

Crete 1941

Bernard Cadogan

Foreword by Rt Hon Trevor Mallard Karakia by Trevor J Moeke



PRAISE FOR Crete 1941

Crete 1941 is both a compelling tribute to heroism under threat and a subtle study of the epic and its place in the modern world. By attending to the history of political poetry in such a compelling and informed way, Dr Cadogan proves that poetry can still contend with the most difficult questions about bravery, belief, and allegiance at a time of war, and that it can serve the memory of those who deserve the highest respect.

- Dr Dan Sperrin, University of Oxford, Faculty of English

Reclaiming the skill, force and wisdom of millennia of European and South Pacific poetic taonga, and acknowledging the complexities of heroic deeds, error, and crime, Crete 1941 is no less than a commemoration and analysis of the human condition *in extremis*. In post-heroic times, this is a most difficult task and Crete 1941 tackles it with sensitivity, wit and brayura.

- **Dr Norman Franke**, Conjoint Research Fellow, University of Newcastle, Australia

Like the epics of old, Crete 1941 is the story of the deeds of men and women that are worthy of recording and retelling. The battle of Crete may have ended in the defeat of the allied forces, but the bravery of the defenders of the island is still celebrated in Greece as one of the most heroic moments of that war. Crete 1941 offers a new perspective to this event: that of the New Zealand allied forces to whom the island was an alien world, providing insight and understanding of the experience of fighting on the other side of the world. Crete 1941 is more than a historical epic. It is a guide to knowledge: knowledge of the mythical and historical past, but also knowledge of the self, collective and personal.

- Dr Olympia Bobou, School of Culture and Society, Aarhus University

Bernard takes a unique approach to describing the emotions, the sounds, the players and the stage of the Battle of Crete within a poetic saga. He captures the clash and collision of our Treaty cultures within this tale of tragedy. I hope that our future generations will study Bernard's poetic work for its insight into the political forces at play and how this piece of history has played its part in our national identity.

 Tania Te Rangingangana Simpson, author, The Last Maopo, Member, Waitangi Tribunal

Of all the military campaigns fought in Greece during the second world war, the Battle of Crete is remembered as one of the strongest acts of defiance against Nazi aggressors. During ten days of fighting, 274 Australians and 671 New Zealanders were killed, and more than 3000 captured. Cretan villagers risked their lives hiding many ANZAC troops on the island, forging special bonds among the nations of Greece, Australia and New Zealand. Eighty years on, Crete 1941 brings all this to life, highlighting the sacrifices of our forebears so we may lead a peaceful, liberated life. This book is a sensitive account which deserves all the accolades and respect it will doubtless receive.

- **Tony Tsourdalakis**, President, Cretan Federation of Australia & New Zealand



Crete 1941

Bernard Cadogan

TUWHIRI

Wellington Aotearoa New Zealand



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Karakia

A dedication to the 28th Māori Battalion, and to this book *Crete 1941*, its skilled pen, its articulate rendering, recanting uniquely of and for their feats. Invocation launching acknowledgement and prayer, drawn from the Battalion's own 1941 open air desert 'recording' to send 'home'. Remastered also from writings, poems, insights, stories and songs of their feats and families.

Hear now as hearts beat in unison, see the ancestral Matariki (Pleiades) constellation.

The new year, time to close, to surrender, to farewell – renew, refresh, and to set forth, anew.

Celebrate and honour.

As they did. As we must. As always!

So then, vigilance, a prayer of dedication:

'Kia hiwa rā! Kia hiwa rā!'

'Te kokoma i te kōkōmako

Ko te hautapu e rite ki te kai nā Matariki

Tapa reireia koia tapa

Tapa kononua koiana tukua

Hei auē. Hei!!!'

'Ka maumahara mātou ki a rātou.'

Hark! In mem'ry lingering – all too stoic here then tempered fired furnaced face of death

Aloft now you brave ones - as galaxied ancestral markers to the

heavens – harbinger stars to your oceans' voyagers' navigators yielding life's sacred renewal

Hear then the dawned heliacal rise of Matariki – the constellation's altars heralded – invoke them here – season renewed!

We hold them.

