FROM ACHILLES TO ANZAC: HEROISM IN THE DARDANELLES FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE GREAT WAR

The Australian representation of the First World War Gallipoli Campaign is filled with allusions to antiquity and the Classical world. The men in the trenches were aware that they were located across the Dardanelles from Troy and references to the landscape's past permeated their writings. Allusions to antiquity also pervaded art, literature and journalistic accounts of the campaign throughout the war and in subsequent years. This paper will look at the reasons why ancient epic and heroism were used when representing the Anzac involvement at Gallipoli. It will also examine the construction of the Anzac myth at Gallipoli, which forged a link between the Classical past and the Australian present and future. This will demonstrate that the Classics were used as a means of commemoration for the fallen Anzacs that acknowledged, but also justified their sacrifice. It will also examine how the Anzac myth utilized the landscape as a convenient access point to the history and mythology of Western civilisation, placing Australia within a European continuum while simultaneously establishing themselves as an independent nation with their newly composed epic tale of noble sacrifice. The Greek attack on Troy and the allied attack on Gallipoli are paralleled in their amphibious approach, the personal nature of the battles, and the prolonged period of inconclusive fighting (this being much longer in the case of the Greek forces). Although Australia's conflict ultimately resulted in a loss, the rhetoric of victory surrounds the campaign. This rhetoric was designed to place Australian martial endeavour alongside that of the ancient Greeks as a compliment, a rival, and perhaps even a continuation of the Trojan War. The epic and poetic nature of the setting provided a link to the Western canon of literature, particularly Homer's epics, set across the strait. The obvious parallelism was made poignant by the fact that both events combine notions of heroism and battle and sadness at the loss of war.[1]

Contemporary Australian society and culture are the result of continuous cultural import and dynamic intercultural exchanges, constantly reworked into culturally appropriate forms in order to meet local requirements.[2] It would be difficult to understand Australian history, culture, society, or myth without knowledge of British and European models.[3] Australia's cultural adoption fits into a broader context of cultural appropriation. Gregory Staley has gone so far as to say that, 'all of Western culture is in some sense a footnote to Greek and Roman mythology'.[4] Horace writes in his *Satires* that we all tell the same stories again and again, changing only the relevant names to ensure the story becomes about

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[1] Londey (2007): 349
[2] Schreuder and Ward (2008): 11; Waterhouse (2003): 117
[3] Hirst (2005): 56; 76-79
[4] Staley (2005): 206

the new narrator.[5] Homer's *Iliad* is one of Western civilisations' great stories, fated to be retold over and over again. Despite its physical isolation from Europe, Australia is not exempt from this fate. This paper will examine how Australians retell stories from antiquity to contextualise themselves within the Western tradition. The re-telling of archetypal stories allows Australia to re-construct their meaning so they become relevant to the new nation's past, present and future. Mircea Eliade, in line with Horace, posits the possibility that there is nothing new in the world and that everything is merely a repetition of something that came before – what he calls primordial archetypes. This repetition places significance on the archetypes as exemplars.[6] The Anzac myth conforms to both the repetition of the heroic archetype, drawing on Classical and Medieval conceptions of heroism, but also has its basis in history. The romantic allusions to ancient archetypes facilitate the Anzac story's rapid transition from history books to Australia's popular imagination and then into myth.

John Carroll argues that all societies have a body of myth or archetypal stories and that Australia's do largely derive from the Western *mythos*.[7] These archetypal stories exist in the form of the Anzac myth, a point which has been argued extensively in Robin Gerster's *Big Noting the Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing*. In this book Gerster contends that,

> Without a national tradition of battle literature on which they could draw, the war writers cultivated a fresh, home-grown heroic image, while simultaneously exploiting an imported one from antiquity… [Australian soldiers] were seen as somehow [to have] atavistically inherited the transcendent qualities of the heroes of the legendary Trojan battlefield so tantalisingly close to Gallipoli itself.[8]

Using exemplars from antiquity was a means of creating a cultural heritage for a nation which had a relatively short history at the time. The youth of the nation did not afford it the time to establish a proud martial history, but by implying their connection to ancient Greek warriors Australia accessed Europe's long heritage.

