Artistic identity in the published writings of Margaret Thomas (c1840-1929)

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Lynn P. Brunet
30 December 1993
ARTISTIC IDENTITY
IN THE PUBLISHED WRITINGS OF
MARGARET THOMAS (c1840-1929)

ABSTRACT

Margaret Thomas (c1840-1929) practised painting and sculpture in a professional capacity in both Australia and England. She was the first woman in Australia to practise sculpture professionally and has been recorded as such in the annals of Australian art history. Her published writings provide insight into the subjective experience of a woman artist at a point in history when women were beginning to emerge into the professional practice of art. Her writings span a number of literary genres, from poetry, biography and short stories to travel and art historical writing.

This thesis uses her published writings, together with a brief outline of her career, as a case study of the emergence of women into the professional practice of art. It focuses on the development of her artistic identity. The study reveals that the woman artist’s shift from an amateur to a professional status was not accomplished in a single decisive step. It suggests that the woman artist did not immediately abandon her historical link with her role as an accomplished amateur but that while tentatively placing one foot in the professional sphere she wove her traditional role meaningfully together with her new role. The thesis argues that the woman artist of the late nineteenth century used the framework of the amateur tradition to create a support matrix of identity from which to venture into the unknown of art as profession.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Margaret Thomas (c1840-1929) was the first Australian woman to practise sculpture in a professional capacity and the first woman to win the silver medal for modelling at the Royal Academy. She was also a professional painter and later in her career she became a published writer producing a number of books ranging from biography, poetry and short stories to travel writing and art history. During her lifetime she saw major changes in the colonial Australian and British societies in which she lived. Among the changes most relevant to her artistic practice was that involving a shift in public intellectual life from an amateur to a professional base. The negotiation of her identity in these shifting conditions was complex, involving confusing adjustments between contradictory values. Her published writings provide insight into her subjective experience as a woman artist and reveal much about her process of identity formation. They suggest the degree and depth of the adjustments made by a woman to compensate for the internalised barriers imposed by a patriarchal construction of the role of the artist.

This dissertation will investigate Margaret Thomas’ published writings as a case study of the emergence of women into the professional practice of art. The study reveals that the woman artist’s shift from an amateur to a professional status was not accomplished in a single decisive step. It suggests that the woman artist did not immediately abandon her historical link with her role as an accomplished amateur but that while tentatively placing one foot in the professional sphere she wove her traditional role meaningfully together with her new role. The thesis will argue that the woman artist of the late nineteenth century used the framework of the amateur tradition to create a support matrix of identity from which to venture into the unknown domain of art as profession. This identity matrix could also act as a buffer if her projected professional success (the fame that many women artists craved and which the future canon of art history would deny) were not achieved.

The span of Margaret Thomas’ career from her early training in the 1850s until the 1920s parallels a marked shift, not only in the position of women in the artistic professions, but also in the development of the professions in general. In the 1850s the amateur intellectual or artist was accorded a prominent position in the
formation of colonial Australian culture and also in Victorian culture as a whole. However, from the 1870s the well respected amateur was beginning to be supplanted by the trained professional. As Deirdre David notes, towards the end of the century “intellectual life itself became a profession where before it had been a gentlemanly hobby.”

The middle class notion of the professions, as it was emerging in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as a single-minded pursuit of a discrete area of knowledge, was not a useful model for the woman artist. For her to invest her entire identity in a profession which was constructed around a patriarchal ideology and catered almost exclusively for male needs would be dangerous if not self destructive. The realm of art as profession was thus a foreign or alien space for her. The first phase of a shift into this space was accomplished by a group of politically active women, Laura Herford and others, who in 1860 achieved access to the professional art training establishment of the Royal Academy. The next phase, in which the subject of this thesis can be historically placed, deals with the woman artist’s first encounters in the world of professional art.

Margaret Thomas thrived on the challenge imposed by a venture into foreign spaces. As a child, migrating to Australia with her family during the height of the goldrush, she learned many skills of adaptation which she applied whenever she encountered the strange or unfamiliar. As a young woman she courageously resisted the status quo by entering the male domain of sculpture. As an older woman she travelled extensively, sometimes risking her life, in search of adventure in exotic places. But the ideological baggage she carried with her into these foreign spaces simultaneously acted as a burden and a barrier as well as a support structure. While driven by a desire to gain self-fulfillment in a highly independent way, she was also constrained by her bourgeois background to measure her success in conservative terms.

