'Dew to the soul': one Australian artist's response to war.

[The Unknown Warrior has come] from an obscure grave in France, to his last resting place in Westminster Abbey, & it is to honour his passing, symbolising as he does, the unrecorded acts, the unseen devotion, the unknown heroism of the 'Digger', the 'Tommy', the 'Jack Tar' that we are all gathered here ... The streets are lined with soldiers & sailors, & there are more police to the square foot than I have ever seen in my life. Vida Lahey (1)

In 1914, Vida Lahey (1882-1968) was an independent, practising artist with her own Brisbane studio, who also taught at Brisbane High School for Girls. She had already painted *Monday morning* (1912, Queensland Art Gallery), for which she is often best remembered. She had travelled to New Zealand on a painting tour, and had begun to be vocal about the impoverished state of Queensland art. (2) War brought a sharp change in direction. Her contribution to the war, as her niece Shirley Lahey claims, was in 'abandoning her career just when it was gathering strength' in order to go to London and provide a home base for the 'boys'. (3)

Among the 52,561 young men that signed up to fight in 1914 (4) was Vida's cousin Godfrey, who enlisted as a signaller. The following year, due to Gallipoli, the number of men enlisting increased, and her brothers Romeo, Noel and Jack, along with several cousins, signed up. By 1918, a total of fifteen cousins, six from the same family, had joined Vida's three brothers; four were killed. Her brother Jack was severely wounded twice, and Romeo fought in several major battles. (5) Noel died on 10 June 1917 from wounds received in Ploegsteert Wood, part of the Battle of Messines Ridge. (6)

Letters such as the one above by Lahey have always been treasured by descendants, but they have recently increased in public value. In 2005 the last Gallipoli veteran died. Gallipoli no longer exists as a lived memory. It has passed from the experiential to the memorialised realm. The veterans are dead; their memories remain only as stories told by descendants recalling the memories their loved ones shared and, more concretely, in representations generated through the experience of war itself (letters, memoirs, diaries or artwork). This increases the value of, and the need to contextualise, such primary resources.

An acute sense of the boundary of this disappearing past may partly account for the interest in the first world war that Bruce Scates traced in interviews with 200 Australian 'pilgrims' to Gallipoli. (7) Some went there as backpackers to 'party' but it is clear that for others the experience was deeply moving. Their anecdotes demonstrate how identity is intricately bound to narratives of the past, the desire of the living to find a link to their dead, and the nuances of long-term grief. (8) Gallipoli's landscape is 'charged with meanings': (9) national meanings consciously converge with personal meanings that the very process of memorialising helps to construct.

Although Joy Damousi (1999, 2001) has claimed a historiography for grief and loss, and Jay Winter has suggested that there is a 'language of mourning', Scates argues that such histories and languages are often lost. (10) There has been a failure to 'historicise grief at the level of the individual' and questions like, 'How did parents, lovers and friends come to terms with loss, how did they rationalise their "sacrifice", what form did bereavement take?' have not been asked, says Scates, much less answered. (11)

By examining Vida's response to the war, this paper contributes to the project of finding answers to such questions, and it does so in two ways that intersect. Firstly, it demonstrates that public acts of commemoration structure the experience of private 'remembering'. Secondly, it shows that the taking up of the commemorative moment is just as clearly extended into a very personal and necessary expression of grief.

In the first instance, using Vida's letter I follow through on Winter's phrase, 'language of mourning'. I argue that Vida internalises various binaries from the public ceremony of the Unknown Warrior. These are organised through the principle binary of absence and presence where absence is, unusually, the more powerful term. Every binary contributes to a complex network that captures the complexity of her grief as an emotional response that is also an intellectual and artistic response that we can trace.

In linking emotion and intellect, I am following Martha Nussbaum's understanding of the emotions as 'upheavals of thought'. For Nussbaum, emotions are not simply feelings that buffet people around without connection to intelligible patterns in their lives. The cognitive act of 'receiving and processing information' lies within emotions, though not necessarily as 'elaborate calculation, or even of reflexive self awareness'. (12) Nussbaum adapts the ancient Greek idea that emotions are constituted through a eudaimonistic element: that is, they are self referential, connected to a person's 'flourishing'. (13) 'Most of the time', she writes, 'emotions link us to items that we regard as important for our well-being, but do not fully control. The emotion records that sense of vulnerability and imperfect control'. (14)