Mention of Troy and the *Iliad* are frequent and sometimes flippant but their presence immediately contextualises the Anzacs within a greater narrative, one that spans almost three thousand years, positioning themselves as heirs to epic heroism. Achilles is the greatest of all Greek warriors, fated to suffer and eventually die with a 'tragic dignity'. The Anzacs exploit this heroic archetype when they are represented as great warriors tragically and nobly sacrificed for the good of their fellow Australians.[9] Eric Hobsbawn argues that 'More history than ever is today being revised or invented by

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[5] *mutato nomine de te fabula narratur* (change the name and the story is told about you), (Horace): I.i.69
[6] Eliade (1954): 90
[7] Carroll (2006): 29
[8] Gerster (1987): 2
[9] Carroll (2006): 29

people who do not want the real past, but only a past that suits their purpose', that 'today is the great age of historical mythology'.[10] There is popular support for repetitive and historical archetypes.

Eliade argues that heroes who live on the mythico-historical plane are preferred to cosmic heroes.[11] The tangibility of historically-based heroes appealed to the Australian literati, who, as early as 1915 wrote about the Gallipoli Campaign as the moment of Australian independence. Banjo Patterson, in his 1915 poem, 'We're all Australians Now', demonstrates the contemporary notion that the Anzac landing at Gallipoli would compose the first page of Australia's history,

> The mettle that a race can show
> Is proved with shot and steel,
> And now we know what nations know
> And feel what nations feel
>
> […]
>
> With all our petty quarrels done,
> Dissensions overthrown,
> We have, through what you boys have done,
> A history of our own.[12]

The location of Australia's foray into world history occurred within the same landscape as so many past seminal conflicts. Saturnino Ximinez went so far as to say that 'all history has passed through the Hellespont, from the expedition of the Argonauts and the Trojan war down to the recent Great War'.[13] It was this history that now became a prelude to Australia's own and made Australia's history part of the European mythical and historical narrative which spanned thousands of years. This chronology established a new narrative of events where the future of ancient Greece would be the Australian nation and the future of the Australian nation could be envisaged as being as grand as that of ancient Greece.[14]

Despite the Anzacs' eventual loss of the campaign, they are commonly represented as victors. Their victory is not a glorification of war or an actual military victory but the apotheosis of the Australian people transcendent in the midst of European state destruction.[15] Europe was the locus of political democracy, from where rational thought originated and great literature came.[16] The Anzacs were symbolic of Australian national identity engaged in combat at the heart of Western civilisation,

[10] Hobsbawm (2003): 296
[11] Eliade (1954): 147
[12] Patterson 'We're all Australians Now' (1915)
[13] Ximinez (1925): 91
[14] Ball (2001): 115-6
[15] Kapferer (1988): 23
[16] Kapferer (1988): 127

defining what it meant to be Australian as they demonstrated their courage and diligence. The comparison between the athleticism, youth and vigour of the Anzacs and Greek heroes is employed to symbolise that the Anzacs, in their youth, represented the rebirth of Western civilisation and their embodiment of its fundamental ideals.[17] Through their participation in the Great War, Australia was unified with the European world through their now common history. This intensified bonds with Europe more generally and lent enthusiasm for Australia's participation in the war. Australians became a symbol of a utopian vision of Greek civilisation and the defenders of the ideals of the West against the Turks.[18] More specifically, the location of the Gallipoli Campaign and its proximity to Troy resulted in an ideological understanding that Australia was united with Western civilisation at its foundations.[19]

Like the ancient warriors the Anzac soldiers transcended historical circumstances and individual limits in Australia's first and most important encounter with fate.[20] As Australian war correspondent C.E.W. Bean said upon the first anniversary of the Anzac landing at Gallipoli, 'A year ago Australians made a world name and the word 'Anzac' became a synonym for every desirable human quality.'[21] This transcendence from unknown soldier to world-renowned hero is prevalent in Bean's rhetoric about the Anzacs in general. Carroll recognises Bean's attempts to equate the Anzacs with ancient heroism and the epic tradition when he asserts that the two volumes of Bean's *Official History of Australia* that document Gallipoli 'have claims as the Australian *Iliad*'.[22] Bean himself did not write the history as an epic in itself, rather, he hoped it might provide inspiration for 'some great Australian poet' to 'tell the people of the world, in a language that would last forever, the epic story of Australian courage and valour'.[23] By relating the Gallipoli campaign to the myths and epics of the ancient world Australia's story becomes part of the continuous narrative of Western society and asserts Australia's place within the broader cultural context of its forebears. Just as Australians were to prove that they were brave and strong enough to fight on the world stage on 25 April 1915, the literature that followed perpetually reasserted the nation's place within European cultural tradition by constructing a link between Australian greatness and the majesty of antiquity.