The maintenance or betterment of her class position figured very strongly in all of Margaret Thomas’ ventures, whether artistic, literary or travel. Her identity was inextricably bound with her class position as well as her career choice. She often simply calls herself an ‘artist’ but on many occasions she attaches the prefix ‘lady’. At these times the reference to her gender appears to be significant because of its association with status. As Beverley Kingston argues, “‘Lady’ meant a position in the class scale superior to all other descriptors such as ‘woman’ or ‘female’. In practice it usually meant somewhere above wherever you were now.” Furthermore the appellation ‘lady artist’ also allows her a range of
flexibility in the practice of her creativity. As a cultivated woman, that is a 'lady', she could embrace learning and the arts from the broad perspective of the dilettante. The terms 'woman artist' or 'professional artist' (perhaps anachronistic twentieth century terms) do not appear in her vocabulary. When she uses the term 'artist' it seems to be with a sense of pride in her achievements. But on occasion, in a self-deprecating mood, she terms herself a 'mere artist' and apologises for her limitations.

Throughout her career she maintained a mixed artistic identity. She acted simultaneously as a dilettante practising her artistic talents as a testimony to her class and status as well as a thoroughly trained professional meeting high standards in her professional practice. She could simultaneously be accused of dabbling unwisely in areas in which she possessed no innate skill (her early writing falls into this category) and celebrated for her excellence in the field of visual arts. Her decision to place the demands of her class position on an equal footing with those of her profession could well be interpreted as a contributing factor towards her eventual obscurity as an artist. This explanation, however, ignores the question of women’s subordination within patriarchy.

As this study will reveal, Margaret Thomas, as a subject of conflicting discourses, hints at underlying identity conflicts at various points throughout her published writings. While she is able to articulate the pain and anxiety caused in part by this identity conflict and confusion, the clarification of the causes of her difficulties does not seem to reside in her power. Only a deconstruction of her writings, with the advantage of time, cultural and ideological distance, can afford the perspective necessary to an interpretation of her place in the professional development of women as artists. The nature of this conflict, as it applies to women in general, is aptly described by Catherine Belsey:

[women] as a group in our society are both produced and inhibited by contradictory discourses. Very broadly, we participate both in the liberal-humanist discourse of freedom, self-determination and rationality and at the same time in the specifically feminine discourse offered by society of submission, relative inadequacy and irrational intuition. The attempt to locate a single and coherent subject position within these contradictory discourses, and in consequence to find a non-contradictory pattern of behaviour can create intolerable pressures.
Margaret Thomas grew up in a social order where the highest social position a woman could attain was through natural lineage or a well placed marriage, but she matured in a period when the professions cut a swathe through this old order and allowed individuals to progress socially through education and training. Her career reflects a nervous oscillation between the values of the old order and those of the new.

In her lifetime Margaret Thomas made a deliberate choice to forego a narrow career path in favour of developing a wide range of interests. She proceeded to carry out her artistic practice in a lateral rather than a linear progression. Seen in contemporary binary terms her choice could be read as a ‘feminine’ solution to a career path where the feminine is associated with a lateral approach and the masculine with a linear one. In contemporary phallogocentric discourse the ‘amateur’ has become associated with the feminine and devalued, whereas the ‘professional’ has been valorised as the preferred masculine model.

And yet in the nineteenth century this neat division did not apply. By practising as an amateur, an individual was signifying his or her available leisure and claiming membership of a privileged group. Furthermore this claim bore a relationship historically with the period of the Enlightenment in which great innovations in science, technology and the arts were made by amateurs. Women, when practising as amateurs in the nineteenth century, were not only referring to a feminine tradition but were also reflecting a highly honoured masculine tradition which was, with the decline of the aristocracy, rapidly in retreat. Women preserving this amateur tradition, in an oblique and reactionary way were conserving an attitude towards knowledge which was fast being replaced by a fascination with ‘expertise’.

The amateur tradition which had its roots, therefore, not in a gender division but in class was still able to offer women some valuable support and was to continue to function as a background against which the bourgeois woman acted. This tradition provided the individual with a generalised knowledge of the fine arts resulting in a broad if not indepth understanding and signifying an acquisition of taste. An amateur interest in the arts was proof of a woman’s upper or middle class status and some of the skills which she accumulated as part of her grooming towards gentility would prove invaluable in the professional sphere. To abandon her amateur background would mean forfeiting a considerable portion of her identity which allowed her a useful flexibility. By retaining her amateur interests alongside her professional aspirations Margaret Thomas was able to negotiate the
dangers of her new public role while protecting herself in the familiar territory of her traditional role.

Margaret Thomas managed her shift into the professions by utilising her writing as a balance to the physically demanding work of marble sculpture and the limitations of classical realist portraiture. Although not motivated to explore the political aspects of her artistic career in an overt or 'feminist' way, she did, however, investigate some of the ramifications of art as a career choice for women by framing her ideas in a variety of literary genres. In a self-appointed role as cultural observer, she frames many of the issues concerning women in the arts from both a direct and tangential perspective.