Vida's letter represents Armistice Day 1920. Despite the drama and scale of that public event, however, her personal grief remained and demanded further acknowledgement. The war and her loss were beyond her control and rendered her vulnerable. Indeed, that commemoration simply acknowledged the extent of everyone's vulnerability. Nowhere is the reiteration of incomprehensible loss more obvious than in the row after row of headstones in military cemeteries. (15) Some writers even argue that the enormity of emotional suffering had a cultural outcome in the shift to modernity occasioned by the Great War. (16)

In the second instance of my analysis, I demonstrate that this 'language of mourning' necessarily becomes personalised through Vida's painting *Rejoicing and remembrance: Armistice Day London 1918* (c. 1923). It becomes possible to recognise the intersections between memorialising (as public sign) and a representation shaped by personal memory (as intelligent emotion) because these analyses help to historicise Vida's grief, thus restoring the specificity of personal bereavement.

In the analysis of the painting, I argue that Vida redeploys some of the binaries that the letter helped to identify. Working to destabilise binaries altogether, the painting

captures an ambivalence that stands as Vida's definitive, yet characteristically gentle, critique of the war. This act of sustained critique was eudaimonistic: an extended mourning necessary to Vida's future well-being. It supplemented the memorialising represented in the letter and it existed in excess to, or beyond the therapeutic reach of, the public grief and political symbolism of the ceremony of the Unknown Warrior.

On 11 November 1920, Vida was part of one of the largest crowds London had ever seen. People waited for the sounding of Big Ben at the eleventh hour and the simultaneous arrival of the Unknown Warrior at the Cenotaph (meaning empty tomb). The new memorial was then unveiled by King George V. As the chimes stopped, two minutes of silence was maintained until broken by the plaintive sound of The Last Post. (17) The Unknown Warrior, preceded by six black horses pulling the gun carriage on which his coffin rested, continued down Whitehall to the burial place of kings, Westminster Abbey. The outer coffin was made of oak from Hampton Court Palace and a sixteenth-century crusader's sword from the Tower of London collection was tucked under its wrought-iron bands, emphasising the humble Unknown Warrior's status as Christian hero. There he had a guard of honour: one hundred recipients of the Victoria Cross and a congregation of bereaved mothers and wives. He was interred along with a handful of French earth. It was the first ceremony ever taped in Westminster Abbey and the tapes sold at seven shillings and sixpence, an average day's pay. (18) Exactly a year later, a slab of black Belgian marble marked the spot, adding to the symbolism of European loss. The body within the grave, however, was randomly selected from four bodies exhumed from different European battlefields and it may have come from any part of the Empire.

The symbolism of the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month is familiar because it is reinvested with power every year. The Unknown Warrior at the heart of the spectacle is less well remembered. The cultural significance of swords and oak are now obscure and the politics of French earth and Belgian marble are remote. The Unknown Warrior was a communal symbol of grief, highly charged with meaning--just as the Gallipoli landscape is highly charged with meaning for Australian and Turkish visitors. Just as the individual tombstones of identifiable soldiers subsume their identities into a collective military and national identity, so the Cenotaph and the Unknown Warrior serve the function of stripping away the personal in order to express state values of unity, political allegiances and common sacrifices that bind citizens. It is a singular burial that memorialises communal burials of the unknown and, as such, it, too

accentuates one aspect of an individual's identity while downplaying others: whereas each person belonged to multiple communities--familial, national, religious, and professional--collective burial foremost articulates and commemorates the identity shared by all members included in the monument. (19)

So, in the ceremony of the Unknown Warrior the crowd is provided with an impersonal yet intimately significant 'screen' onto which each individual can project grief in a way that constitutes the emotion as a national event. This becomes very clear in the rest of Vida's letter home which she writes, not only in the first person as one would expect, but in the present tense to render her experience more directly. Vida writes of the Unknown Warrior having come:

from an obscure grave in France, to his last resting place in Westminster Abbey, & it is to honour his passing, symbolising as he does, the unrecorded acts, the unseen devotion, the unknown heroism of 'the Digger, the 'Tommy', the 'Jack Tar' that we are all gathered here ... The streets are lined with soldiers & sailors, & there are more police to the square foot than I have ever seen in my life ...

Then the officer's voice rang out ... & the men came to attention, reversed their arms, & bowed their heads. The faint sound of music became audible & the strains of 'The flowers of the forest' gradually drew nearer, & then the Unknown passed by.

The striking of eleven was to herald the two minutes silence but minutes before the hour struck the quiet had so spread & deepened that utter silence had come.

From far down at the Cenotaph the faint sound of the Cathedral Choir singing 'Oh God our help in ages past' made a faint ripple on the stillness, & then ceased, & the silence grew and deepened into something beyond mere silence. It was a spiritual experience, a communion.

