Parts of Fortune* was considered unacceptable to the reading public because it included such language. Until 1943, eight years after Manning's death, the book was published under a *nom de plume* and in an expurgated version.[22] Thus it can be seen that stories about what happened in World War I were written or told with an awareness of the audience for which they were intended meaning that much of the reality, and the truthfulness, was probably

filtered out to produce an account that would not offend.

It is such an awareness of her audience that Patsy Adam-Smith showed during an interview about *The ANZACS*:

> I left out a lot of things, because they were too horrific. As a writer I could scarcely bear to do this but I left them out because I thought people would close the book saying 'I can't bear it...I can't go on reading it'.[23]

The book contains plenty of detail about battles and much understanding of the sorrow attached to war, but apart from the need to write an acceptable story, the selected material also seeks to present a sympathetic picture of the soldier. This is in line with the author's desire "not to castigate the victims of war", meaning the soldiers, (p. vii) and is reflected in her extensive use of diaries written by Sister Kitchen. These "most exquisitely detailed diaries",(p. 35) recorded over a period of five years, mark the troops' progress to Egypt, Gallipoli and England and provide the sort of detail that Adam-Smith requires. Alice Kitchen's thoughts about her work with the wounded and dying, written in the sympathetic voice, give another woman's opinion about the Anzac experience, in this case the opinion of someone who came as close to the experience as a woman could get.

The need to make their story acceptable explains the difficulty returned soldiers had in telling families and friends what had happened to them. Sapper Dadswell wrote, "...our loved ones will never understand and we can never forget".(p. 339) Although they were valued sufficiently to be preserved and retained for almost sixty years before the writing of this book, it appears that very few of the diaries were read by relatives.

(p. 347) Returned soldiers discovered, "no one is very interested in the bad news they have to report".[24] But probably of more significance was the difficulty for anyone who had not been there to even imagine what it was like. Patsy Adam-Smith points out that in later years, "To their children it was almost incredible; to their grandchildren, totally incomprehensible". (p. 352) Such lack of understanding in those around them ensured the success of Anzac Day.

"At first it [Anzac Day] had been seen as an occasion when returned men would meet one another" when reminiscences and language could be shared with fellow survivors. The legend of Anzac was "protected, enshrined and sanctified" in the arranged ceremonies that became part of the day. Patsy Adam-Smith avoids mentioning the boozy celebrations, brawls and ostentatious games of two-up that also became part of Anzac Day,[25] preferring to rest with the original intention of a day providing the comfort of shared experiences. Had she mentioned them, no doubt the sympathy she extends to the men she writes about would have excused such behaviour.

The need to find an acceptable story to explain what had happened, to ease the grief felt by so many Australian families, must be seen as factors influencing the ready acceptance of mythological and legendary stories surrounding the Australian Digger, which were not without official manipulation. Australia's Official War Historian, C.E.W. Bean, is an abiding influence on all research relating to World War I events and at the end of her book, Adam-Smith goes out of her way to acknowledge Bean's work.(p. 358) Throughout *The ANZACS* she quotes Bean at great length,

so aligning herself with his opinion of the Australian soldier.

Bean edited *The Anzac Book*,[26] a magazine said to have given "the first unveiling of the 'official' literary portrait of the Digger". The magazine, containing a selection of items submitted by soldiers, first came into being while troops were still at Gallipoli. Bean chose accounts that displayed ironic humour, stoic acceptance, and attitudes that showed the war event as a big adventure. It appears that Bean deliberately edited out items that dwelt on bloody description and the danger of the situation.[27] It is through this work, and his *Official History*, that Bean is largely credited with creating the legendary Digger. His *History* shows that the horror of war was not so easily avoided, but the qualities of heroism, ironic humour and stoicism associated with the Australian soldier are also promoted in this work.[28]

Other legendary influences upon the creation of the Anzac myth, are those of the Australian bushman and "the heroes of the Trojan battlefields so tantalizingly close to Gallipoli itself".[29] Such perceptions provided consolatory visions of the Anzac, seized on as acceptable stories about World War I. By 1930, Bean appears to have rejected the Greek heroic view of the Anzac, in favour of "the real nobility in the ordinary, unpretentious Australian". Denis Winter believes that Bean was moved by the "unobtrusive heroism and self-sacrifice" of Diggers, seeing them as "ordinary Australians caught up in the extraordinary situation",[30] which Adam-Smith echoes in her aim to write "...about the ordinary - extraordinary? - women and men of our land,...".[31]

One of the "ordinary - extraordinary?" men she writes about is John Kirkpatrick Simpson. The Simpson legend is part of Australian folklore and has been used in a manipulative fashion ever since it was first told. The 'simple tale', the original Simpson story, emerged about the time when conscription waned in mid-1915. It was seized upon and used politically in recruitment campaigns. Later, it found its way into school readers and papers, and was retold ever after in school Anzac Day ceremonies where Simpson was upheld as "the personification of devotion to duty and self-sacrifice in the Great War",[32] an 'acceptable' version of the Anzac soldier.

Maybe it was the influence of such ceremonies that remained with Patsy Adam-Smith, though she says she was "sick at heart at the proliferation of simpering words for school children about this delightful man's man". (p. vii) Simpson appears to hold a fascination for her. She writes about him in the Preface, and in several places in his association with Gallipoli, then gives a whole chapter to a discussion of his family story and eventual heroic face.

In her attempt to find the "real man" behind the legend, Adam-Smith names the perceived hero, John Kirkpatrick Simpson, as a "boozer and brawler, a rowdy stoker-type larrikin", (p. vii) a description that does not appear very 'delightful'. In rejecting the manipulated version of Simpson, Peter Cochrane claims she has selectively used the Simpson Kirkpatrick letters and produced yet another conservative fiction.[33] She knew he was an Englishman, but she gives him "all the qualities of the legendary

Australian", describing him as "redolent as a gum tree, as Australian as a kangaroo, a real colonial spirit". (p. 122) In pulling down the ideal of Simpson as told to Australian school children, in itself a construction and for many years seen as an 'acceptable' story, Adam-Smith draws on the bush legend that lies behind the Anzac myth. Simpson emerges as the Australian male stereotype found in much of her work.

'War is Hell'

Patsy Adam-Smith attributes the comment 'War is Hell' to General Sherman. (p. vii) The word 'Hell' has been so often applied to the violence, disruption and grief occurring as a result of war that its use has become clichéd. This application of the metaphor is also questionable. Hell is a place of the imagination, conjuring up visions of fiery pits, where those who were wicked in life are punished and tortured after death, a vision that does not sit well with Adam-Smith's view of the soldier as innocent victim. A possible effect of this metaphor is to move us from an area of reality into a metaphysical realm. Implicit in the frequent use of the word 'Hell' as a description of war, is the difficulty and pain experienced in trying to tell what it is really like.