Before proceeding to a discussion of her writing it is important to outline what has already been said about Margaret Thomas by other authors and critics. There is very limited information on Margaret Thomas as an actual historical figure, the reason being that there were very few surviving documents apart from her published writings, her will and a collection of her artworks remaining. She never married and left no surviving heirs. Nonetheless she has managed to gain a place as a 'founding mother' in Australian sculpture. It is important to note, however, that in the total volume of her visual artwork, her paintings far outnumber her sculptures. While she has gained a place in the canon of Australian art history for her success as a professional portrait sculptor, her preferred medium, quite clearly, was painting.

As an early female professional she was included in several dictionaries of biography, in Australian and English art history books and in Who's Who as well as in newspaper articles of the day. There is, in fact, quite a long list of references to her name but the information is primarily repetitive and depends on earlier sources.\(^5\) The earliest references, therefore, are the most extensive and interesting, whereas the latter proffer little new information and generally include only a brief mention of her name.

In 1863 she was first mentioned in the Melbourne Argus and the Illustrated Melbourne Post in reviews of an exhibition of work of the Victorian Society of Fine Arts. The first review in the Melbourne Illustrated Post on 3rd January was quite extensive in its criticism of her work and in its encouragement towards her.
In it she is referred to as “a young lady pupil of Charles Summers”.\(^6\) Thereafter, while she was still in Australia and as a student, rather than a professional artist, she was recorded in a number of catalogues of exhibitions and in jurors’ reports she was commended for her diligence in both painting and sculpture.\(^7\)

In 1892 she was represented in Phillip Mennell’s *Dictionary of Australasian Biography*.\(^8\) An account was given of her work to date and mention was made that “she was one of the first three students to apply for, and obtain permission, to draw from the casts and copy the pictures in the galleries of the Melbourne Public Library.” It also stated that she was “an industrious litterateur “, having published by this stage, a book of poems, *Friendship*, in 1873, *A Hero of the Workshop*, her eulogistic biography of Charles Summers, in 1879, and several journal articles.

Another spate of references occurred after her death in 1929. She was mentioned in *Who’s Who* in 1930, and in 1934 was referred to in three publications, William Moore’s *The Story of Australian Art*, F. Johns’ *An Australian Biographical Dictionary* and the *Centenary Gift Book*, a book about Australian women. She was then represented in *Who Was Who 1929-1940*. In 1939 Douglas Sladen mentioned her in *My Long Life*, his account of his numerous friendships and acquaintances. Margaret Thomas, among other artists, had painted his portrait.\(^9\) The *Who’s Who* references tended to follow the pattern of Phillip Mennell’s earlier biographical summary, and little new material, apart from a more extensive list of her writing, appears in these references.

Since then Margaret Thomas’ name has been included in the canon of Australian art history and of British and Australian women artists. However, very little light has been shed on her accomplishments. Biographical dictionaries tended to repeat earlier information and sometimes misrepresented it. In the case of Graeme Sturgeon’s *The Development of Australian Sculpture* there are significant errors. Sturgeon negates her contribution to Australian sculpture on the basis of her limited stay in Australia. He says:

> William Moore, in his “Story of Australian Art” (1934), describes Margaret Thomas as the first woman sculptor to come from Victoria. Although this is strictly true, the fact that she remained in Australia for only six years and carried out all her major work in England makes her claim to a place in the history of Australian sculpture rather tenous.\(^{10}\)
Margaret Thomas stayed in Australia for sixteen and not six years. There is also a significant argument to be made concerning the types of contributions that could be interpreted as Australian at this time. Sturgeon cites other artists who spent even briefer periods in Australia, such as Thomas Woolner (1825-1892), who was a member of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood and who spent only two years here, as having more relative significance. Sturgeon went as far as including the work of Sir Joseph Edgar Boehm Bart, R.A. (1834-1890) who never came to Australia at all. The fact that two of his sculptures were bought by the purchasing committee of the Melbourne International Exhibition seems, in Sturgeon's view, to have secured him a place in the story of Australian sculpture. It is also strange that Sturgeon does not give Margaret Thomas more credit, particularly since he quotes her in the preface to his work. The quotation he uses refers to her thoughts on sculpture as an artform:

While the art of painting is admired and appreciated by the whole of the civilized and even half-civilized world, her more retiring sister sculpture appears to appeal only to the few who, besides possessing a certain refined cast of mind, have given some study to her more sober fascinations.\(^{11}\)

While Sturgeon acknowledges her authorship in this instance, he uses material from her biography of Charles Summers extensively, but fails to mention *A Hero of the Workshop* as source material.