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[17] Kapferer (1988): 127
[18] Kapferer (1988): 128
[19] Kapferer (1988): 127
[20] Nile (1991b): 35
[21] Bean (1916)
[22] Carroll (2006): 29-30; It is important to note that Bean's *Official History* did not make any direct reference to the *Iliad*. Robin Gerster (1987), however, argues that Bean, just as Herodotus had centuries earlier, had 'drunk at the Homeric cistern til his whole being [was] impregnated with the influence thence derived', 67; The quotation cited by Gerster can be found in the Introduction to Rawlinson's (1927) translation of *The History of Herodotus*, Vol. I, p. 6.
[23] Bean's Speech at the NSW Institute of Journalists, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 April 1925, 16.

The idea that the glory of the Gallipoli landing would endure is evident in Patterson's poem 'We're All Australians Now',

> So now we'll toast the Third Brigade,
> That led Australia's van,
> For never shall their glory fade
> In minds Australian. [24]

This rhetoric of eternal glory fills written accounts of the war and serves as propaganda to justify the monumental loss of life. The greatest paradox of every war is the seeming futility experienced by its participants because of the large numbers of fatalities. Martin Ball argues that the sanctity of death offers the greatest defence to criticism.[25] Therefore, in order to make the sacrifice of lives seem worthwhile debate about the perceived futility must be censored. In place of debate arises rhetoric of remembrance. This is designed to console the bereaved, elevating the sacrifice of their loved ones rather than focusing on its pointlessness.[26] The memorial reaction to the Great War presented itself in large volumes of poetry. The rhetoric of remembrance created in the poetry of World War One and the Gallipoli campaign would have offered little comfort to the poets' deceased comrades and, at most, could elevate the deeds of participants for the survivors and the deceased's relatives. Rather, poetry served to distance the author and reader from the reality and the horror of mechanised warfare instead romanticising the actions of participants.[27] The need to view the loss of life at Gallipoli as a sacrifice rather than an exercise in futility is demonstrated in the last words of Aspinall-Oglander's second volume of his *History of the Great War*, 'Truly it may be said that those who fell in Gallipoli did not fall in vain. In the words of Aeschylos, "What need to repine at fortune's frowns? The gain hath the advantage, and the loss does not beat down the scale"'.[28] It is perhaps through the need to understand the war as a worthwhile sacrifice that romantic descriptions from antiquity took shape and the modern war rooted in technology became a worthwhile sacrifice through its poetic treatment.

Another reason for the romantic treatment of Australia's participation at Gallipoli may be a deliberate avoidance of Christianity. Lionel Lindsay equates happy lives to pagan Greece and condemns Christianity as an 'ominous shadow of melancholia and 'purity' upon the blitheness of life'.[29] Peter Londey argues that classical motifs offered a traditional language of representation while being a safe

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[24] Patterson 'We're all Australians Now' (1915)
[25] Ball (2001): 60
[26] Todman (2005): 151-2
[27] Ball (2001): 215
[28] Aspinall-Oglander (1932): 486; This quotation is taken from Smyth's translation of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* I.571; I.574. It is worth noting that this is a recollection of Greek victory over Troy.
[29] Quoted in Smith (1971): 104

alternative to Christianity.[30] The choice to ignore Christianity has also been interpreted, by Paul Fussell, as part of a conscious step over industrialisation and Christianity as a whole.[31] Australians were a new people, part of a new nation, and they had an opportunity to get right what Europe had not. By returning to a time before industrialisation and Christianity they could create a new point of origin for Western Civilisation and correct the mistakes made which led to the First World War.