By placing this statement at the beginning of her book Adam-Smith gives it some importance. In this section I will examine the way she depicts war in her retelling of the Anzac legend.

Accounts written or told by those who experienced World War I, despite limitations of recall or need to

communicate an acceptable version of what happened, are probably as close as we could come to any understanding of what the soldiers experienced. Some of the letters and diary extracts Patsy Adam-Smith reproduces were written just before or after a battle, some describe the saving of a life or the loss of a brother, many talk about the privations suffered. In her text Adam-Smith adds photographs to show the sheer destruction caused by war, as in the 'before' and 'after' photographs of Pozieres, totally razed by the battle. (p. 191) One photograph of wounded soldiers, many of them amputees, is used to illustrate Sister Kitchen's opinion that "few of AIF will return except as cripples". (p. 214) In this way Adam-Smith sets out to show the horrors that Australians suffered in World War I, but in her wide-ranging text there emerge other and various faces of war.

Alongside images of destruction and sorrow we become aware that war carries its own sense of excitement and adventure. In the early part of the book this is apparent as soldiers enlist and embark for overseas showing their eagerness to get to the war before it is finished. They are caught up in the excitement of travel. Carl Janssen writes of Egypt, his awe at seeing the Pyramids echoing that of many others. He tells of,

> Queer Arab cafes, bakers' shops, confectioners, metal workers...special shops where those Tarboosh caps are blocked in shape...I will always remember that first view of the Pyramids. They stood out as masses of purple against a gorgeous sky. (p. 48 and 50.)

The excitement of being involved in battle is very obvious in an account of a landing that took place at Gallipoli in May 1915.

> They were insanely excited. Lieutenant-Colonel Olden claims that when the first shrapnel began bursting round the deck of the *Lutzow* as they reached Gallipoli waters, 'realising they were under fire for the first time [they] promptly climbed the masts and rigging to get a better view of it'. (p. 81)

Adam-Smith does not, I think, seek to deny that this sense of excitement and adventure exists alongside the awfulness of war. At the age of eleven, at an Anzac Day ceremony, she had her own experience of, "the thrilling call of the bugle", when she, "would have marched to wherever it called without looking back", and this despite her, "intimate knowledge that war is the ultimate evil". (p. 14) Her understanding of the several faces of war is also apparent when she writes about a childhood awareness and recalls learning about the war at school.

> We felt the pitch of an excitement that nothing else engendered; we felt the delicate sting of the champagne bubbles of adventure the like of which these men knew; no other group of men we encountered had the freemasonry of comradeship that these had; and we knew that war gave to man the chance to defy his mightiest enemy - death - and the trace of the combat was etched on him for all time. (p. 7)

The adult author's mind is at work here, interpreting what may have been felt by the child. Understanding that the excitement of war includes encounters with death, acknowledges the horror of war that cannot be avoided. There is also a definite awareness of war as

an adventure, and some awe of the men who are set apart because of their experiences.

However, it is not the sense of adventure that Adam-Smith wants to emphasise, and in her desire to invoke sympathy she dwells on the privations and suffering of World War I soldiers as told in their own words. The sympathetic view also relies on her definition of the soldier as victim, "he who holds the weapon", as separate from "he who plans and benefits from the battle". (p. vii) She emphasises this with her description of generals playing war games on large tables, far from the aggravating untidiness of the real battlefields. (p. viii) Here can be seen her class consciousness, her allegiance to the soldiers, and her rejection of the upper echelons of power often evident in her writing.

In most twentieth century war literature, attention is given to relationships between soldiers and officers. The view of the soldier as passive victim rather than all-conquering hero, came about when the vulnerability of soldiers in the face of modern weaponry was fully realised at Gallipoli and more definitely acknowledged with World War I battles in Europe. Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and others voiced their revulsion at what Robert Graves calls "the suicidal destructiveness" of modern war,[34] showing that the "myth of the all powerful warrior"[35] had become a thing of the past. The gap between officers and fighting soldiers was emphasised, contributing to perceptions of the soldier as victim.

This view does, however, ignore the reality that the same soldier was also likely to be firing a weapon on

the enemy, who in turn became his victim. This is aptly illustrated in one diary entry included in *The ANZACS* which shows how successfully manipulative propaganda disseminated at home, provided an excuse for killing.

> I shall hate to take life but I feel justified in wreaking vengeance on these allies of the *unspeakable* though 'cultured' hun. (p. 163)

In *The ANZACS*, Patsy Adam-Smith's World War I soldier is victim, not only of modern weaponry and the politicians and generals who arrange war, but also of manipulation, propaganda and appeals to patriotism that urged him to fight for his country.

A description of the Gallipoli ceasefire, called on 24 May to allow burial of the dead, could be seen to illustrate this.

> In some parts of the line men mingled freely with Johnny Turk...For these few hours in No Man's Land there was not the slightest sign of personal hostility...They exchanged cigarettes and souvenirs. (p. 78)

Adam-Smith's simplistic view of wars arranged by generals, fought by men who would not fight otherwise appears to be supported. However, the ideal is shattered when, at the end of the Armistice,

> A tremendous fusillade of rifle-fire broke out, both sides blazing away at each other's parapets, as if to say, "The Armistice is over - now it is WAR. (p. 78)

Several accounts included in *The ANZACS* show their writers' awareness of both the excitement and the horror of war. Norman Young wrote to his mother on 25 September 1918, close to the war's end, "One must

actually take part in the proceedings to know the sensations and feel the excitement of the attack", but concluded, after naming some who had been killed, "War is a damnable business. There's no other word for it...I can't find words suitable enough", (p. 324/325) a comment which, like the use of the metaphorical 'War is Hell' statement, expresses the difficulty of telling what war is like.

Sister Kitchen shows some awareness of the many faces of war. Farewelling Sister Samsing, with whom she had worked for four years, she writes, "what a long time and what experiences! some good, some interesting, some most bitter. Some most disappointing, and heartbreaking". (p. 328) Most nurses' diaries show large contrasts between their demanding work with the wounded and dying, and time they were able to spend off-duty. Sister Kitchen, exhausted after nursing troops from Gallipoli, was able to take leave and go "up the Nile to Luxor, and [stop] off at all the temples and ruins she had ever read about". But her war experience interrupts her delight with this journey when, seeing the fallen Colossus in Ramesseum, she realises:

> ...she had no knowledge of the number of eyelids she closed, of the number of amputees she nursed - young men who died unwept, alone, unsung. (p. 156)

Her observation, the image of young soldiers dying alone, pulls at the emotions, though if they were alone when they died, these men would not remain unwept and unsung by those at home. But also involved here are her own emotions, the woman watching this happen and aware of war's sorrow which, although removed in time, relates to Patsy Adam-Smith's place as observer of this war.