In this respect Margaret Thomas' writing has suffered from a lack of formal acknowledgement. It is generally only referred to in a list at the end of the biographical entries and yet her ideas have frequently been included in histories of Australian sculpture. In particular many entries concerning Charles Summers depend heavily on *A Hero of the Workshop* but not all credit her with the original authorship. In some entries she is known simply as Charles Summers' friend and pupil and occasionally as his biographer.

Noel Hutchison, an exception, credits her with influencing events here "by her publications on sculpture and her biographies on artists."\(^{12}\) She did in fact write only one biography. Ken Scarlett in *Australian Sculptors* notes her comments on the Post-Impressionists and Futurists and includes extracts from *How to Understand Sculpture*. However, when Alan McCulloch includes her in an *Encyclopedia of Australian Art* in 1984, he refers to Scarlett's account and says "in 1911, she gave strong support in her writings to the new emerging art
movements in France and Italy”. \(^{13}\) This is a direct misreading and an incorrect summary of Scarlett’s entry. She did in fact call Post-Impressionism and Futurism “a revolt against the chocolate-box inanities of the mid-Victorian epoch” but then proceeded to say:

\[...\textit{but the firm foundations of art as laid by the Greeks nearly two thousand years ago remain unshaken against the attacks of Pre-Raphaelites, Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, Futurists, et hoc genus omne. The banalities of the Victorian era have already passed into the limbo of obscurity, so also will pass the crude productions of these schools when the present craze has departed...}^{14}\]

To date, the most inclusive historical record of Margaret Thomas’ contribution to the visual arts is in Joan Kerr’s \textit{Dictionary of Australian Artists} (1992).\(^{15}\) Kerr cites the most extensive list of her artworks shown in the Australian and British context. Again Kerr lists Margaret Thomas’ literary work only at the end of the entry. The only other bibliographical reference to her writing occurs in Jane Robinson’s \textit{Wayward Women: A Guide to Women Travellers} (1990).\(^{16}\) Although Robinson deprecates the quality of Margaret Thomas’ travel writing as dry, factual and impersonal she says “she must have been a most interesting woman” and calls the illustrations “vibrant and obviously evocative”. She concludes “[she] need not have bothered with the words at all”.\(^{17}\)

The type of errors listed above attest to the shortcuts taken by some compilers and the layering of misrepresentation which occurs when the primary sources themselves are ignored in favour of earlier bibliographical references. The repetitious nature of the information on Margaret Thomas and the fact that it is found in so many sources suggests a concern to represent her as a pioneer woman in a traditionally male dominated field. But the lack of concern to discover the quality and extent of her contribution suggests that she has gained more notoriety for her position as pioneer than for her actual contribution towards the artform. The ‘fame’ of this position becomes a parody of itself when it is regurgitated in the form described above, where the image is reflected in mirror after mirror, and where each time it is harder to see the details of the original. Through these echoes, these many imitations, the famous person no longer stands as a three-dimensional character but as a phantom, attesting more to the need for individuals as tokens or signifiers of a hierarchical liberal humanism than to their personal capacities in the field.
"Jerusalem by Evening Light with the Mount of Olives to Left"
*Two Years in Palestine and Syria*
Jane Robinson’s comments raise important questions concerning Margaret Thomas' writing and that of women artists in general. It is quite clear that she was not a gifted writer although her writing improved with time and she did achieve a level of proficiency. And yet as primary source material and documentary evidence concerning the early experiences of women in professional artistic practice her work is invaluable; even so it has continually been overlooked. As Mara Witzling observes, the writings that are available by women artists of the nineteenth century are as yet rare, undiscovered or overlooked. Once exposed, however, they can be a valuable resource for investigating the processes by which these women found their way into the profession, maintained their position and dealt with an ideology which tended to exclude them, while practising in spite of it.

Witzling proceeds to discuss the severe underrepresentation of women’s art historical writing within the public domain, in comparison to women’s literature, literary criticism or writing on literature. She states:

*Often women artists wrote in order to explore the conflicting demands of their profession and gender. The question Can a woman be an artist?, further refined as How can a woman be an artist?, and finally focussed to Can I be an artist? is asked...*

Margaret Thomas’ published writings are a valuable resource which document one woman’s concept of the artist and her process of fulfilling her career expectations within the confines of late nineteenth century and early twentieth society. But even a brief knowledge of her life reveals that she was privileged with the advantages of a class position which buoyed her career path to a considerable degree. Her writing, then, reflects her attitudes towards class: while she often demonstrates a concern for the poor or underprivileged, she draws heavily on the advantages of her own class. If her writing was an attempt to ask Witzling’s questions, she was also asking ‘What type of women can be artists and under what conditions?’