The world seemed to die away in that abyss of silence, leaving each soul alone, with Something greater than itself.

I will never forget it, no one who was there will ever forget it.

You were silent in Australia too I know, from the remotest farm to the busiest streets of Melbourne and Sydney silence was kept & I am sure this act whenever it may be remembered brings a dew to the soul, but how arid these postwar years have been perhaps Europe only knows.

At any rate, when London paused, finger at lip, to remember, and stopped short in the midst of the day's business to listen to silent voices, something happened, an influence lingered, that will not wholly pass away.

A Cenotaph to the fallen was unveiled by the King just before the Silence & hundreds of thousands have laid their tributes there.

It now remains for the debt to the living to be discharged, & for London to find honourable work for her unemployed ex-soldiers. (20)

The relationship between absence and presence is immediately obvious. It exists in the symbolism of the historical moment and in Vida's description. It must, for at the heart of this war is the literal loss of bodies that never returned home. Indeed, their return would have been so demoralising (and so expensive) that it was prohibited. (21) Pat Jalland suggests: 'Nearly half the total dead of the British Empire in the Great

War have no known burial place ... Vast numbers of soldiers were blown to bits or left for dead in no man's land, where their bodies could never be recovered'. (22) Over 11,000 of Australia's 60,000 dead were never found. (23) The military cemeteries are on European soil. In a sense, then, all soldiers of Britain and her Empire were 'missing' from their own homes. The emptiness of the Cenotaph insists on this absence. Indeed, Inglis and Jalland argue convincingly that the large number of memorials across the Empire reflect the need to come to grips with the physical loss of the dead as well as the burial of loved ones so far away. The ease of taking that war as the turning towards a modernist mindset is undermined by Jay Winter's exploration of spiritualism, romanticism and resurrection as dominant cultural themes meeting the needs of a bereaved population actively seeking presence. (24)

The idea of a 'good death' at home surrounded by family was shattered by the Great War. Australian deaths were often conceptualised as violent, secular and solitary, based on 'struggles with the land'. (25) As the 'bush legend and the Anzac legend merged', a certain heroic masculinity was embodied in demanding Australian landscapes. (26) Such romantic representations attempted to counter the violence of a French landscape transformed into a nightmarish hell. Dying gloriously ultimately gave way to a stoical commitment to Duty, both in the soldier and his family on the home front. (27)

Absence, then, was the burden to be carried. This wound is directly addressed in the ceremony of the Unknown Warrior: firstly, through recognition of absence via the emptiness of the Cenotaph; secondly, in a resurrection of the corporeal, the real body of the Unknown. This is a Christ-like archetype. Memorialising is a public event harnessed to the civic expression of Christian grief, a subsuming of the personal into the communal spirituality.

Other binaries emerge from this central binary of absence and presence. The opposition of sound and silence follows quickly and logically on its heels. Indeed, it is sound that heralds the resurrection, not just once but twice: initially when the coffin passes the point at which Vida waits, 'the officer's voice rang out ... The faint sound of music became audible & the strains of 'The flowers of the forest' gradually drew nearer, & then the Unknown passed by'. What is particularly interesting here, though, is that the binary of silence and sound is destabilised by the sheer intensity of the emotion that is dammed up behind this culturally constructed and orchestrated silence. Vida experiences 'something beyond mere silence'. Because the 'world seemed to die away', she experiences something 'spiritual', a 'communion' as 'each soul alone' simultaneously fills the emptiness of that silence, not with sound, but with presence. For a sacred moment silence makes Something manifest, it fills the abyss.

This manifestation is evident in a third binary: movement and stillness. The singing is tangible as a 'faint ripple on the stillness' travelling across the distance filled by the crowd. The 'quiet ... spread and deepened', expanding to become silence; that silence also 'grew and deepened' in a metonymic movement that echoes the image of the ripple. As inheritors of this moment, we are drawn deeper and deeper as we share Vida's reconstruction of an unforgettable experience: we confirm that 'it will not wholly pass away'.

The binaries triggered by the passing of the Unknown cross one another to form an affective, emotional network: in the silence there is no absence, in the stillness there is depth and shape and movement, in the moment there is eternity and though each soul is alone, it has communion. The loss represented by the Unknown has been transformed into Something. At the very least it appears here as the fragile consolation that the public act of memorialising seeks to initiate and perpetuate by creating a focus for the projection of personal grief.