Adam-Smith depends on the emotional content of her material to depict the horror of war. In doing this she avoids accounts that describe the excitement of killing included in Gammage's *The Broken Years*, such as "I had the good fortune of trying my nice shiny bayonet on a big fat Turk", or "I killed his assailant by giving him five rounds in the head. I...let him have it full in the face". An Australian ambulanceman comments, "I am inclined to think they make it too willing to bayonetting [sic] and killing...our men are hard and even cruel".[36] Accounts conveying such sadistic enjoyment do not fit with Patsy Adam-Smith's sympathetic view of the soldier. Her decision to present the pathos of war does lead her to include this account,

> I came to a spot where the dead were lying two and three deep, and I saw an Australian and a Turk who had run each other through with their bayonets. Both had apparently fallen dead at the same instant as their bayonets had not been withdrawn. In their death struggle, their arms must have encircled each other , and they were lying exactly in this position when I saw them. They had been in that sad embrace for at least a week'. (p. 79)

Though it is unreal to believe this was a last expression of love, the description of two enemy soldiers locked in each others' arms in their final moments carries the image, pointing out the uselessness of their enmity.

It is in the book's mid-section, which concentrates on the battle fronts of Fromelles and Pozieres, that the awfulness of war is most apparent. Accounts are of the appalling physical conditions under which Australian

soldiers fought. During a lull in battle Sergeant Williams recalls,

> All faces ghastly white showing through masks of grime and dried sweat, eyes glassy protruding, and full of that horror seen only upon men who have lived through a heavy bombardment. (p. 185)

Amid graphic descriptions of inescapable mud, there is the ever-present awareness of death, and the author comments,

> All reports, diaries, letters and tape recordings of the survivors of Fromelles tell of one thing: the scene in the trenches where wounded and dying were piled up. (p. 183)

The section emphasises enormous losses experienced on the Western Front, making it evident that this period of the war had as much significance for Australia as did Gallipoli. It is in such descriptions that Adam-Smith shows the misery of war, the physical discomfort, and appalling loss of life.

That such experiences had a lasting effect is also one of the book's theme's. Among the many photographic representations of war, the most appalling must be the 'before' and 'after' photographs of soldiers who suffered face mutilation. (p. 294) Neither does Adam-Smith omit descriptions of war-induced madness. Recollecting what it was like, Jim McPhee said, "...almost all had experienced shell shock to some degree - the slightest being the shakes, or bleeding from the ears, ranging to complete dementia". (p. 179) There are also the physical effects of being gassed that would prove a lifelong burden. (p. 336) Heartfelt letters from mothers whose sons were killed, exhibit yet another aspect of war's sorrow that lingers long after the event. (p. 135)

Concentrating on the sorrow of war, Patsy Adam-Smith selects material to illustrate the soldiers' pitiable position. In a similar vein, Sister Alice Kitchen's diaries provide a useful commentary. Her observations show an awareness of personal tragedy, and the wider effects of war, for the soldiers and for their families. She is always conscious of the later effect of what she was seeing.

> ...such dreadful news for so many of them at home to hear. It makes one realise the awfulness of war...There will be grief and sorrow in many a home and I am afraid few of 1st AIF will return except as cripples. (p.76)

The scope of Sister Kitchen's diaries allows selections to appear in correct time sequence throughout the book. They therefore exert an influence on the book's tone and contribute to Adam-Smith's desire to have this depiction of war convey the sorrow and grief felt as a result of World War I. She selects diary entries, letters and interview accounts to illustrate this and includes comment from others who observe the effect of war, notably herself and Sister Alice Kitchen.

Many of her readers will experience the horror that Patsy Adam-Smith would want them to know. Others may be reading for the thrill of the battle. Gerster points out, "While war horrors are often shuddered at, the tendency is to communicate the *thrill*, rather than the terror of the fight".[37]

This is not Patsy Adam-Smith's aim but there is a sense in which, for all her stated intention to decry the event, by writing a book about war, she can be seen to perpetuate the idea of war in the mind of her audience.

As a writer she wants to warn about the horrors and consequences of war, yet decides not to include accounts of soldiers who experienced sadistic enjoyment in killing. She has not, then, shown some of the worst behaviour that war generates. Also, even as she makes her reader aware of the misery of war by including descriptions of the difficulties and privations experienced on the battlefield, and details some of the after-effects of war, she cannot avoid the sense of excitement and adventure that war promotes. Ultimately, whether or not the warning is delivered will depend on the reader's perception of the text.

Personal Narratives

1 Patsy Adam-Smith, *The ANZACS*, inside back flap of dust jacket.

2 Patsy Adam-Smith related this at an ANU/*The Canberra Times* Literary luncheon, held to promote *Prisoners of War*, 16 October 1992.

3 Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years*, Penguin, Ringwood, (1974), 1987. This statement appears on the front cover of the 1987 edition.

4 ibid. p. xiii.

5 ibid. p. xiii.

6 ibid. p. xiv.

7 Popular Memory Group, 'Popular Memory: theory, politics, method', in Johnson, R., McLennan, G., Schwarz, B. & Sutton, D., *Making Histories: Studies in history writing and politics*, The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., London, 1980, p. 233.

8 Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, (1975), 1977, p. 311.

9 ibid. p. 327.

10 ibid. p. 327.

11 *The Canberra Times*, 'A teenage WWI army dismissed as a myth', 25 April 1993, p. 1.

12 Popular Memory Group, in *Making Histories*, p. 233.

13 Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years*, pp. 25 to 51.

14 ibid. p. 34.

15 ibid. p. 35.

16 Note: Simpson is mentioned at pp. vii, 48, 71 and 72, 80 and 81, as well as Chapter 14 pp. 122 to 127.

17 Note: Battle of the Wazzir mentioned, Chapter 8, pp. 54 to 56, 59, and 129.

18 John Holden, 'The way they were when they sailed away', in *The West Australian*, 21 October 1978, p. 34.

19 Lionel Gossman, *Between Literature and History*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1990, p. 249.

20 Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years*, p. xiv.

21 Robin Gerster, *Big-noting, The Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, (1987), 1992, p. 4.

22 Frederic Manning, *The Middle Parts of Fortune*, Granada Publishing, Limited, St Albans, 1977, Introduction, p. v.

23 John Holden, 'The Way They Were When They Sailed Away', Review in *The West Australian*, Perth, 21 October, 1978, p. 34.

24 Paul Fussell, *The Grear War and Modern Memory*, p. 170.

25 Richard White, *Inventing Australia Images and Identity, 1688-1980*, George Allen & Unwin Australia Pty Ltd, Sydney, 1981, pp. 135 and 136.

26 *The Anzac Book*, Written and illustrated on Gallipoli by the men of Anzac, Cassell and Company, Ltd, London, 1916.