A close reading of her work will therefore need to specify her position by acknowledging her ambitions as signifying the desires of a wealthy, middle class,
Anglo-Saxon, colonial woman. But the textual personality that is revealed in her writings must be seen only as an indicator of the actual personality beneath it and not as a true or actual representation. Considering the lack of other documentary evidence concerning her, the personality informed from the writing may represent her preferred public ‘persona’. However, even as a construction it can offer clues, not necessarily to the ‘real’ personality Margaret Thomas, but to the experience of middle class women artists of her time.

In the deconstruction of the dominant tropes of art history the ongoing analysis by feminists of the work of women artists has done much to draw attention to the limited dimensions within which the artist has been defined in the past. This feminist work has exposed the relevance of gender in the stereotyping of the artist. However, many of these critics and art historians assert the importance of other elements of cultural formation which impinge on, and are contiguous with gender such as race and class, and do so by applying an equally close reading to account for these other factors. Cora Kaplan, for instance, warns of the dangers of privileging gender over other forms of social determination. Applying such a rationale to this thesis a full exposure of the “interlocking sets of social relations” which govern the formation of the professional woman artist can be achieved.20

Sarah Puddle espouses the same rationale. She proposes that cultural studies should be seen in its political context and involve:

\[ \text{a politics of reading that is a process of interrogation of the class and race-bound assumptions as well as the concepts of gender and femininity in culture...unless you include these constructs in your frame of reference your interpretation may simply reinforce these divisions.}^{21} \]

The history of women artists which has evolved from the investigations of these historians has primarily produced a history of a limited group of white middle class women. In the enthusiasm to expose gender restrictions there is a danger that the middle class woman’s experience can become universalised to represent the artistic experience of women in general. As Elaine Showalter points out the same dangers that feminists have exposed concerning the universalising of male experience can be reproduced along class lines if precautions are not taken to observe the other social factors which are operating.22 Particular notice should be taken of which political and social structures the artistic statements of women seek to preserve and which they seek to dismantle. In relation to women in the
professions equal attention must be paid to issues of class as to those of gender.

At the turn of the century there was much discussion amongst social scientists and economists concerning the nature of elites, particularly because of Karl Marx’s attack on capitalism. Thorstein Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class* in 1899 and Vilfredo Pareto’s *The Rise and Fall of the Elites* in 1901 crystallised theories about class prevalent at the end of the nineteenth century. Veblen’s theory, historically relevant to the period being examined, outlined the development of the aristocracy at a point in time when it was beginning to show signs of disintegration. For our purposes his theory is extremely useful in contextualising the role of the bourgeois woman in relation to an amateur practice of the arts and particularly interesting because of its contemporaneity with Margaret Thomas’ writing.

Veblen’s thesis was very simple. He claimed that in societies in which people live above the line of bare subsistence the surplus is used primarily to impress other people rather than for social betterment as a whole. He argued that since barbarian times societies have gravitated into two basic groups, the workers and the elite. In pre-historical times these two groups were originally based on gender distinctions, with women forming the body of workers, relying on their manual skills to produce the material needs of the community and with men practising the predatory skills of war and hunting as well as religious observances. Subsequently the men’s occupations came to be perceived as superior and ‘honourable’ whereas the women’s came to be regarded as vulgar and inferior. He made the extraordinary statement that “[virtually] the whole range of industrial employments is an outgrowth of what is classed as women’s work in the primitive barbarian community.”

In a more developed society, he said, such as a feudal society, the elite became that group of individuals, the aristocracy, which proved its economic superiority by being exempt from industrial employments. Veblen termed this group the “leisure class” and the occupations deemed elite were those non-industrial pursuits associated with “government, warfare, religious observances and sports”.

Ordinarily, he said, women belonged to the inferior class along with slaves, but once societies attained a more complex stratification the women in the highest rank became exempt from industrial labour. Their exemption, though, was not primarily to allow them personal freedom, but to testify to their husband’s
honoured status. If a man could afford to own a wife who did not work then this was one means by which he displayed his economic superiority. In this context the ideal woman is small, slim and weak, if not actually incapacitated, as opposed to the ideal of a previous epoch where the woman needed to be strong, robust and able to work.

In Veblen's thesis the higher learning pursued by the elite male is retrospectively allied to the priestly functions. The division between exoteric and esoteric knowledge is traced back through this argument where exoteric knowledge, deemed 'useful' by virtue of its relationship to the work of gaining a livelihood, is regarded as inferior to esoteric knowledge. The individual who could afford to pursue economically useless knowledge was again testifying to his economic superiority.26

One of the functions of the woman within the leisure class was to display the wealth and privilege of her husband. Her leisure was, however, deemed inferior to his, and instead conveyed her unfree status. Her pursuit of knowledge was to reflect rather than challenge his pursuits. Its quasi-scholarly and quasi-artistic nature represented her vicarious leisure and reflected on her master "whose comfort or good repute [was] enhanced".27 All other attitudes towards knowledge or accomplishment were deemed 'unladylike' for the aristocratic woman.