Poetry and diary entries from the trenches at Gallipoli demonstrate that the protagonists of Greek myth were present in the minds of the better-educated soldiers and officers. The soldiers' proximity to Troy would not have been lost on those with a classical education, and, in retrospect, the shared fate of the Trojans and the Allied forces could not be overlooked. The AIF landing at Gallipoli had a 'uniquely epic backdrop', and as Ball observes, it was a landscape already filled with 'historical poetics'.[32] It is possible to see Troy from Cape Helles, where the British forces landed, and with binoculars on a clear day, it is also possible to see the ruins of Troy from the site that, upon their landing, it was the Anzacs' objective to conquer.[33] The Australian public were made aware of the epic history of the Dardanelles.[34] In October of 1915 E.C. Buley states that 'it was an additional joy for Australians to learn that they were to fight in the footsteps of Homer's heroes and Alexander the Great', calling Anzacs the 'new Argonauts'.[35] The location of the campaign would also have recalled the excavation of Hissarlik in 1873 where German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann began unearthing Troy on the other side of the strait.[36] Peter Londey argues, there was 'No doubt many, like Compton Mackenzie, dreamt of Greek gods as they approached the peninsula'.[37] The Anzac awareness of antiquity is exemplified in the diary entry of Private T. J. Richards of the First Field Ambulance, A.I.F. who wrote:

> Gallipoli has mythology interests as the great warrior of the siege of Troy – Achilles – is buried here, or at any rate there is a place described as the "Tomb of Achilles". Lemnos Island is known also to mythology as it was here that Vulcan landed when he was thrown out of Mount Olympos by Juno.[38]

Those who did not have classical knowledge of the Dardanelles prior to landing at Gallipoli were offered one upon their arrival as padres lectured the men on the historical importance of the Gallipoli

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[30] Londey (2007): 345
[31] Fussell (1975): 115; see also Carroll (2006): 29
[32] Ball (2001): 77
[33] With the use of binoculars, on a clear day, Carroll (2006): 31.
[34] Macleod (2004): 11
[35] Buley (1915): 59-61
[36] Heinrich Schliemann began excavations in 1870 without permission from the local government. The excavations resumed in 1873 after permission was granted. His assistant Wilhelm Dörpfeld whose work between 1893 and 1894 shed new light on Schliemann's discoveries after his death.
[37] Londey (2007): 349
[38] Richards (1915): AWM, 2DRL/0786

Peninsula and its surrounds.[39] More tangible than history lessons were archaeological remains. While digging in the trenches the history of the peninsula was literally being unearthed by the Anzacs. The spirit of discovery was parodied in the poem "The True Story of Sappho's Death" published in the *Anzac Book*. The poem was published as a translation of a recently discovered tablet found at Quinn's Post by a New Zealand bomb-thrower.[40] However, in actual fact the poem was a parody of Byron's "The Isles of Greece" from Don Juan, Canto the Third – LXXXVI.[41] Although not an actual archaeological discovery, the poem still demonstrates knowledge of the classical past and the archaeological potential of the area.

The romance of ancient mythology also encouraged the soldiers to discover the landscape's past for themselves. It seems there was a profound nostalgia in those at Gallipoli desirous to make contact with the world of myth.[42] This desire was officially encouraged through the lectures provided by the clergy and also by Bean, who encouraged soldiers to find relics which could be taken back to Australia. The Australian War Memorial houses some of these relics. These are positioned amongst Syrian antiquities dating to the fourth century CE found by members of the AIF in Syria and Palestine and a largely intact mosaic floor from approximately 561CE excavated by soldiers involved in the Second Battle of Gaza in 1919.[43] Also, once mounted on an interior wall of the memorial was a Greek inscription. The Australian War Memorial film *Australians Remember* reveals the importance of the inscription in Bean's words,

> The effect of the appeal [of digger's [*sic*] souvenirs] was that the men sent in relics, great and small, some in writings that they couldn't read. This plaque written in 440 BC, when translated, turned out to be just as fitting to our Anzacs as to the men of that time: *These by the Dardanelles laid down their shining youth in battle; and won great glory for their land so that their foemen groaned carrying war's harvest from the field; but for themselves they founded deathless memorial of valour.*[44]