27 Robin Gerster, *Big-noting*, pp. 29 to 33.

28 ibid. p. 1.

29 ibid. p. 2.

30 Denis Winter, selection and compilation, *Making the Legend, The War Writings of C.E.W. Bean*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, pp. 235 to 237.

31 Patsy Adam Smith, *Hear the Train Blow*, p. IX.

32 Peter Cochrane, *Simpson and the Donkey*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1992, p. 222.

33 ibid. pp. 36 to 38.

34 Robert Graves, *But It Still Goes On, An Accumulation*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1930, p. 47.

35 Robin Gerster, *Big-noting*, p. 5.

36 Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years*, pp. 96 to 98.

37 Robin Gerster, *Big-Noting*, p. 12.

CHAPTER THREE

Autobiography

In this chapter I will discuss the autobiographical element of *The ANZACS*, the personal view of World War I, told through Patsy Adam-Smith's own experiences and those of her family. Looking also at her autobiography of childhood *Hear the Train Blow*, I will examine influences in her early life that may explain her impulse to write this retelling of the Anzac story, and relate this to the survival theme found in much of her work.

A Family At War

In the Preface and first chapters of *The ANZACS*, while giving a brief, disordered account of the background to the war, Patsy Adam-Smith puts herself in the action, detailing her own interests and her reasons for examining World War I. This authorial intrusion expresses Adam-Smith's need to establish a direct connection with the event she is writing about, apparent in this and other of her books. The journey through this war is so often linked with the author's life that it is difficult to escape the feeling that its writing is, in part, a journey of self-discovery.

The first chapter of *The ANZACS* reveals what is behind Patsy Adam-Smith's passion to write about war in such detail. She entitles it *Why Did You Go to the Great War Daddy?* - her adaptation of the recruiting placard question 'Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War?' The original implies that if the father ignored the call to serve, he would have no story to tell his children. Patsy Adam-Smith's version sets up a different enquiry, a questioning of why anyone would want to be involved. Her child's-eye, remembered view, is of the aftermath of the war, being one of the "generation whose fathers, uncles, and sometimes elder brothers were either dead, or 'returned' men...". She claims that she, and children like her, grew up "in a world where men were called 'Hoppy', 'Wingy', 'Shifty'...", depending on whether they had lost a leg, an arm or an eye. (p. 2)

Her father and five of her uncles went to war, and all were casualties. Two uncles were reported missing at Lone Pine, and one uncle survived but eventually died as a result of being gassed. Her father, a sailor, invalided out at 21, "before he had long been a grown man", (p. 5) made only monosyllabic response to her questions about the war. It was only in delirium, after a severe accident, that this man who had his seventeenth and eighteenth birthdays at sea, spoke about his experiences.[1] He was 82 years old before the author was able to record his reminiscences on tape, the transcript of which gives a clear example of difficulties involved in recording recollections of an event years afterwards. (p. 24)

As the author herself recognises, the retold, child's-eye view is often a distorted one, with a highlighting of some events which stay in the memory. There is likely to be an element of being told a story so often that one adopts it as a personal experience. (HTB 1 and 2). The adult author's imagination is also at work, sifting early remembered events and adding later impressions. In *The ANZACS* the result is a vivid, telescoped picture of life in an Australian family dealing with the after-effects of World War I.

It seems sure that Patsy Adam-Smith is not writing about an isolated experience, for almost 216,000 Australians were killed or wounded between 1914 and 1918, representing 65 per cent of the total embarked, and the loss was felt Australia-wide. When compared with Britain and other Commonwealth countries, these losses represent the highest percentage of casualties

suffered. (pp. 359/360) But, as she illustrates, the effects were felt in some families more than others.

Adam-Smith describes the heartless teasing she received from girls whose families had escaped losses such as those experienced by the Smiths, and shows how her innocent acceptance of the war *memorabilia* found at home was ridiculed by one of her schoolmates.

> 'They must be funny, your parents', she says. 'Why?' 'All that rubbish from that war!' Her father wasn't there, nor her uncle, and you envy her...'Think you're smart don't you! We know why your father went to the war! Well he came a gutzer didn't he!' (p. 5)

Such teasing in Adam-Smith's teens, led her to ask the question of her father, "Why did you go to the war?" a question which was never satisfactorily answered. Eventually this led to her extensive research into World War I, and culminated in her writing of *The ANZACS*.

Both of Patsy Adam-Smith's grandmothers knew the grief of losing sons to the war. Her paternal grandmother Adam-Smith, had four sons away and is said to have waited each day for that fateful knock on the door, standing "at the side of the curtain peeping out the corner of the window". The minister came three times, and she said "...- I knew each time which one of the boys it was".[2] Brigid Adams, mother of the two lost at Lone Pine, "merely received a card with her two sons' names filled in on the dotted lines and the word *missing*".[3] She lived with the uncertainty of the word, and never understood that *missing* meant there was no identifiable body. As Adam-Smith tells, for her two uncles there were no graves, only their names carved on

a memorial stone. (p. 144) Grieving, yet having no body to mourn, was one of the agonies of the time. The body of only one Australian soldier was brought back to Australia for burial, that of Major General Robert Bridges.[4]

The author's mother, sister of the two brothers lost at Lone Pine, belonged to the generation of women who supported men returning from World War I. When Patsy Adam-Smith writes about the failure of the Soldiers Settlements, it is with some family insight; knowledge that her father and mother had taken up a block and worked hard to keep it, but were unable to meet payments or buy stock, and had eventually lost it. (p. 353) In the family, there were stories of men who had struggled to make the settlements work, (p. 353) and an understanding of how women had suffered while coping with the Depression, at the same time supporting men affected by their war experiences.[5]

This family carried a memory of war as an event that had struck its very heart. Adam-Smith's childhood confusion revolves around the demonstrated awfulness of war, which she saw in her family, set against the thrill of,

> ...proud April days when we wore our father's medals to school, in moments of thrilling, chilling excitement as the Last Post died away, the bugle silenced, and we stood with bowed heads beneath our family names on the ugly stone memorial in our little towns. (p. 2)

This conflict between propaganda, public and political, and her own private emotions and experience, can be found throughout *The ANZACS* as Adam-Smith seeks to question and understand at one level, yet falls back to an acceptance of the myth that props up that which she

questions. While the place and the effects of war are under scrutiny, she appears to accept the Greek heroic legends and myths surrounding the Gallipoli campaign, and enshrines the later legend of the Australian Digger within the text. Placing Australian soldiers who did not return alongside the "three hundred at Thermopylae", (p. ix) she indicates that, in coming to terms with her own understanding of war and what it could do to people, like many others who sought consolation for the loss and horror of World War I, this child took the offered path of mythical interpretation and legend. Despite her questioning and search for "reality", a certain belief in the legend is still evident. In this can also be seen the influence of the material she uses, diaries and letters belonging to a time when the legend played a part in helping Australians to accept the enormous losses experienced in World War I.