In Veblen's thesis the association between learning and class explains the development of the amateur tradition amongst the upper classes. The aristocratic pursuit of knowledge per se, and for no other purpose other than a development of the individual's mental powers, would conflict with the development of the professions, in which the acquisition of knowledge brought financial reward. A preference for the amateur tradition was, as Deirdre David points out, a characteristic of the early Victorian period which was "resolutely amateur" and "disdaining specialisation".28

As Veblen frequently mentioned, the emulation of one class by the class immediately below it is one feature of the development of a pecuniary culture. Standing at the head of the social structure the leisure class's standards become "the norm of reputability for the community" and the "result is that the members of each station accept as their ideal of decency the scheme of life in vogue in the next higher stratum, and bend their energies to live up to that ideal."29

As the middle classes developed in power throughout the nineteenth century the
role of the middle class woman signified the aspirations of the middle classes towards the living standards of the aristocracy. The woman had traditionally been utilised in the upper classes as an emblem of status. In the upwardly mobile middle classes her role was to elevate or ‘civilise’ the men who went out to work in the world of business and to simulate an aristocratic-type environment in the home. From the point of view of her acquisition of knowledge, the bourgeois woman was expected to imitate the manner of the aristocratic woman and to embrace an attitude to learning which, while it was still a watered down version of male learning, was deemed morally superior to the ‘vulgar’ knowledge being acquired by her male partner in his everyday pursuit of business.

This is where the difficulty lay for the bourgeois woman towards the end of the nineteenth century when the professions were beginning to open to her. On the one hand she was beginning to achieve access to the public domain through the avenue of the professions, but on the other hand she still aspired to the value system of the elite. These values allowed her, if only symbolically, to transcend the limitations of her class and to outstrip her male partner. The mercantile professions, unlike the traditional aristocratic professions of medicine, law, the army and the clergy, were, in the words of Robert Dingwall, seen to describe services “performed for gain rather than satisfaction or obligation, of skills acquired rather than naturally endowed and of lowly client-dependent status as against the honorific independence of the gentleman.”30 Put simply the bourgeois professions were seen as ‘vulgar’. The bourgeois woman’s reluctance to identify too readily with the professions and to hold on to the value system associated with the amateur tradition is thus quite understandable from this perspective. Her attachment to tradition, however, signified that the old patriarchal order was still in place.

Veblen did not attempt to tackle the entry of women into the professions beyond their entry into places of academic learning but his arguments bear a strong resemblance to later feminist theory on the subject. Julia Swindells’ thesis in Victorian Writing and Working Women appears to reflect his theory.31 She argues that the entry of women into the professions at the end of the nineteenth century masked other forms of gender restrictions while masquerading as egalitarianism. She states:

*The entry of women into the professions is not therefore the beginning of freedom, but, in being the gift of gentlemen, the beginning of a courtship, in its gender and class terms, or a less*
When Margaret Thomas entered the arts as a professional she was caught between the value systems of the old order and the new. Her career and her writing shows a fluctuation between these value systems. The following chapters will explore her writing to trace her management of these contradictory value systems, their effect on her identity formation and agency.

Chapter one will describe her milieu in order to establish that the influences on her artistic identity came equally from the amateur tradition and the professional sphere. Chapter two examines her biography of Charles Summers in the context of her perception of the professional practice of sculpture. It also examines her need to mythologise the role of the artist and its relationship to women artists. Chapter three explores her short story "The Story of a Photograph" as her attempt to construct an ideal professional woman artist. It demonstrates how she interpolates aspects of the amateur tradition onto the new professional role of the woman artist.