Despite the implication that the plaque was a relic discovered by an Australian soldier it was not discovered by an Anzac on the Gallipoli Peninsula. It was in fact a copy of a well-known inscription which had been noticed by the poet Christopher Brennan, whose friend Robert Innes Kay wrote to Bean of its relevance to the Gallipoli Campaign.[45] Fiona Nicoll interprets the use of antique relics as a way of imposing the digger on a discourse of 'civilisation'.[46] By placing this inscription in the Australian War Memorial, a shrine to the deceased, Bean elides space and time and places the memory

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[39] McKernan (1986): 28; Trendall (1973): Forward
[40] "The Anzac Book" (1916): 68.
[41] Quiller-Couch (1919): poem 601; For discussion of "The True Story of Sappho's Death" as a parody of Byron's "The Isles of Greece" see Hamilton (2003): 127 and Stanley (2005): 169.
[42] Dowden (1992): 65
[43] AWM Guidebook (1942) cited in Nicholl (2001): 24.
[44] *Australia Remembers* quoting from Bean's writing and cited in Nicoll (2001): 24.
[45] R. I. Kay to Bean, 31 May 1932, AWM93, 422/1/4; Londey (1993): 50-1
[46] Nicoll (2001): 24

of the Anzac amongst relics of antiquity. The relics served as tangible evidence that the Anzac soldiers had fought in historic landscapes, in the shadows of mythological and historical heroes.

By using the word 'relic' and positioning these in the Anzac shrine, the classically educated Bean was also emulating ancient Greek practice.[47] It was common in ancient Greece to collect the accoutrement of warrior heroes and house them in temples of worship. Some examples of these include, the *Argo* which was housed in Corinth while its anchor resided in Cyzicus; Odysseus' ships and *rostra* which were left to later generations as far away as Spain; and Agamemnon's ship which was preserved in Euboea.[48] Peter Londey argues that the connections made between antiquity and the Great War provide a 'language of commemoration'.[49] This commemorative purpose, paired with the collection of sacred relics, likens the Australian War Memorial to an ancient temple, a shrine to the hero-cult of the Anzac soldiers that elevates the deceased to heroic status, in the image of ancient heroes. This acts as justification for the failed campaign and commemorates the loss of life as if it were a mythic epic rather than simply a martial defeat. As a myth the tragedy and sacrifice can herald the beginning of the Australian nation and obscure the pointless loss of life. The Anzacs become a monument to the past and a memorial to poor decisions, while simultaneously acting as a starting point in Australia's history as a nation independent from Britain. Through classical and mythical allusions time is elided and the Anzacs, in the image of ancient warrior heroes, resume civilisation at its romantic origins, ignoring the modern European mistakes that led to the tragedy of the Great War.

As a myth, the story of the Anzacs needed to present an ideal at the same time as it presented something recognisable and present. This was achieved by casting the Anzacs as temporal incarnations of the ideal within the eternal narrative of the Trojan War – equating modern heroes with mythical predecessors.[50] Eliade defines the cyclical nature of mythical conceptions as 'eternal return' and this makes the past simply a pre-figuration of the future.[51] The identities of these mythical equivalents is not important, their function is to emulate the archetypal hero.[52] This emulation positions Anzacs on the spectrum of eternity and implies that they are reincarnations of those who

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[47] Fewster (2009): 3; The act of cult traditionally takes place on or beside the hero's grave, which becomes his sanctuary, deVries (1978): 231.
[48] Further examples are referenced in deVries (1978): 230-3. The Temple of Athene at Phaselis held the lance of Achilles; the Temple of Apollo in Croton held the lance of Meleager and Heracles' weapons; the Sanctuary of Asclepius in Nicomedia held Memnon's sword; Samothrace possessed Aeneas' shield; Argos possessed Diomedes' shield and was where Menelaus hung up the shield of Euphorbus; the sceptre of Agamemnon was in Chaeronea; the necklace of Helen was in Delphi and her sandals in Iapygia; the folding chair of Daedalus was in the Temple of Polias on the Athenian Acropolis.
[49] Londey (2007): 344-59
[50] Gaster (1954): 186
[51] Eliade (1954): 88-90
[52] Eliade (1954): 43