Patsy Adam-Smith was born in 1924, six years after the end of that war, so it seems unlikely that she took part in school Anzac Day ceremonies before 1929, eleven years after the landing at Gallipoli in April 1915. By this time Anzac Day had become a statutory holiday and developed into "a common form of observance, complete with a semi-religious ritual, liturgy and hymnal, perhaps filling a spiritual need in a secularised society".[6]

It is such a ceremony, she describes in her autobiography of childhood, *Hear the Train Blow*:

> This was the type of dramatic group I liked. We sang the Recessional and said the Lord's Prayer...That day I looked for a second on Gallipoli, and patriotism stirred me for the first time...tears coursed down my cheeks

> as they have often coursed since that day, tears not of sorrow but of pride.

Organisers would have considered this an exemplary response. We are told that as a member of a devout Catholic family, she later had to go to Confession to atone for attending the Protestant service. (HTB 108 and 109) Evident in this account is Patsy Adam-Smith's own Australian conservatism. A disturbing aspect of her patriotic response, and the response of many Australians to this day, is its association with what happened at Gallipoli, battles inextricably bound up with acts of violence in which enormous numbers of young Australians were killed. With the emotion and patriotism apparent in this remembered reaction to an Anzac Day ceremony, the adult author's recollection contains much of the sentiment apparent in *The ANZACS*, which also embodies later feelings that built up around memories of Gallipoli.

For a sensitive, imaginative child, not averse to eavesdropping, or poking around in boxes of *memorabilia*, (p. 4) and given little in the way of explanation, there was a need to work out her own reasoning, to question what the war was all about and to search for answers. Family experiences provided a link and a starting point for her enquiry. The author's interest in the newly formed Australian Navy, is prompted by her father's experiences in that Navy, and the loss of her two uncles explains her intense interest in what happened at Lone Pine.

In 1975, a journey to Gallipoli gave her a chance to visit the place where her mothers' brothers were killed (p. 98) and she hears a description of the battle given by a now 'famous' Turkish guide "who was there when the

Australians landed" (p. 98) In her account of this visit to the Peninsula, (pp. 142 to 147) Patsy Adam-Smith's writing is clearly an expression of her personal emotion. It would surely be difficult to remain unmoved by the place or the remembered time, but the chapter is fraught with sentimentality, and references to Greek mythology abound. A suitably national floral emblem, a dried sprig of Australian wattle and gum leaves her mother sent to be placed on their graves, makes a connection between the sister and her two dead brothers, between the country they came from and the country they died in, illustrating how the effects of war force people to cling to small tokens of remembrance. In the visitors' book, Patsy Adam-Smith writes, "these hills are the last that heard the laughter of two boys from 'Calrossie', Yarram Yarram, Victoria, Australia". (p. 145) The author's remembered image of her two uncles is of "Jack, the beautiful boy, and Stephen, the laughing roly poly" in the family portrait taken in 1914. (p. 4) In the author's mind they remained laughing, an indication of how a memory can get stuck and lose reason for, despite pictures of stoicism and humour associated with the Anzac legend, it is difficult to believe that much laughter echoed around Lone Pine in 1915.

Adam-Smith's description of how Gallipoli looks now, what it feels like, and how it smells, ends the section on Gallipoli. Having described the battle, the visit and the photograph of wattle neatly placed at the foot of the memorial on which her uncles' names appear, for they have no graves, she can be said to have buried those who were left unburied at the evacuation.

It has been suggested that part of the regard that Australians feel for this "scrubby steep patch of Turkish soil" has something to do with "the sense of defeat, of having abandoned the dead to the enemy which has created and sustained the significance of Gallipoli and Anzac".[7] C.E.W. Bean wrote of the abandonment of graves to the Turks as "...-a cause of deeper regret to the troops and their people at home than any other implication in the abandonment of the Peninsula".[8]

This may have been so for those who fought at Gallipoli and for contemporary Australians, but with the war graves now well established, passing time has dimmed that immediate sense of loss and Gallipoli has become a place of pilgrimage. Also seen as the place where Australians realised their sense of nationhood, the Peninsula has become enshrined in the cause of that nationhood, with all the potential for political usage that that implies. But any idea of war as glorious is surely lost in the "row on row on row on row" (p. 144.) of names, bringing recognition of the price a nation pays when it goes to war. Patsy Adam-Smith illustrates the far-reaching effect of this not only through personal accounts gleaned from her research, but also through her own family story.

An Australian Childhood

Patsy Adam-Smith's personal involvement in her text, together with the enigma of a woman writing in such detail and with some passion about war, prompts a closer investigation of the life behind such a text.

Her autobiography of childhood, *Hear the Train Blow* first appeared in 1964 and received popular acclaim. Like *The ANZACS*, Adam-Smith claims it as a story of her class, "we, the 'respectable poor'". (HTB VII) The autobiography seeks to examine her early life and, at the same time, it records a particular way of life. Set in the years between the two wars, *Hear the Train Blow* pictures a past Australia which could be easily recognised by those who had lived through the Depression years, providing an opportunity to contrast that era with improved conditions prevailing around the time of its first publication in 1964. Later editions, 1981 (twice) 1987 and 1992, being further removed from the time depicted, make for an even greater contrast and create a greater sense of nostalgia.

As she sat down to write about her childhood, despite a later assertion that it was crowded with laughter-filled days, Patsy Adam-smith's feeling is of the "fear that hovered like a wraith about me". (HTB X). That fear is the adult author's understanding of having grown up accepting her place as the Smith's natural daughter, ignorant of the fact that she was only their adopted daughter, and unaware of the revelation that was to change her perception of life.

Young Patricia Jean always knew that her mother, Bridget Smith, had adopted her sister, the motherless Mick, but it was not until her early teens that she became aware of her own adoption. The revelation, learned in less than ideal circumstances through an overheard conversation, shattered her self-image. Having been born to one of her mother's sisters, she was taken into the family of which she was so proud, when she was only five days old. The closeness of the

relationship seems to have prevented Bridget from being as open about her second daughter's adoption as that of Mick's, her fear being that the child would recognise her real mother and be attracted to her. The author's remembrance of the assertion, "She's mine", indicates that Bridget wanted the child to belong to her, as much as the child wanted to belong. (HTB 150)

The discovery casts a shadow on the sunny childhood, and the knowledge darkens the rest of the autobiography. The facts of her early childhood are unchanged, and the people around her remain the same, but her view of life is changed. Fear and distrust stemming from the discovery, translates into frenetic activity as she applies herself to any and every kind of learning.