At this point the letter makes an interesting shift because it becomes specifically Australian colonial. It changes tense and tone as Vida creates her own ripples: from centre to periphery at the level of Empire to colony, from rural to urban at the level of the nation. She writes 'from the remotest farm to the busiest streets of Melbourne and Sydney silence was kept'. This contrast between places heightens the unity achieved in those moments of Silence across differences and distances so that she can, in the moment of writing, connect to those at home and forget that her words would take many weeks to reach Australia, forget her dislocation.

Her purpose, then, is performative. She symbolically reiterates the call to Silence, her desire is that it should act as a medium for connection in the same way that it functioned for her on Armistice Day, 1920. She refers explicitly to the memorialising and linking functions of 'remembering'. Memorialising is strengthened because the performative absence of sound that constituted 'Something greater' need not even be enacted; it need only be recalled in order to bring a 'dew to the soul'.

Here, in Vida's most poetic and complex phrase, is a final binary: the fleeting and the permanent--dew and soul. Memories are fleeting, like the dew and they are lost yet renewed daily. Built into this is the tension between moisture and aridity because the souls of living and departed alike must be nourished, never allowed to wither and perish in the spiritually arid, hellish landscape of war. There is an intersection with other binaries in the network, as the purity and fragility of dew recalls the temporary stillness of dawn. The dew, like the Silence, simultaneously represents a loss and a new beginning. Dew has qualities of absence and presence, forming into droplets through condensation; it is drawn from an apparent absence, from the air itself as it cools. It is repeating that movement from the Unknown to the Something as though it is the embodiment of that performative Silence. Yet, by definition, a dew 'rests' on a surface: for Vida Lahey it rests as balm upon her own soul. Soul is the Something that remains despite all that is lost.

The need for a new beginning is explicit in the final lines: 'It now remains for the debt to the living to be discharged, & for London to find honourable work for her unemployed ex-soldiers'. Vida Lahey was an energetic pragmatist. Here she turns to the 'now', and then quickly to an 'honourable' future for the 'living', both those who have fought and others on the home front. Vida wants to find dignity in the face of a history that is not, as Grossberg would say, of her 'making'. (28) Refusing nostalgia, she grapples with the discharging of the 'debt' of gratitude for the hardships of soldiering--this change is marked by the phrase 'At any rate', which makes the shift from 'soul' to 'business'.

From this letter we can see that Vida had a very rich inner life, one full of symbolic resonances, of emotional and spiritual depths that fed her creativity whether she used

the language of words or what she called the 'language of art'. (29) This reading captures the ways in which memorialising structures memory. Her personal sorrow is both maintained by and subsumed into national Australian losses and those of the Empire. Although Australians and New Zealanders fought the furthest from their own shores, their losses were represented by the same Unknown Warrior. He was symbolic of the Empire's unity, the identification of its colonies with it. (30)

Like many other single women, Vida needed a tangible way of coping with loss. She had no husband in the war. Many, of course, did not because most volunteers were young and single. But nor was Vida a mother. She was a sister. Organisations that sprang up to help those on the home front were aimed at the wives and mothers of soldiers until '[m]aternity was elevated to the realm of heroism'. (31) Even the stoicism of grieving fathers was officially embodied in The Sailors' and Soldiers' Fathers' Association. (32) Just as personal memories became subsumed into the public act of memorialising after the war, so during the war, was a sister's specific identity marginalised as mothers, fathers and then wives were placed centre stage. Single women found solutions for this because, as Patsy Adam-Smith acknowledges, when the home front mobilised:

Hundreds of charitable organisations were set up to raise funds for anything and everything--13 802 301 [pounds sterling] was raised by 'Patriotic' funds ranging from the Sandbag Fund to Xmas Billy loans and Cheers Fund, War Horses, Belgian Nuns, Belgian Canal Boats and Tobacco for Troops Fund. (33)

Whilst all of this support certainly helped the Australian 'boys' at the front, nothing could easily compensate them for the absence of their loved ones. This recognition was particularly sharp in its intensity when they left the battlefield wounded or on leave. Roly Mills's letter home to his sister captures this poignantly:

At every village we passed, the people were out waving handkerchiefs to their lads, welcoming them home on furlough. It made me realise I am away from home ... When we got to London wounded and saw all the English Tommies meeting their mothers, sisters, brothers and friends, we Australians realised a little more that we are far from home. (34)

As the pragmatism evident at the end of Vida's Unknown Warrior letters suggests, Vida wanted to be instrumental in offering tangible support. In fact, she energetically embraced the task of easing homesickness such as that of Roly Mills. This suggestion is confirmed by a postcard to a sister, where she also insists that the family should not be concerned for her wellbeing:

I am very busy tracing drawings of aeroplane parts all day and all day [sic] and writing letters and odd jobs at night. Jack ... still has no power over the fingers in his left hand. I do hope that all goes well with you and yours dearest I know you will think of me

here in the grey mist as I think of you in the dancing light. Don't worry about me I would not be elsewhere [sic] for anything and have never once felt other than happy and glad that I came. (35)

Nevertheless, as first port of call for the men at the front and the letters of both friends and family at home seeking further information about their menfolk, Vida's service took its toll on a 'quiet and modest personality'. (36) In an interview a few years before her death in 1968, Vida noted that she had been 'caught up in war work and I was doing that sort of thing until I found I couldn't do it any longer'. She goes on to say, in what seems to support the 'quiet and modest' description, that, 'all the nurses and soldiers, of course, had priority and they were taken [home] first, naturally'. (37) Added to the strain of support and liaison (no matter how welcome) was this two and a half year delay in her repatriation home. During that time, she studied, travelled and painted furiously to rejuvenate her career. All this activity inevitably postponed Vida's grieving process: the part that could only occur once she returned to the familiar environment of home, without Noel and some of her cousins, yet with others much changed by war.

When she did arrive home in February of 1921, she continued to prepare for a Brisbane exhibition within three months. By October, her mother wrote in a letter that, 'Vida is not very well the strain of the war has told on her very much'. (38) In November, Vida retreated from active duty to the family by staying in Tasmania for two years with fellow artist and teacher Mildred Lovett (nee Paterson). At her 1924 solo exhibition, *Rejoicing and remembrance, Armistice Day, London 1918* appears. It was the only painting not for sale because Vida is said to have held a 'special attachment' to it. (39) In this painting the complexities of the letter reappear as Vida continues to work through her own ambivalent responses to the war and its aftermath again in a format that destabilises binaries by presenting them in a complex network.

Bettina MacAulay, art historian and curator of the Vida Lahey retrospective in 1989 at Queensland Art Gallery, calls *Rejoicing and remembrance* Vida's 'most significant painting from the 1920s ... [one that] is a mature and carefully considered realisation which combines her knowledge of the world and of art, and succeeds brilliantly in conveying it through a language of colour, form and symbolism'. (40) Before looking at the painting, I want to think about Vida's 'knowledge of the world' by examining the painting's setting.

MacAulay contextualises the scene as the portico of the church of St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, otherwise familiarly known as the 'Church of the ever open door'. Its minister was a chaplain who had served at the front and therefore allowed soldiers to sleep in the church en route to or from battle. (41) Vida lived nearby. (42) It is even possible, therefore, that she may have seen them do this.

Once known, the symbolism of the location is evident and enriches any reading of the painting. That significance is reinforced, however, by discovering the story of St Martin (316-c. 396 AD), itself generated by tensions around war and pacifism:

Reluctant to join the Roman army, [St Martin] ... was obliged by law to take the military oath, which he then felt compelled to obey. As a soldier posted in Amiens in France, the eighteen year old Martin rode through the city gate one bitter winter's night and saw almost naked beggar huddled against the stonework. Martin cut his cloak in two with his sword and gave half to the beggar. That night, in a dream, Christ appeared to Martin in the form of the beggar to thank him ... Martin could never quite reconcile war with his Christian beliefs and eventually he gave it up to become a 'soldier of Christ'. (43)

We see here familiar themes of sacrifice, duty, honour and compassion that appealed deeply to Vida. Her diary of her trip to Belgium and Holland after the war reveals her love for church architecture. She writes, for example, of seeing the Cathedral in Antwerp for the first time:

we get a transitory view up a street, and see the whole face of the Cathedral, tower and all--one moment and it is gone, like a door opened and shut again--but that fleeting glimpse stirs the imagination, with its vision of the whole height of the wonderful spire, as it shoots upward, direct as an arrow. Like a beautiful thought it springs from the earth, piercing heaven ... it is the loveliest thing I have yet seen. (44)

An Anglican from Wesleyan stock, she also writes of her 'intense shyness' at being in a Roman Catholic Church for the first time and, later still, at the Fete Marie in Maline, of the way in which the priests 'gabbling the prayers hurt me'. (45) It is hard, then, to imagine that she had not familiarised herself with the story of St Martin and allowed her 'imagination' to be stirred as it was by the Cathedral at Antwerp. A letter offering to sell the painting to the Australian War Memorial specifically links the setting of the painting to the spirit of the place when the Armistice was announced. She writes that the painting 'shows the portico of St Martin-in-the-Fields, with the shouting and dancing crowds outside, but I have aimed more at the truth to the feeling of the scene, than strictly literal truth'. (46) Speck goes on to illustrate that to Vida the price of the painting was a secondary issue. Vida writes 'I would very much like to have a small part in the War Memorial'. (47) Without giving a reason for their refusal, the Memorial turned down Vida's offer to make public her private response to grief.