We hold them.

We hold them, those brave ones...

'We will remember them.'

'..... Ah Mem'ry lingering!'

Na

Trevor J Moeke

Ngati Porou, Ngati Awa, Ngati Kahungunu Wellington, NZ August 2021



Foreword

By Rt Hon Trevor Mallard

The stories of Maui, Kupe, Cook, Waitangi, Ruapekapeka, Parihaka, Maungapōhatu, Gallipoli and Michael Joseph Savage have helped shape our understanding of ourselves as New Zealanders. 'Crete 1941', Bernard Cadogan's epic poem culminates with the entry of the 28th (Māori) Battalion into the battle and in doing so brings together warriors over the millennia so different and yet with so much in common.

'Crete 1941' is written in Spenserian stanzas, made famous by the 16th century allegorical epic 'The Faerie Queene' which celebrated the Tudor dynasty and especially Elizabeth I. To be able to tell a story of such length within the discipline of the eight lines of iambic pentameter followed by the single twelve syllable iambic line per stanza is something no one other than Cadogan is currently capable of doing. It has a beat, a rhythm, which I most enjoyed while reading it aloud.

Bernard Cadogan is a New Zealander who in recent decades has lived near Oxford in the UK. He is a thinker who applies his considerable intellect to issues of both our past and our future. Cadogan's work on Sir George Grey provides considerable insight into how and why the British imperialist approach changed, and therefore the colonisation of Aotearoa differed so much from South Africa and Australia. His advice to me, and to other Ministers, in developing a strategy to counter the Don Brash-led attack on equity in Aotearoa in 2004 and 2005 was invaluable.

As is clear early in 'Crete 1941', Bernard Cadogan has an extensive understanding of Greek and Roman gods. Like Arapeta Awatere, later Commanding Officer of 28th (Māori) Battalion did when exhorting his men, he uses Greek and Latin as well as English proverbs and poetry to emphasise his meaning. He weaves together the lessons of ancient places and battles with the fight for Crete.

Unlike many from modern Aotearoa I've been lucky, through sheer coincidence, to have had contact with Cretans and some extensive discussions about our role in their battle. An early Petone Labour Party Hall, built in the time of Harry Holland and now the home of the Lighthouse Cinema, for many years housed the Wellington Cretan Club. We used it for election day and night activities under their ownership.

A highlight of lockdown and the later part of 2020 for me was the arrival nearly every day of a few more stanzas of what was to become 'Crete 1941'. It wasn't always easy to get my head around. Google generally helped, the notes for each Canto in this edition certainly do.

'Crete 1941' has added two items to my bucket list. First to read this epic on Hikurangi, the maunga that inspired so many men of the 28th (Māori) Battalion, and secondly to read it again high in the Asterouia or Psilortis mountains. Both experiences can only help educate me.

Trevor Mallard

Wainuiomata 2021



Introduction

Between 20 May and 1 June 1941, New Zealand experienced its Dunkirk moment as Allied forces under Major General Bernard Freyberg resisted the German invasion of Crete, before retreating across the Libyan Sea to Egypt. For Greek forces, this battle marked their final resistance on Greek territory before continuing the fight from exile. The war became a partisan war in occupied Greece that became the prelude to the Greek civil war of 1946–49. For Māori, the Battle of Crete was the first time Māori soldiers, in the form of the 28th (Māori) Battalion, entered the theatre of war between the nations as a fighting infantry force, and not as military pioneers, as sappers, diggers and trench-builders.

Māori and Pākeha New Zealanders found themselves fighting for the oldest site of European civilisation – of the literate palace-based Minoan civilisation that began over 4000 years ago. That this was the case can only be understood now. No one in 1941 had the time to reflect on this background. The island has borne a reputation for both a golden age and appalling cruelty. Virgil and Dante explored this profound ambivalence of both Crete and European civilisation in their own ways.

An epic poem seemed a good way to capture the significance of our failed defence of Crete for both ourselves and the Greeks of Crete. The New Italian Epic (NIE) of the cryptic Italian writing syndicate Wu Ming hinted at how this might be done. I decided to revisit the court epics of Ferrara, the colonial epics in similar form by Edmund Spenser and Alfred Domett, one-time Premier of New Zealand: 'The Faerie Queene' and 'Ranolf and Amohia'.