Patsy Adam-Smith grew up on the side of the railway tracks, "skirting the desert country in Victoria's north west",[9] "where often our house was all there was of the town named on the railway signpost". (HTB 1) All of which conjures up an Australian image of space and distance. This understanding of isolation persists throughout the book and obviously exerts an influence on the lives of the Smith family. The life portrayed has an underlying sense of struggle, a determination to overcome internal and external battles, not least of which is the need to survive well by the side of the railway.

Bridget Smith, called Birdie by her husband, provided the family's strength. She worked as a station and post mistress on the railway, which gave the family a roof but no extra wage. Her husband, Albert Smith, was a fettler, and "the footloose fettler and the station-

master with wanderlust" moved around from station to station whenever a double vacancy occurred. (HTB 96)

Her mother's fondness for storytelling gave the young Patricia Jean a feeling that she "took part in, saw, fretted at, laughed at the coming of the baby that was me", though without understanding that this was a description of her adoption. (HTB 2) Through other stories she understood that her sister, Kathleen, known as Mick, had been adopted into the family when her Irish mother had died. Mick was seven years older, but the two girls appear to have had many adventures together, in spite of their mother's authoritarian parenting.

A strict Irish-Catholic background dictates a particular way of life, and children were more confined in those days, but two restrictions are, tantalisingly, unexplained. Books were banned, the young Patricia Jean had to swear on the cross not to bring books into the house; of course, the ban only served to make her an avid reader. The second restraint was on the forming of friendships. The adult author wrote "I feel that the reason neither my sister nor I could have friends has no place in this book or on my tongue". In adulthood she sees it as a bitter restraint that "we have had to slough off to gain stability". The friendship the young Patricia Jean had with Kevin, the son of the "only other Catholic family" points to a religious reason for one or both of the imposed bans. (HTB 34)

Apart from the need for the girls to defy many of her restrictions, Patsy Adam-Smith proudly chronicles her mother's achievements. She emerges as a capable woman

who worked constantly to keep her family well-fed and dressed. Her compassion is amply demonstrated in her ready offers of help to those in trouble. But her determination to do the best for her family translates into a need for them to succeed which overtakes all other considerations.

A day at the Nowingi sports meeting focuses the family and their abilities. Birdie won the Married Ladies Race, Mick won her running race, and Albert won the axemens' contest. The "very small" Patricia Jean "wobbled in last" vowing "some day I will win a race", (HTB 16), a resolution that seems to have marked her general attitude to life. The motto engraved on the little iron tank of her Grandad's furphy, probably sets the tone, 'Good, better, best, never let it rest, until your good is better and your better best'. (HTB 69) Such striving seems to be behind constant assertions the author makes about her childhood,

> I knew I had the best dress of all, white silk (HTB 34)...We also had a radio. Later the mother's club bought one for the school, but ours was the first (HTB 86)... I was spoilt. I had everything. Mick had everything she wanted too, but she was not conceited. I was because I considered I had more than she had, and what is more that I was entitled to more because I had Mum and Dad. (HTB 106)

This certainty was to lead to dismay when she learned that it was ill-founded. Photographs taken on her mother's Box Brownie, are offered as evidence. In the light of her later understanding of her position as an adopted and not a natural daughter, there is, however, a sense in which the adult author sets out to reassure herself that everything was indeed as it had seemed.

An awareness of class is apparent in all of Adam-Smith's writing. In *Hear the Train Blow*, she uses reports of an opulent wedding, appearing in a newspaper opposite an advertisement for the coat her mother ordered and took 36 weeks to pay for, to show the difference between her life and that of children growing up in wealthy suburbs in Melbourne. She asserts there was no bitterness at the time, yet there appears to be some bitterness in the drawing of the comparison, and defensiveness in her comment, "All Dad ever said about wealth was, 'We mightn't have much money but we can have a lot of fun'". She sees such fun as making a protective padding, "...when you left home and shut your eyes and jumped in to the boxing ring", (HTB VIII) expressing her adult understanding of life as a battle where people fight to survive and hang on to their beliefs.

Despite moving school so often, the young Patricia Jean was always two years ahead of her class and at the age of twelve she sat for the Merit exam, and won three scholarships. But the family could not afford to pay for uniforms and 'extras' so the offers had to be refused. The bitterness of disappointment again makes the contrast between an able child living on the side of the railway and those who were unaware of what it was like to exist on a fettler's wage. The determination to succeed remains, and the goal is moved to achieving a Leaving Certificate and Matriculation through correspondence classes. A new teacher had encouraged her, opening up new horizons so she could even dare to think of going to University, though this was not to be realised. (HTB 124)

Contained in this autobiography are images of the place and time. The axemens' contest at the Nowingi sports meeting is described with the writer's inside knowledge bringing an added excitement to a familiar Australian contest. Events such as the Country Races, followed by a Ball with its tables of country food, attempt to push away the isolation of one store towns. (HTB 49 to 57) The Coolgardie fridge fights the atmosphere of heat and dryness, and the ubiquitous Australian dunny provides a hiding place for books smuggled into the house. There are Depression images of the rabbit trapper, swaggies, men 'on the wallaby' wandering the roads looking for work and begging for food, (HTB 91) and men hopping trains to get from one place to another hoping to find work. Patricia Jean's father told her "Try not to see it, but try not to forget it when you have full and plenty". (HTB 98) Writing this is her sign of not forgetting, as is also her determination to write about ordinary Australians.

In the light of this author's later work, probably the most significant figures appearing in her autobiography of childhood, are those of the men, mainly the railway fettlers in her father's gang. They misread the telegram her mother sends from Melbourne to announce the young Jean's birth, and think the baby is a boy. They immediately make plans for his future on the railways. But, when they discover the baby is a girl they quickly accept her as a future "little dancing partner". (HTB 3). The rough, but kindly gang of fettlers is always in the background of the young girl's life.

Most important member of the gang is her father who,

> ...wore the badge of the navvy, the scarred hands and leathered neck of a lifetime of toil on the tracks, where pick, shovel and 28lb hammer were the only tools of trade. (HTB 1)

He is also the returned sailor, runner, footballer, champion axeman, and tennis player, who "never spoke much, but seemed more like a receptacle for other people's thoughts". (HTB 91) No dog could resist him, and he was never put out by anything. Coming from a Scottish background he was not a Catholic, but took the family to church and attended some church functions. Then, after the accident in which he almost lost his life, he was confirmed on the same day as his daughter. The image of the child kneeling at the side of her father as Archbishop Mannix offered his ring to both of them, declares the firmness of their relationship and prompts a declaration of love for this man. (HTB 142) In contrast, although the adult author has included many references to her mother's ability, and an adult appreciation of her effort, there is no such firm declaration of love for her.