Here MacAulay picks up the provenance of the painting: two exhibitions, ownership on Vida's death by Romeo and, on his death, placement in an exhibition by Macquarie Galleries in Canberra. There, in 1978, the War Memorial purchased it. Since then it has been on display (2001) at the Memorial. (48) Vida did not lose the desire to become actively involved in public commemoration of war. In the second world war, when Nora Heysen and Stella Bowen became official war artists, Vida applied to do likewise. Her name is on a list of seventeen artists 'to be appointed as required to cover the war effort in Australia'. (49) At the age of sixty, it seems she was never

'required'. However, we do have Rejoicing and remembrance as her response to the first world war.

Appropriately, MacAulay's emphasis is that of the art historian and it is valuable in its capacity to link Rejoicing and remembrance to other works of art. Its 'riotous profusion of flags', for example, are like those in works by Monet and Manet that celebrate Bastille Day and can be said to represent 'the release (although for different reasons) from tyranny'. (50) Speck has a slightly different focus, generating her reading of the flags through the imagery and colour, as well as their symbolism: 'Symbols of the soldiers' sacrifice, their flags of nation and Empire, are a backdrop to the mourning women. The women's grief and loss appear to be embodied by the flags, which drip rivulets of blood'. (51)

Speck's reading certainly draws attention to the colour in the painting, finding in it a different focus for the symbolism--the remembering and sacrifice, rather than the celebration. Both interpretations rest within the single image, the flags. Speck's reading seems more immediate when the original painting is viewed. The colour could even easily be read as blood flying upwards rather than dripping downwards. The flags dissolve into a bloody pool so the colour hovers slightly above the figures transforming them from celebratory crowd to amorphous mob. Whether colour or form or symbolism is emphasised, the flags are dissolving, losing their power as national symbols. Even before thinking about the figures themselves, this image critiques national aggression.

This is consistent as an interpretation if there is recognition that the colour here is also fiery. The red reflection on the glass lamp above the church door suggests hellfire as much as blood; its glow is evident against the wall near the lamp and across the roof of the portico. When Vida discusses the line as an element of the 'language of art', she says 'the "S" or flamelike shape expressing as it does an upward and side-to-side movement, produces the effect of intensity of life, and vehement aspiration ... we find this motif employed in many of Van Gogh's feverish landscapes'. (52) The flags can be linked to the 'vehement aspirations' of nations, aspirations clearly, by intent or otherwise, bloody. The result is 'hysterical', 'feverish' in its 'intensity', and violent. All are caught in its aftermath for there are touches of red (miniature flags perhaps) even in the midst of the 'rejoicing' figures. They dance from right to left, passing from joy to mourning as they proceed across the coffin-shaped flagstones.

That touch of colour also links the foreground of the painting to its background, creating a conduit between public and private space. The violent flags are beyond the portico in the public space of memorialising. The faint outline of a distant building dead centre of the painting is hinted at in that space. It draws the eye through the larger rectangle of the frame, through the next rectangle created at the edge of the portico, to these considerations of symbolism and public space. The line of the flagstones reinforces this movement of the eye, even though the mind is trying to read the right to left movement of the figures. Focus oscillates: foreground with a right to left movement, and background creating depth and surface in the planes of the image. The perspective therefore creates the inner space of the portico itself--the sanctuary of the church, the inner sanctum of personal expressions of joy and suffering, the privacy of individual memory rather than memorial.

Both MacAulay and Speck highlight the opposition between the figures in the foreground of the painting. Speck acknowledges Vida's suffering, perceiving it in the 'grief and loss' of mourning women contrasted with the women who 'dance and sing'; she suggests the 'whites doves of peace unify these differing reactions'. (53) MacAulay also acknowledges Vida's 'coming to terms with her own grief', linking it to the widespread grief occurring at the time. (54) She does not see the doves as a unifying thematic principle that blurs the boundary between mourning and joy; they are simply a 'complement' to the 'lifting of the spirits' she read into the flags. The doves 'soar in a sky that is filled with light'. (55) Once more, there is a multiplicity, the functions of theme and movement.