Chapter four studies her travel writing. As a 'lady traveller' she is protected by aspects of the aristocratic tradition which allow her to travel, guarded by her class and race. Propped behind her easel her professional status provides further protection. This chapter demonstrates her utilisation of a combination of value systems and devices associated with Orientalism to reinforce aspects of her identity. In chapter five her popularist art history writing is examined. In a period when public education in the arts was seen as important for humanitarian purposes and to counter possible class unrest, Margaret Thomas wrote art manuals for the public. She felt that professional writing was obfuscating and a barrier to the appreciation of art and saw her role as a mediator between academia and a lay public. Her position reflects the oscillation she had always felt between a professional and an amateur approach. Finally chapter six deals with her poetry. Her poetry exposes sites of dissonance in many aspects of her life. This chapter will look at those poems which deal with her struggle with the idea of being a professional artist and the personal pain she incurred by attempting to negotiate contradictory ideologies.
5 See Appendix 1.
6 See Chapter 1 for more details of these reviews.
7 See Joan Kerr, *Dictionary of Australian Artists: Painters, Sketchers, Photographers and Engravers to 1870* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992) 791-792 for a summary of these catalogue references.
14 Margaret Thomas, *How to Understand Sculpture* (London: Bell & Sons, 1911) 165, 166.
15 Kerr 791-792.
17 Robinson 150.
19 Witzling 2.
24 Veblen 6.
25 Veblen 4.
26 Veblen 273.
27 Veblen 280.
28 David 8.
29 Veblen 63.
32 Swindells 25.
CHAPTER 2

AMATEUR OR PROFESSIONAL?
MARGARET THOMAS' CULTURAL MILIEU

Margaret Thomas is situated historically at a point where the amateur and the professional art traditions occupied an equal priority in the formation of cultural identity. By tracing the details of her social and artistic milieu in both the Australian and British context, this chapter will illustrate that her identity as a creative artist was influenced by both of these traditions. Throughout her career she mixed with a range of artists who occupied various positions on the sliding scale between the artist as amateur and that of the practising professional. Her place as an early professional woman artist is here assessed in accordance with the range of artistic identities available to her and is set against the matrix of her identity as a middle class Anglo-Australian colonial woman.

Margaret Thomas spent her life amongst an elite social group, the literati and intelligentsia of colonial Melbourne and fin de siècle London and also travelled to and lived in other major cultural centres such as Paris and Rome. She was a wealthy woman and her history demonstrates her involvement in the concerns of a privileged group. She was, in Douglas Sladen’s terms “in the swim”. In the London, where she chose to live after leaving Australia, she was part of the London bohemia for whom a continual round of receptions and parties was the order of the day.1

In colonial Melbourne of the 1850s and 1860s the group of individuals which formed the local intelligentsia was small and was comprised of the wealthy elite, civil servants with amateur artistic interests and visiting professional artists. In London in the 1870s the association between the aristocracy and artists was still strong. For portrait artists like Margaret Thomas the London club system provided access to a wealthy clientele. However, as the century drew to a close and the British aristocracy showed signs of collapse, this association between artists and gentry also underwent changes. As David Cannadine observes in his treatise The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy, British society in the 1870s was to see the advent of a new middle class professional but as a consequence “the old amateur, traditional, gentlemanly ethos [went into] retreat.”2
For bourgeois women artists the aristocratic construct of the amateur had provided the only framework within which they could create artistic work. Even with access to professional training the majority of women were not encouraged to practise as professionals but to harness their talents to the task of creating a harmonious and tasteful home environment. For the few women who did confront the art establishment with the ambition to become practising professionals there was still comfort to be drawn from their association with the amateur tradition. Margaret Thomas’ career demonstrates that there was a definite place for her amateur interests, particularly in maintaining the sense of herself as a cultivated woman, overriding implications that her professional pursuits were being undertaken simply for pecuniary reasons.

This chapter will focus on the overall trajectory of Margaret Thomas’ career, as well as the milieu in which she flourished. It will argue that, as a wealthy bourgeois woman aspiring towards both a career in the fine arts and social status, there were significant advantages in maintaining links with the amateur convention of the arts as well as those conventions associated with art as vocation or profession.

The available factual details of Margaret Thomas’ life are particularly sparse and there is obviously much biographical research yet to be done. However, from information surrounding her name supported by a close reading of her literary work, it is possible to draw an impression of a woman who had a broad interest in the arts and excelled in one area, that of portraiture, while pursuing concomitantly an amateur interest in literature. She wrote poetry throughout her lifetime and developed a certain skill with prose. She was also an adventurous woman who crossed the threshold from the constricted domestic sphere normally allocated for the bourgeois Victorian woman and sought stimulation by means of international travel. She became an intrepid ‘lady traveller’ drawing on her colonial experience to develop the skills to adapt to the cultural differences of a number of societies.