Albert Smith and his gangers epitomise the stereotypical Australian male who is "masculine, rural, a worker, Anglo-Celtic and of course Australian",[10] perpetuated in Adam-Smith's work. There were others who did not quite fit the mould, but her remembered childhood abounds with men who were kind to her, even indulged her. There was the policeman who bought her first typewriter and taught her shorthand, the priest who taught her Latin. The teacher who encouraged her to read and write, opened up a new world of learning and helped her, finally, to win a race. He rejoiced in this first book, "I knew you'd do it. I've got my notes to prove I always knew it". (HTB 179) In

reporting his comment, Adam-Smith again declares one of the purposes of writing this autobiography of childhood is to seek reassurance and confirm the good she remembers in her childhood.

Life As A Battleground

After she has described the death of her two grandmothers in *Hear the Train Blow*, the author gives a war-like interpretation of life as a battleground, not with everything laid out in battle order but as a,

> ...vague ephemeral unfenced arena that has no boundaries; we can't see the enemy and great clouds roll over, preventing us from seeing clearly. A field in which the most we can hope to do, is parry the thrusts as they come at us through the swirling mists that, often as not, hide the hand that holds the weapon. (HTB 171)

Associated with her maternal Grandmother Adams' death this interpretation sees life as "a battle she had fought all her life, the battle for what she thought was right and moral". (HTB 170) This and the striving in the life of the Adams family becomes the battle to lead a decent life in face of difficulties, in the tradition of the 'great Aussie battler'.

For Patsy Adam-Smith, the battle is a personal one. The enemy is hidden in the wraith she says she felt about her as she started to write her autobiography of childhood. As an adult she is aware of her adoption, looking back at the child who grew up innocently unaware of the revelation that was to come. She assesses comments that were made to her, hints that she

should have recognised, the antagonism she always felt when in the presence of her maternal grandmother. She sees the wraith as always having been there, a swirling mist that she did not see through, so she was unprepared for the threat hiding behind it, the revelation that was to change all her preconceptions about her place in the family. What also emerges is her own sense of insecurity that the revelation of her adoption brings, the lack of trust which she then feels unable to place in the women about her, in contrast to the trust she appears to place in her father and the men in her life.

The declaration of World War II, and her training as a VAD is seen as an escape.

> I would go to this war. Even to bob and float in the little whorls and eddies on the perimeter of this holocaust would be adventure enough to make my nameless, faceless fears insignificant". (HTB 170)

In *The ANZACS*, Patsy Adam-Smith recalls how, as a child attending school flag day ceremonies, in spite of her personal understanding of war as an horrific event, she was moved to answer the "thrilling call of the bugle". (p.14.) But in 1941, the ambiguity of feeling is lost. She did not consider the war as anything but providing an "escape from the turmoil in my mind". (HTB 175) Her understanding, like her brother-in-law who joined up to escape the dole, was that war would help to resolve the difficulties. She goes from one conflict that she felt she could not deal with, into the all-enveloping conflict of war in order to prove herself.

Her idea of life as a battleground not only led her into the war but would later lead her to spend much

time trying to understand what war meant for those involved in it. For Patsy Adam-Smith the 'bobbing and floating' on the edge of war became a lifelong preoccupation, obvious not only in the massive research undertaken for her three war books and other writing about Australians at war, but also through exploring her concept of life as a battleground.

The women she writes about in her books worked alongside their men, or felt the effects of war from a distance. Her second book about the Australian war experience is *Australian Women at War* (1984), again written with reference to her own and her family's recollections. The conflict she depicts in this book comes about as a result of the prejudices women had to overcome in the Boer War, World War I and World War II, in order to be considered for war service. In World War II, their survival is proven in the way women were able to successfully work in positions previously held by men. The threatening conflict for such women was the assumption that they would resume their place in the home after the war.

Patsy Adam-Smith's war experience led her along a different path. The first book she wrote, *There was a Ship,*[11] published after *Hear the Train Blow*, tells about the time she worked aboard the Government vessel *Naracoopa*.[12] A single parent of two children, she spent six years as the ship's cook and radio officer, becoming the first woman to be articled on a coastal trader in Australian waters. She therefore, wrote from first hand experience about the men who sailed in the 300-ton cargo tramp, along Tasmania's coast up to the islands in Bass Strait. The irony of being surrounded by water after growing up in near desert country was

not lost on her. But her need was to chronicle a dying breed, these "brave bawdy men" who were "different from any other group", before they vanished.[13]

Here the pattern was set, she would go on to write *The ANZACS*, identifying the letters and diaries written during World War I as a significant body of writing by working class men, and using them as the basis for telling how the war had affected ordinary people. Later, she wrote about *The Shearers*, examined the plight of Irish exiles, and recorded the folklore and romance of the railways that formed a background to her childhood. Common to all of these are the stories of the people, mostly men, who endured harsh physical conditions yet survived against what appear to be difficult odds.

Her autobiography of childhood, *Hear the Train Blow*, for all its outwardly sunny appearance, conveys a sense of striving and a need to overcome personal difficulty, leading her to view life as a battle within which are difficulties to be overcome. In her work, she sets down the stories of ordinary people, examining how they survive difficulties in their lives. Her interest in war is as an area of conflict which presents problems of survival for those involved.

Autobiography

1 Patsy Adam-Smith, *Hear the Train Blow*, Thomas Nelson Australia, Melbourne, (1964), 1981, pp. 133 to 135. Later references in this chapter will appear by page number e.g. as (HTB 133 to 135).

2 Patsy Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War*, Thomas Nelson Australia, Melbourne, 1984, p. 74.

3 ibid.

4 Charles Miranda, 'Wounds of war killed many in later years', in *The Canberra Times*, 26 April 1993, p.4.

5 Patsy Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War*, p. 108.

6 Richard White, *Inventing Australia Images and Identity 1688-1980*, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1981, p. 136.

7 Jenny Bell, 'The Riddles of Anzac' A different kind of Exhibition', in *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, 17 October 1990, p. 50.

8 C.E.W.Bean, *Gallipoli Mission*, ABC Enterprises in association with the Australian War Memorial for the Australian Broadcasting Commission, Crows Nest, NSW, (1948), 1990,p. 9.

9 Patsy Adam-Smith, *Romance Of Victorian Railways*, Rigby Publishers Limited, Adelaide, 1980, p. 154.

10 Bob Hodge and Vishnay Mishra, *Dark Side of the Dream*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1991, p. 173.

11 Patsy Adam-Smith, *There Was a Ship*, Rigby Limited, Adelaide, 1967.

12 Patsy Adam-Smith, *Trader to the Islands*, Seal Books, Rigby Limited, Adelaide, 1977.

13 ibid. p.1.

CONCLUSION

In *The ANZACS*, Patsy Adam-Smith seeks to record permanently the memories of some who fought in World War I. She also explores her own family's involvement in that war. The diaries, letters and interview transcripts, being the accounts of some who were there, provide a connection to an event which holds a special place in Australian consciousness. The work of a popular author, backed by a large publishing house, helps to bring this material into public notice.