Movement and stillness in this painting echo that same binary in the letter; drawing attention to the overall shifts and complexities of the human heart. The withdrawal of colour from the foreground makes the emotional impact of the lines more emphatic. The eye is not captured and held by the images of blood or fire that are in the background. Like the figures, the viewer is released from the public domain of the national, shifted into the shelter of the portico to contemplate another opposition: the sombre reality of mourning and the Dionysian joy of release into a sensual and riotous freedom.

In contrast to the amorphous crowd near the flags in the public space of memorial, these figures are individualised. The dark, downward pull of the curved line of the shoulders carries the emotional burden of personal memories. Grief is not lost to the nation here. It is owned and real. Its reality is heightened by the fine definition given to the joyful figures, their uplifted arms, their sensual necklines, their elegant ankles and calves all speak of life. The doves are uplifting because their lines and shape echo the opening up to life in the arms of the young woman in the foreground. This is a more subtle expression of the overall uplifting of the spirit reinforced by the 'repetitions of strong verticals'. (56) The classic form of these verticals in the columns gives the painting strength and dignity, a tone suggesting order will be restored; in Nietzschean terms the Apollonian impulse will restore some balance.

This painting, like Vida's letter, has complex tensions and unities. Its composition shares with the letter a focus on tension through opposition but harmony through subtle combination. There is the balance of the figures left to right although thematically they are opposed; that opposition is repeated in the unification of background with foreground through a touch of colour that bridges the two dimensions yet, once more, the two are thematically opposed as public space of memorialising and private space of both joyful and mournful memories. There is the downward pull of that grief that exists alongside a very strong sense of uplifting hope, of faith in the future. There are emotions triggered through use of colour, and as many through the use of line and form. Once more, then, what we see is a network of binaries that functions as a Gestalt to capture the complexity of an ambivalence that demanded a more sustained response from Vida; one that is intelligently emotional.

Both letter and painting exist along a continuum of grief. The power of remembering the Silence at the funeral of the Unknown Warrior was 'dew to the soul' for Vida. At that point, perhaps she began the process of grieving and healing that memorialising triggers through public acknowledgement of loss. Grieving, however, is a notoriously long process requiring individual reflection and acceptance. In painting Rejoicing and

remembrance Vida found a way to prolong those moments of Silence. Without bodies to mourn, grieving took longer for people, loss was harder to accept, and again we find in Nussbaum recognition of this need for extended reflection: 'In grief, given our propensity to distance ourselves and to deny what has occurred, we may have to go through the act of accepting many times before the proposition securely rests there; but all this is part of the life of an emotion'. (57)

In the complexity of the harmonised contradictions in Rejoicing and remembrance Vida found a way to re-enter a space where she was able to 'go through the act of accepting many times', perhaps as many times as there were brushstrokes or lines of charcoal drawn upon the surface. Vida certainly believed, as she wrote in the second world war, that:

art is an integral part of life and what affects life must affect art ... art is not something separate from us, a product of our hands, but is one of our languages; in fact it is the only international language--a language which knows no barrier of place or time, and by which spirit speaks to spirit and century to century. (58)

The painting was an extension of those moments of silence. It, too, was 'dew to the soul': a means of restoring vitality to her inner life, attending to her own 'flourishing' by recognising and accepting the emotional complexities and contradictions inherent in war.

Notes

(1) Shirley Lahey, *The Laheys: Pioneer Settlers and Sawmillers*, Self Published, Brisbane, 2003, p 334.

(2) Lahey, *ibid.*, pp 222, 237; Bettina MacAulay, *Songs of Colour: the Art of Vida Lahey*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 1989, pp 33-7.

(3) Lahey, *op. cit.*, p 267.

(4) Joy Damousi, *The Labour of Loss: Mourning, Memory and Wartime Bereavement in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p 30.

(5) Lahey, *op. cit.*, pp 261-7.

(6) Roll of Honour, Database, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

(7) Bruce Scates, 'In Gallipoli's shadow: pilgrimage, memory, mourning and the Great War', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol 33, no 119, 2002, pp 1-21.

(8) Ian H, *ibid.*, p 7.

(9) Scates, *op. cit.*, p 16.

(10) Winter in Scates, *ibid.*, p 20.