Other southern-hemisphere nations have national epics. At 2475 lines, Crete 1941 is about as long as Argentina's gaucho epic by José Hernández, El Gaucho Martín Fierro. Chile has the three book epic La Araucana, by Alonso de Ercilla. South Africa has Mazisi Kunene's Emperor Shaka the Great; while Australia has Rex Ingamells's The Great South Land. Composed in West Oxford during the first UK pandemic lockdown of 2020, and edited in the Upper Cherwell Valley at Woodford Halse in 2021 during the third lockdown, 'Crete 1941' is an attempt to give New Zealand an inclusive national poem.

Credit should be given to the form used in this epic – the Spenserian stanza. Such a form creates its own momentum; the question is, what does it do? After a trial run of the first 15 stanzas of Canto I, I realised that the form would deliver tragedy, atrocity, reflection, humour, irony and geniality without any bathos or confusion. Homer's wine-dark sea sparkles in the sunlight!

'Crete 1941' ponders how two historically colonised peoples – indigenous New Zealand Māori and Cretans – responded to Nazi aggression. It's a reflection on the virtue of small countries, on great power aggression, and on the necessity for an international order to resist racism and provide alternatives to the brute exercise of sheer force.

The Latin Epicurean epic and poetics of Lucretius, Virgil and Horace influenced this work, and a personal conversation with President Stephanopoulos of Greece inspired this poem. It is also an attempt to offer a prelude to the centennial year of Hone Tuwhare's birth as well as to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Crete and the 200th anniversary of the commencement of the Greek War of Independence at Sfakia, Crete.

It is with immense pleasure that I acknowledge the secular-Buddhist counterpart to Graeco-Roman Epicureanism, and express my heartfelt thanks to The Tuwhiri Project for such exceptionally sensitive and careful editing and presentation of the poem and its notes. I never had to explain anything. New Zealand has lacked a publisher unafraid of ideas and intelligence, and Tuwhiri has now closed that gap.

Bernard Cadogan

Blackwell's Bookshop, Oxford, UK 17 May 2021 whose sacred mountain is Mt Hikurangi, which does indeed receive the dawn first in summer of any mainland or country.

Atutahi is Canopus, a most holy star, prominent in the southern hemisphere, but appearing in the northern hemisphere only in winter south of 37°N. In Māori legend, Atutahi 'the firstborn' stands apart from the Milky Way, and refuses to join those stars, in defiance of Rangi the Sky Father.



Crete 1941

Canto I

1

Crete is the island. No one is called to it save Cretans, who live on the ridge with Africa beyond. There time is stalled, but starts up again to circuit a bridge going nowhere east-west. Place where damage has left a golden age half-flowering, half-petrified, because self-abridged on a heading due north and towering like a wave, rearing up and yet underpowered,

2

likely to collapse and dissolve mid-sea despite the height of Spring's sublime snow. Generals fall back on Crete, not to harry the mainland or strike back in one go, but clutch onto freight, as supercargoes on a failing ship with materiel of war in the hold. Once there, we just know our exile from Hellas is perpetual, unless we surrender the mere ethereal

3

and accept the violence of our failure.
We have to go back by another way.
The Minotaur is a bloody jailer
whose occupation is to darken day
whether in the Bronze Age, now, or May
1941, with shadow-races
which course the slopes. But death is what stays
in the sun, as fast labyrinths chase
after people on the run, then veer into space.

4

On Everest 'we knocked the bugger off' – quipped the Kiwi Good Keen Man. Not on Crete where we left the Greeks in long low troughs the beast fed from. They lived our defeat three years long, while we went on to repeat hard success, once we learned to dance the maze of violence. Daedalus built the high seat and dancing ground where Minos phases in with Rhadamanthus, judging by the traces

4 – Sir Edmund Hillary (1919–2008) who climbed Mt Everest in 1953 made the comment in l.1. Barry Crump (1935–96) a New Zealand author and outdoors devised that limiting form of masculinity of 'the good keen man'.