During the decade before *The ANZACS* was published, there was fervent debate about the place of wars in society. The Vietnam War had come into people's living rooms via television. Though the Vietnam conflict was a very different war from World War I, most people gained an idea about the horror of modern combat and the personal effort of those involved in war. In the light of that knowledge, *The ANZACS* allows the reader to look at a past war. The stories of some who were there add a personal perspective to descriptions, and the numerous photographs that appear alongside the text give a strong visual impression. To all of this is

added the author's colourful style and her own involvement with the story she is telling, making this material easily available to a general audience.

The period at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s was also marked by a series of World War I texts offered across the media, their appearance influenced by and contributing to a general awareness of nation apparent in the Australian community. *The ANZACS* was associated with some of these popular versions of the Anzac story.

In some academic English and History departments, to judge a text as 'popular' implies criticism of the value of the text and the message it conveys. Such criticism has been levelled at popular literature ever since it first appeared. Judgements of *The ANZACS* have often concentrated on its value as an historical text. But there is a sense in which *The ANZACS* may appear as a story of the people, separate from academic histories of World War I.

In any society there is a sense of the past that does not necessarily "conform to academic standards of scholarship or truthfulness", a social production of memory in which everyone participates.[1] By gathering together what were essentially private memories of a particular event in Australia's past, Patsy Adam-Smith has enabled them to enter into the public, national memory. Adding her own comment and interpretation, she has woven them into a narrative about World War I.

Academic historians seek to correct difficulties that occur in the relating of historical events, through authenticated documents and evidence. But when an

author makes a narrative out of such evidence, shaping the story, selecting and interpreting the material, personal and subjective elements are inevitable. Historians are, however, becoming less suspicious of oral histories and even agree that an oral element can make history live. It gives a more rounded picture of a personality for instance, if someone who knew that person is interviewed, even for an official history.[2]

The oral element found in *The ANZACS*, stories told by the soldiers themselves, however modified by transcription, contributes to the book's popularity. Through these stories Patsy Adam-Smith builds on the Anzac tradition and writes her version of the Australian Digger. In excluding accounts that dwell on violence committed by soldiers, she selects material that extends her sympathetic view of the Anzac. Her sympathy evolves from her understanding of the way war affects people, found in the autobiographical element of *The ANZACS*, her childhood awareness of family war experiences.

She uses these family experiences to provide a link and a starting point for much of her examination of World War I. Writing about what had happened to Australians who took part in that war, concentrated those memories and heightened her awareness of that childhood. Being a child in a family and living in a community in which so many older members had felt the effects of war, is to grow up with some insight into the way war can affect people long after the fighting is over. To grow up in a society where the war was lauded and its dead valorised, was to have some idea of the ambivalent messages such an event can emit. Such confusion is found in her writing when she seeks to question war,

yet falls back to an acceptance of the legendary aspects of the Anzac.

In most of her books, within an historical framework, Adam-Smith attempts to tell the stories of the people; their emotional reactions to what took place, coping with what often appeared to be insurmountable difficulties, and somehow surviving. She says she is "writing about the ordinary - extraordinary? - women and men of our land, the timber-getters, farmers, bushmen, railwaymen, seamen, aborigines, battlers and the legendary generation of World War I",[3] a list which shows the area of her interest. Important to her understanding of life experienced by these groups is the way her family managed on the edge of the railway tracks, not only surviving but doing it well, "Mum's food was always the best; dad was always the most successful rabbiter"[4].

Much of Adam-Smith's work has been about particular aspects of Australia's past, most often written with insight gained through her own background. Implicit in all of her writing is the notion of survival, which she identifies as the heroic quality inherent in all people, but which she seems to particularly attach to her notion of class. In her autobiography of childhood, she identifies herself with the under-privileged and their struggle to lead a decent life.

Present also in this autobiography is her Australian national patriotism and sentiment, conveyed through bush images, descriptions of places, things and events that have come to be recognised as strong nationalistic symbols. Not least of these are the men, fettlers, gangers, railwaymen and others who equate to the

stereotypical Australian male, considered to be a mythical character, but whom Patsy Adam-Smith identifies as being part of her early life. *The ANZACS* was the first of her books that sought to explore the lives of such men, who in this case were already enshrined in the Anzac legend.

In recent years, enquiries have been made about the way Australians came to understand what happened at Gallipoli, and how that understanding has been shaped by the Official War Historian, C.E.W. Bean.[5] The current trend is to examine the myths, to look for the 'true story' behind the legend, if there is such a thing. Hugh Mackay, in his recent book *Reinventing Australia*, sees this as a sign that "Australian Society is only now starting to face the truth about itself and its potential and is beginning to outgrow its comfortable myths and legends". His assertion does, however, recognise the *angst* experienced by most Australians as they seek a replacement.[6]

All Australian war literature contains an awareness of the Anzac legend. Whether we wish to accept the legend and the mythological heroism that surrounds it, or choose to recognise the manipulation now associated with it, the legend remains, and will always be part of Australian history. How we, from the present, look on it depends on what has been written about it and, as time progresses, each increasing distance brings a different way of looking at the events that occurred in Gallipoli and in Europe.

Patsy Adam-Smith's focus is on personal narratives, through which she seeks to show how ordinary Australians cope with life, whatever the circumstances

handed out to them. In *The ANZACS*, the struggle is to survive the privations and suffering imposed by war. The overwhelming threat is death, which may strike at any time. On her own admission, the author involves herself completely in the task, using all her story telling abilities to invoke the reader's sympathy for the men who fought in World War I.[7] She builds on the popular Anzac tradition, and draws on the memories of Australia's World War I soldiers then adds her own story, telling what it was like to grow up in a family affected by this war. She relies on the personal account more than the historical facts, and dwells on the emotional situations that war generates. It is therefore more correct to view *The ANZACS*, as a story of the people, not an academic history but a popular narrative based on the folk history of what happened to Australian soldiers in the 'War to end all wars'.

Conclusion

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2 Jane Dargeville, 'Historians celebrate long years of labour', in *The Canberra Times,* 9 June 1993, p. 24.

3 Patsy Adam-Smith, *Hear the Train Blow*, Prologue, p. IX.

4 ibid. p. 16.

5 Jenny Bell, 'The Riddles of Anzac' a different kind of exhibition', in *Journal of the Australian War Memorial,* No 17, October 1990, pp. 49 and 50.

6 Hugh Mackay, 'The Big Angst', an excerpt from , 'Reinventing Australia: the mind and mood of Australia in the 90s', Angus and Robertson in *The Australian Weekend Review,* January 30-31 1993, pp. 1 and 2.

7 *Patsy Adam-Smith, Sunday Afternoon with Peter Ross, ABCTV, 18 October 1992.*

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