This paper is part of a larger project exploring Australian literary responses to the Great War of 1914-1918. It draws on theories of embodiment, mourning, ritual and the period has "dropped into oblivion." In his view, neglect of writings by First World War combatants is not due to its quality, "for this is not the only, or even the essential, condition" for consideration; rather, it is attributable to a "disjunction between the ideals enshrined in the Anzac legend and the experiences recorded or depicted" (170). The silence, we argue, also encompasses literary responses by non-combatants, many of whom were women, though limited space precludes consideration here of their particular contributions.

Although poetry and fiction by those of middling or little literary reputation is not normally subject to critical scrutiny, it is patently not the case that there is no body of literature from the war period worthy of scholarly consideration, or that most works are merely pathetic, jingoistic, sentimental and in service of recruitment, even though these elements are certainly present. Our different proposition is that the "lost literatures" deserve attention for various reasons, including the ways they embody conflicting aims and emotions, as well as overt negotiations with the dead, during a period of unprecedented anguish. This is borne out by our substantial collection of creative writing provoked by the war, much of which was published by newspapers, magazines and journals.

As Joy Damousi points out in The Labour of Loss, newspapers were the primary form of communication during the war, and never before or since have they dominated full-time such a vast and diverse readership; readers formed support groups through shared reading and actual or anticipated mourning, and some women commiserated with each other in person and in letters after reading casualty lists and death notices (21).

The war produced the largest body count in the history of humanity to that time, including 60,000 Australians: none was returned to Australia for burial. They were placed in makeshift graves close to where they died, where possible marked by wooden crosses. At the end of the war, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) was charged with the responsibility of exhuming and reintering bodily remains in immaculately curated cemeteries across Europe, at Gallipoli and in the Middle East, as if the peace demanded it. As many as one third of the customary headstones were inscribed with "known unto God," the euphemism for bodies that could not be identified. The CWGC received numerous requests from families for the crosses, which might embody their loved one and link his sacrificial death with resurrection and immortality. For allegedly logistical reasons, however, all crosses were destroyed on site.

Benedict Anderson suggested the importance to nationalism of the print media, which enables private reading of epemera to generate a sense of communion with thousands or millions of anonymous people understood to be doing likewise. Furthermore, Judith Herman demonstrates in Trauma and Recovery that sharing traumatic experiences with others is a "precondition for the restitution of a sense of a meaningful world" (70). Need of community and restitution extends to the dead. The practices of burying the dead together and of returning the dead to their homeland when they die abroad speak to this need, for "in establishing a society of the period has "dropped into oblivion." In his view, neglect of writings by First World War combatants is not due to its quality, "for this is not the only, or even the essential, condition" for consideration; rather, it is attributable to a "disjunction between the ideals enshrined in the Anzac legend and the experiences recorded or depicted" (170). The silence, we argue, also encompasses literary responses by non-combatants, many of whom were women, though limited space precludes consideration here of their particular contributions.

Speaking in the voice of the other is a fundamental task of the creative writer, and the ultimate other, the dead, gaze upon and speak to or about the living in a number of poems. For example, they might voice their displeasure and plea for reinforcements, as, for example, in Elia McFadden's poem "The Wardens," published in the Sydney Mail in 1918, which includes the lines: "Can you hear them calling in the night-time's lonely spaces [...] Can't you see them passing [...] Those that strung so strongly, and have laid their lives away?" The speaker hears and conveys the pleading of those who have given their breath in order to make explicit the reader's responsibility to both the dead and the Allied cause: "Thus and thus we battled, we were faithful in endavour/Still it lies unfulfilled—will ye make the deed in vain?"

McFadden focusses on soldierly sacrifice and "drafts that never came," whereas a poem entitled "Your Country's Call," written in the same paper in 1915 by "An Australian Mother, Shirley, Queensland," refers to maternal sacrifice and the joys and difficulties of bringing and raising her son only to find the country's claims on him outweigh her own. She grapples with paternalism and resistance: "he must go forth./Where? Why? Don't think. Just smother/up the pain./Give him up quickly, for his country's gain."

The War Precautions Act of October 1914 made it "illegal to publish any material likely to discourage recruiting or undermine the Allied effort" (Damousi 21), which undoubtedly meant that, to achieve publication, critical, depressing or negative views would need to be repressed or cast as inauspicious to enlist, though evidently many writers also sought to convince themselves as well as others that the cause was noble and the cost redeemable. "Your Country's Call" concludes uncertainly, "Give him up proudly./You have done your share./There may be recompense—somewhere.

Sociologist Clive Seal argues that "social and cultural life involves turning away from the inevitability of death, which is contained in the fact of our embodiment, and towards life" (1). He contends that "grief for embodiment" is pervasive and perpetual and "extends beyond the obvious manifestations of loss by the dying and bereaved, and the rituals of every-day life" (200), and he goes so far as to suggest that if we recognise that our bodies "give to us both our lives and our deaths" then we can understand that "social and cultural life can, in the last analysis, be understood as a human construction in the face of death" (210).

To deal with the grief that comes with "realisation of embodiment," Searle finds that we engage in various "resurreptive practices designed to transform an orientation towards death into one that points towards life" (8). He includes narrative reconstruction as well as funeral lament and everyday conversation as rituals associated with maintenance of the social bond, which is "the most crucial human motive" (Scheff qtd. in Searle 30). Although Seale does not discuss the acts of writing or of reading specifically, his argument can be extended, we believe, to include both as important resurreptive practices that contain desire for self-repair and reorientation as well as for inclusion and as creation of an empathic moral community, though this does not imply that such desires can ever be satisfied. In "Reading," Virginia Woolf reminds that "somewhere, everywhere, now hidden, now apparent in whatever is written down is the form of a human being" (28-29), but her very reminder assumes that this knowledge of embodiment tends to be forgotten or repressed. Writing, by its aura of permanence and resurreptive potential, points towards life and community that signify absence and disconnection.

Christian Riegel explains that the "literary work of mourning," whether poetry, fiction or nonfiction, often has both a psychic and social function, "pivoting of the processes of mourning while simultaneously being a product for public reception." Such a text is indicative of ways that societies shape and control responses to death, making it "an inherently socio-historical construct" (xviii). Jacques Derrida's passionate and uneasy enactment of this labour in The Work of Mourning suggests that writing often responds to the death of a known person or their ouvre, where each death changes and reduces the world, so that the world as one knew it "sinks
into an abyss" (115).

Of course, writing also wrestles with anonymous, large-scale loss which is similarly capable of shattering our sense of "ontological security" (Riegel xx). Sandra Gilbert proposes that some traumatic events cause "death's door" to swing "so publicly and dramatically open that we can't look away" (xxi). Derrida's work of mourning entails imaginative revival of those who have lost and is a struggle with representation and fidelity, whereas critical silence in respect of the body of literature of the First World War might imply repeated turning from "grief for entertainment" towards myths of immortality and indebtedness. Commemorating the war dead might be regarded as a resurrec


Sutherland, Katherine. "Land of Their Graves: Maternity, Mourning and Nation in Janet Frame, Sara Suleri, and Arundhati Roy." Riegel 201-16.