Canto II

1

Men who have come from the ends of the earth hold the island. They fit into their slot.

Surprised at the calm and absence of surf, they put together Talos the robot, as the defender of their new plot in the sea. They heard of the Aegean from their fathers, but do not know a lot. Few had ever visited museums.

For them Crete has to stand in place of New Zealand.

2

And they wonder a bit how old-fashioned it is, but unless they did sixth form Greek in a country where knowledge is rationed, it stays a closed book. The range and huge streak of snow remind them of home while the peaks touch on stars just the same, but left is right looking toward the sun, the ground is bleak, except where cultivated in tight labyrinths of generous leaf and filtered light.

3

The strangest thing is how they are tonsured to the sun, with their hair barbered so close. Their manners mix looseness and structure although they grin a good deal, their jocose humour betrays a glint of the morose, at times. They fit in, but lack the words, the women, the properties, to suppose such a beautiful land would be proffered them for good, despite a resemblance which is absurd

4

to their own. Atlantis is a high wave and wall of dream, they will have to pierce or surmount. They will either find the cave of Zeus, or his tomb. Germans are coerced by the same prospect, as they rehearse their operation – although they are still to see Crete. Neither side knows how fierce conflict will get. For now it is all drill, as camp life stops any use of personal will.

5

The Kiwis do not yet know metrics – the tierce is the smallest unit of time they are able to learn in physics.

Death could come by milliseconds or climb a hospital's plateaux of pain, sublime beneath the blue cold. Others will labour in agony, until the body declines to take more. Who is she – this saviour to and from pain, irrespective of behaviour?

Canto III

1

The Expeditionary Force found a perch at Venice's Palazzo Dandolo.

'The Stones of Venice' had once paved Christchurch, and inspired Francis Petre's Otago.

Cafés called the Lido and Rialto, cinemas quite unlike the models

Ruskin took from the Gothic long ago.

In a doge's palazzo in huddles

New Zealanders stand at the bar and get sozzled.

1 to 4 – please refer to the Orpheus and Eurydice myth in Virgil's *Georgics* IV, to Claudius Claudianus' *De raptu Proserpina*, and to Monterverdi's operas *Orfeo* and *Proserpina rapita*. The latter was premiered at the Palazzo Dandolo (now the Hotel Danieli) in 1630 for a Mocenigo-Giustinani wedding. Claudian lived c. 370–c. 404 CE, and Claudio Monteverdi lived 1567–1643. The British art critic and social thinker John Ruskin (1819–1900) is also referred to, and the New Zealand architect Francis Petre (1847–1918).

2

After more than four years of warfare, they had battled their way from Greece to Crete, from Egypt to the Maghreb, and shared two years in Italy, to defeat the Germans. Their ranks had been depleted. It was April 1945.

The peace they made would never be complete, nor the sorrow that had come alive in many of them – pools of fear they had to dive.

3

The kingfisher knows how to reverse, but these guys are scared they will not pull out. They have to make grief a friend and rehearse life all over again. The marabout at the desert's edge – what was he about? Only the woman who looked at one long with never a smile, made silence shout. Of the accidents of war, the strongest is love: a surgeon's knife withheld or else prolonged.

4

The question was put by the Mantuan, what was it that Orpheus sang to move the underworld powers? Claudian composed one answer from Milan which proved his 'de raptu Proserpinae' – truth of what had moved Hades and his queen. A later Mantua, and Venice, soothed recollection, gave grief the chance to keen, ravished by the music from Monteverdi's scenes.

Canto IV

1

Mycenae is the hot stone at his feet.
Knossos is the colony of ants,
which keeps circulating and repeating
labyrinths. Zeus is a gecko scant
upon the wall, Apollo the descant
from all cicadas, the goddesses. Blooms
the bees attend, while the occupant
beneath the boulder, is justice looming
as a small scorpion – Minos avoiding doom.

2

The Cretan poet lives outside of myth.

He is Daedalus, often an exile.

His genealogy runs in riffs
of No-one son of Nobody, smiled
on by none of the bug plant and reptile
gods. The waves do a little thunder.