came before them. Myths contain heroes because man needs the ideal by which he should live to be exemplified.[53] Glaucus defines what it was to be a hero in the *Iliad* when he says, 'My father Hippolochus sent me to Troy with the instruction always to be brave and surpass all others and not to disgrace the ancestors'.[54] Peleus then uses the same words to his son Achilles in Book Eleven.[55] Although modern heroes are generally heroic for shorter periods than ancient heroes, they still perform an active and necessary function in society.[56] deVries argues that heroes are an indestructible component of all societies and that modern archetypes have their origins in the ancient past. The archetypal warrior hero, with ancient roots and modern application, is 'the brave young man who dies an early death'.[57] This is the very definition of an Anzac hero but could just as easily be applied to Achilles or countless other ancient heroes. The conscious pairing of Anzacs with ancient heroes is also reminiscent of ancient practices. In Sparta, Agamemnon was worshipped as Zeus Agamemnon. This was not the worship of Zeus and Agamemnon combined but the incarnation of Zeus in Agamemnon.[58] In the same way, equating Anzac and Digger with Agamemnon or Achilles isolates the idealised heroism of the ancient heroes and facilitates the worship of the incarnation of the archetypal Achilles or Agamemnon within the Anzac. The choice to allude to ancient Greek heroes emphasises a desire for Australia's participation in the Great War to endure as a tale of courage and valour but also recognises that it was a trial of tragic sacrifice and bitter endurance.

The connections between the Gallipoli Campaign and the Trojan War eventually became inherent in Australian representations of the campaign. The Anzac myth had become an extension of Homeric myth through shared landscape and heroic archetypes. In 1935 Hamilton delivered a speech at an Anzac Day ceremony in London. He speaks of,

> a book called the *Iliad*, containing what we would nowadays call 'Despatches from the Siege of Troy', a campaign almost duplicate to ours, although it took place 3000 years ago. Instead of a wooden horse, we made use of a steel ship, that's about the extent of the difference… In another 2000 years the two legends will have blended and passages from the historians will be expounded in the schools as beautiful images of wicked happenings long ago.[59]

The Trojan Horse Hamilton refers to is the collier *River Clyde*. *River Clyde* was run aground at Cape Helles (V Beach) concealing 2000 troops. The military manoeuvre was orchestrated by Commander Unwin and was 'inspired by the story of the wooden horse at the siege of Troy'.[60]

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[53] deVries (1978): 247
[54] Homer, *Il.*,VI.207-9
[55] Homer, *Il.*, XI.784
[56] deVries (1978): 180
[57] deVries (1978): 182
[58] deVries (1978): 234
[59] Hamilton (1935): 2
[60] Moorhead (1956): 97; For a full description of the manouvere see Moorhead (1956): 97; 116.

The use of ancient myth is notably present in the treatment of Australia's landing at, and subsequent occupation of, the Gallipoli Peninsula. The stories created during and about this formative event in Australia's nationhood have served as a militaristic origin myth from 1915 and have been continually re-constructed ever since. Australian author David Malouf echoes Horace's sentiment in his claim that we inhabit a world of unfinished stories, echoes, and repetitive horrors and miseries where the *Iliad* acts as a beautiful and pure mirror.[61] By comparing Australian warriors to ancient heroes, and drawing on the shared landscape of the Dardanelles as the setting for the Trojan and the Great War, poets, journalists, politicians, soldiers and writers of every sort have contributed, and will continue to contribute to the composition of the Anzac myth. This elision of mythic narratives elevates the Anzac heroes and the Australian nation to a legendary position. As an independent, youthful and united nation, Australia would continue in the image of the Greeks. They would re-establish democracy free of European-state-corruption and religious bias. Like a phoenix, Australia would rise from the ashes of European civilisation to become the new locus of democratic civilisation and in thousands of year people would read of the Gallipoli Campaign as they would the Trojan War – as a mythical beginning fought for by heroic warriors.

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[61] Malouf (2009)

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