- (11) Scates, *ibid.*, p 20.
- (12) Martha C Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: the Intelligence of Emotions*, Cambridge University Press (paperback edn), Cambridge, 2003, p 23.
- (13) *ibid.*, p 32.
- (14) *ibid.*, p 43.
- (15) Thomas Laqueur, 'Memory and naming in the Great War', in John R Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations: the Politics of National Identity*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1994, p 161.
- (16) Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1975; Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: the First World War and English Culture*, Bodley Head, London, 1990.
- (17) The following paraphrase is drawn from these two websites: Mike Rodin, *Aftermath: When the Boys Came Home*, <http://www.aftermathww1.com/warrior2.asp>, 2002; Westminster Abbey: Place of Worship House of Kings, 'People buried or commemorated: Unknown Warrior', <http://www.westminster-abbey.org/library/burial/warrior.htm>, 2004.
- (18) M J Daunt, 'How to pay for the war: state, society and taxation in Britain, 1917-24', *The English Historical Review*, vol 111, no 443, 1996, p 883.
- (19) Ann Marie Yasin, 'Funerary monuments and collective identity: from roman family to Christian community', *The Art Bulletin*, no 87.3, Sept 2005, p 436.
- (20) Letter from Vida Lahey in Lahey op. cit., p 334.
- (21) K S Inglis, 'The unknown Australian soldier', *Journal of Australian Studies*, March 1999, p 9.
- (22) Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, p 374.
- (23) Inglis, op. cit., p 8.
- (24) Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 1995.
- (25) L Fitzpatrick, 'Secular, savage and solitary: death in Australian painting' in Kathy Charmaz, Glennys Howarth and Allan Kellehear (eds), *The Unknown Country: Death in Australia, Britain and the USA*, Macmillan Press, Hampshire, 1997, p 28.
- (26) Pat Jalland, *Australian Ways of Death*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, p 307.
- (27) *ibid.*, pp 306 ff.; Damousi op. cit.
- (28) Lawrence Grossberg, 'The context of audiences and the politics of difference', *Australian Journal of Communication*, no 16 (December), 1989, p 16.
- (29) Vida Lahey, *The Rudiments of the Language of Art*, MS F2622, Fryer Library, Queensland University, Brisbane, being a record of the second lecture in a series of lectures in art sponsored by Professor J V Duhig, 1942.

- (30) Inglis, op. cit., p 10.
- (31) Carmel Shute, 'Heroines and heroes: sexual mythology in Australia 1914-1918' in Joy Damousi, and Marilyn Lake (eds), *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p 24.
- (32) Damousi, *The Labour of Loss*, pp 52-7.
- (33) Patsy Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1984, p 71.
- (34) Roly Mills in Adam-Smith, *ibid.*
- (35) Vida Lahey in Shirley Lahey op. cit., p 290.
- (36) Daphne Mayo, MSS Notes for Daphne Mayo's Biography of Vida Lahey, for the Society of Women Writers NSW Literary Competition 1969, UQFL 119, Box ,1969, p 1.
- (37) Vida Lahey in Hazel De Berg, *Conversation with Vida Lahey*, Sound Recording Transcript, Hazel de Berg Collection, ORAL DeB 152, 1965, p 3.
- (38) In Shirley Lahey, op. cit., p 341.
- (39) *ibid.*, p 367.
- (40) MacAulay, op. cit., p 43.
- (41) *ibid.*; Melanie Machin, *St Martin-in-the-Fields: History*, <http://www.stmartin-in-the-fields.org/jserv/history/index.jsp>, 2001.
- (42) Catherine Speck, *Painting Ghosts: Australian Women Artists in Wartime*, Craftsman House, Melbourne, 2004, p 88.
- (43) Machin, op. cit.
- (44) Vida Lahey, *Travel Diary*, 1 August 1919, p 2, Papers (manuscripts) 1909-63, Record no 40713, John Oxley Library, Brisbane.
- (45) *ibid.*, 4 August 1919, p 9, 16 August 1919, p 2.
- (46) Lahey in Speck op. cit., p 88.
- (47) *ibid.*
- (48) Sue Lovell *Conversation with Laura Back when viewing Rejoicing and Remembrance*, Australian War Memorial Storage Facility, Mitchell, Canberra, 20 July 2005.
- (49) 'Appointment of Miss Vida Lahey as official war artist', Minutes of Art Committee Meeting, 12 January 1942, AWM 93, File No: 50/4/2/88.
- (50) MacAulay, op.cit., p 45.
- (51) Speck, op.cit., p 88.

(52) Vida Lahey, *Rudiments*, p 28.

(53) Speck, *ibid.*

(54) MacAulay, *op. cit.*, p 45.

(55) *ibid.*

(56) *ibid.*

(57) Nussbaum, *op. cit.*, p 46.

(58) Vida Lahey, *Art for All*, Queensland National Art Gallery, Brisbane, 194*, p 1.