The birds keep away from the scorching tiles.
Poetry is the end of wonder;
it is the garden cracked and broken asunder.

3

The ideal state is a partisan unit. There men and women are held in common for arms. These artisans of revolution leave their caves to geld the old god again, and start to herald a new golden age, with people's courts and public dining. Monsters must be quelled among great powers, for Germans were taught the perfect state existed in classical thought.

4

Myth is the monster the ideal state kills. Obdurate story games the worst features of mind, as an abattoir of spills entertains the new Minotaur's creatures. This is why each man and woman reaches for a gun – this is why they look past the Germans to organise the future. The occupation has changed things fast. Revolution is deliverance that can last.

5

So it seems. The poet's part is to call on Nemesis, support Archidamus on the mountain. Mesomedes installed retribution as a theme; Rhianus condemned Sparta's breaking and harnessing of Messenia for heavy draught and grain. In a later age Solomos woke lightning's voice, with reverence and craft. The bowman Elytis saluted sun with shafts.

Canto V

1

New Zealand knew Spenserian stanzas before: its premier Alfred Domett was Governor Grey's Sancho Panza.

Both worked to reduce Māori to subject status, which meant repression directed on the Waikato, and taxidermy by means of an ethnographic project on an indigenous enemy, through books, cantos, alexandrines and allegory.

1 - Alfred Domett's Spenserian and Schopenhauerian epic of New Zealand race relations and ethnography is 'Ranolf and Amohia' (1872). Domett (1811–87) was premier of New Zealand (August 1862–October 1863) under Governor Sir George Grey. It promoted the supersession of the Māori nation by settlers and its assimilation into the colonial population.

2

Domett wrote 'Ranolf and Amohia' while Ngāti Mahuta were expelled from Auckland, to catch pneumonia in the July rains, without dwellings shelter or fire as the torrents fell near what is now mock-Tudor Drury. Arthur Schopenhauer and Spenser's spell failed to make exhibits of Māori. They only preserved imperial poetry.

3

Recommended by Sir Harry Parkes for the Crown Princess Frederick to read, the New South Wales premier remarked that Domett's work was an interesting screed on how natives were superseded. Her arts advisor was Jules Laforgue, a Uruguayan who used to proceed on lunar walks out to Charlottenburg, as poetry was displayed in a Berlin morgue.

- 2 Drury south of Auckland has a Tudor shopping centre.
- 3 Sir Henry Parkes the premier of New South Wales (1872-75, 1877, 1878-83, 1887-89, 1889-91) suggested Domett's *Ranolf and Amohia* as reading to Kronprinzessin Victoria (1840-1901) the consort of the future Kaiser Friedrich III. Known in English as the Crown Princess Frederick or Empress Frederick, she had wanted to learn about Māori. Her French 'reader' and general cultural adviser was indeed the Franco-Uruguayan poet Jules Laforgue (1860-87) who served her 1881-86, and published *L'imitation de Notre Dame La Lune* in 1885.



About the author

Born in New Zealand in 1961, Bernard Cadogan is an accomplished poet, philosopher and historian. Since 1996, he has worked as a political advisor and speech writer, in particular as policy advisor to the prime minister. He has been a consultant to the New Zealand Treasury since 2011 and was appointed an honorary advisor to the Māori king in 2015.

He is especially interested in the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, John Rawls and Charles Taylor, and his current focus is on postcolonial thought, the formation of empires, and the resilience, relevance and viability of small nation states.

Bernard holds a DPhil from Oxford University on the political thought, constitutionalism and racial policy of Sir George Grey (1812–98) in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. He lives in the Cherwell Valley, near Oxford, with his wife Jacqueline and their three children.



Thanks

Many good friends responded to this poem as it was being written, helped and advised in various ways. Some influenced me as a poet or in my knowledge of how nation states think and behave. I would like to begin by acknowledging my immense debt to a New Zealand poet, the late Hone Tuwhare (1922–2008) and to express my gratitude for his witness to poetry, from when I first met him in 1978. I also wish to acknowledge a distinguished poet in Arabic, the Palestinian poet Walid Khazendar who has given me such wise counsel here at Oxford.

I wish to give especial thanks and express deep gratitude to Trevor Moeke for the magnificent karakia he composed for 'Crete 1941'. I wish also to acknowledge with corresponding gratitude the thoughtful and generous words of Rt Hon Trevor Mallard in his foreword. I thank Adrian Kennedy, Rt. Hon Sir William English KNZM, Sir Harawira Gardiner KNZM, Hon Sir Michael Cullen KNZM, Rt. Hon Simon Upton, Hon Hugh Templeton AO QSO, Gabriel Makhlouf, Bill Moran MNZM, Dr Hanno Scheuch, Hon Justin Shaw, Vangelis Vitalis, Dr Girol Karacaoglu, Dr Olympia Bobou, Dr Mark Hickford, and Carolyn Heath.

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Tony Tsourdalakis,

President, Cretan Federation of Australia & New Zealand

Vangelis Vitalis

TUWHIRI

A small group of people from Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia came together not so long ago to publish a book. Looking for a name for our imprint that would express what we stood for as secular Buddhist practitioners, we adopted a word in te reo Māori: Tuwhiri. This was our way of acknowledging and respecting the tangata whenua, the indigenous people of Aotearoa.

This idea was discussed within and beyond the small community of secular Buddhists in our two countries. 'Tuwhiri' captures our response to our encounter with the forms of Buddhism that had arrived in our countries. The notion of revealing, making known, discovering something lost or hidden, matched our experience of finding fresh insights in the early Buddhist teachings when we examine them anew.

Secular Buddhism is a trend in contemporary western Buddhism which highlights care – the fundamental ethic in the teachings of the historical Buddha – in all its aspects. Secularity calls on us to express this ethic of care in ways appropriate to our time and current predicaments.

In the face of humanity-induced catastrophes – not least the climate emergency and intensifying social injustices – we owe a special duty of care to future generations to overcome them, and to leave our successors with a safer, fairer world in which they may thrive. We need to express our care for coming generations in many ways, from changing our own personal lifestyles, through accounting for our history, to choosing political representatives who advance long-sighted policies in aid of a better world.

This book makes no claim to Buddhist inspiration. However, it serves to make all who read it even more aware of the wrongs perpetrated by those who colonised Aotearoa, and the need to settle the claims that have arisen from this process. Thus Tuwhiri takes pleasure in publishing it.

To find out about The Tuwhiri Project, please go to:

https://tuwhiri.nz/about

Australia has 'The Great South Land', South Africa has 'Shaka Zulu', Argentina has the gaucho epic 'Martin Fierro', and Chile has 'La Araucana' as its national poem. Now New Zealand has *Crete 1941*, an epic poem about the New Zealand-led defence of Crete during the Battle of Crete between 20 May and 1 June 1941.

Crete 1941 is the only epic long poem in English since Derek Walcott's 'Omeros', with the entry of the 28th (Māori) Battalion as an active combat force providing the culmination of the poem. As geopolitical tensions rise in the Pacific today, it's timely to look back to when New Zealand last went to war and defended another small nation – Greece – on its last redoubt, in a battle that ended in a Dunkirk-style evacuation.

More than just a war story, *Crete 1941* brings women back into the historic struggle for Crete. The poem is a life-changing reflection on the virtue of good small nations, on the contribution of indigenous peoples such as Māori and Cretans to international developments, and on the fragility that both peace and its disruptors share.

Born in New Zealand in 1961, Bernard Cadogan is an accomplished poet, philosopher and historian. Since 1996, he has worked as a political advisor and speech writer, in particular as policy advisor to the prime minister, and has been a consultant to the New Zealand Treasury since 2011. He was appointed an honorary advisor to the Māori king in 2015.

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Crete 1941 is more than a historical epic. It is a guide to knowledge: knowledge of the mythical and historical past, but also knowledge of the self, collective and personal.

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- ... a sensitive account which deserves all the accolades and respect it will doubtless receive.
- Tony Tsourdalakis, President, Cretan Federation of Australia & New Zealand

[This book] weaves together the lessons of ancient places and battles with the fight for Crete.

- Rt Hon Trevor Mallard MP, Speaker of the NZ House of Representatives