She was born circa 1840 in Croydon, England and arrived in Australia with her family in 1852 at the height of the goldrush. Her father, according to bibliographic accounts, was a shipowner and, as a wealthy merchant, his family was incorporated into the elite of Melbourne society. The family lived at Richmond, which was in the 1850s the first suburb of Melbourne to become the home of a select society of pioneering gentry and then a class of wealthy and prosperous merchants.
In her published writing Margaret Thomas makes no reference to her personal family background. Despite the autobiographical nature of some of her work (her poetry in particular has this attribute) her parents do not even warrant a mention; nor are any allusions made to them. On the other hand her friends and lovers, shrouded in vagueness to protect their identity, play a significant part. Despite the overt links which the Victorian middle class woman was to have with home, family and the private sphere, Margaret Thomas' published writing seems to deal with the private only in an abstract and idealised form. As a single woman her concerns for family are few. Any references which she makes to her childhood are written in the context of her artistic formation and demonstrate more of an interest in her overall cultural environment than in the details of her personal history.

The identity that emerges in Margaret Thomas’ published writing is a constructed one. Consequently, to search for the literal in her poetry in order to try and glean biographical data from it would be a pointless activity. For one thing, as Margaret Homans argues, the genre of Romantic poetry, in its insistent concentration on the motif of Mother nature, did not allow the woman writer to make tangible connections with her own roots. Furthermore, the intention of Romantic poetry was to enlarge the self rather than to reduce it to specific subjectivity. However, Margaret Thomas’ poetic references to childhood, her own and childhood in general, do provide some useful evidence towards aspects of her identity formation, if not towards concrete biographical information. The sonnet “Poetry”, written as an adult, is a reflection on a childhood obsession:

In childhood Poetry took me by the hand
And led me, singing, down life’s untried way,
That flow’r-decked path where infant spirits stray;
In youth we wandered through the mystic land
Like lovers none beside might understand;
And she is with me, faithful, friend, to-day,
Sweet solace of my soul! and she will stay
Till He who gave that soul again demand.
To me her smiles come like the living beams
Of light upon a mountain top or sea,
Transfiguring all things; of my childhood’s dreams
And youth’s fair hopes she only rests with me.
Blest be the gift of Poetry, which redeems
Our sordid lives, and sets the spirit free!
Intellectualising her childhood experience she describes herself as being nurtured by cultural entities like ‘Poetry’, ‘Art’ or ‘Learning’ rather than by real human beings. Poetry becomes her nursemaid and constant companion, transmuting the everyday into a more rarified, even spiritual, experience. Resisting the convention of a feminine identification with nature, she portrays herself as perusing nature, rather than being part of it. The result, she feels, is victory over the sordidness of the everyday. However, this elevation of her experience results in an annihilation of her individuality. The aspect of her identity that does emerge is her desire to separate herself from the more concrete aspects of colonial life; to use poetry, art and learning as a means of escape from the oppressive reality of a raw new society.

While she makes no references to the actual circumstances of her early life Margaret Thomas’ romanticisation of childhood reflects an absence of concern with daily survival and a participation in a world of sentiment. She often refers to her childhood and youth as an enchanted time but it is an enchantment associated with a vague mythical construction which does not detail real events. There is one occasion on which she refers to her childhood as a painful period. In one of her poems referring to fears and grief she asks “[could] the bitter years of that pain-laden past my childhood bore win no exception from the present grief?” This statement suggests that there may have been some hidden reason, apart from poetic convention, for her to shroud her early life in vagueness.

There is also a sense that her bourgeois connections, and the world of business from which her family had sprung, warrant no real reflection on her part. Her concerns seem to lie in the cultural advantages of her middle class position rather than in the source which provided her with these advantages. The enchantment she refers to, as Leigh Astbury suggests, provides the means whereby she can escape from the harsh reality of colonial life and also from the banal and commonplace aspects of her middle class roots.

The poem “Learning” is her adult reflection on a child’s education:

Child, if though wouldst with truth and honour live
(Better without that thou shouldst cease to be),
Thy first years, thy first fresh efforts give
To learning; all beside is vanity.

Learn, while the glorious sun in heav’n rides high
And nature groans beneath his fervid ray;
Learn when the silver moonlight floods the sky,
Driving the silver-seeming stars away.

Learn, ever learn, while yet thy youth is fair,
When womanhood is lovely in its strength,
When age like frost lies lightly on thy hair,
And when thy journey's end is near at length.

Learn! and thy sheaves of garnered wisdom bear
To brighter regions; thither shalt thou come
With songs of triumph, learning even there
Amid the gladness of the Harvest Home.

In the absence of any details of her educational background her poetry suggests that she must have had a keen interest in self-education. The conditions surrounding the education of middle class girls varied greatly, depending on the will and economic capacity of the parents, but it appears that Margaret Thomas was furnished with an environment that was both supportive and encouraging. Her well-rounded artistic talents testify to the middle class ambition of producing accomplished daughters to grace the home and reflect the cultural aspirations of a prosperous class. In this climate the young woman's training could be superficial and 'amateur' in its worst sense, or could in fact provide the impetus for further self education. Combined with the evidence of her youthful successes this poem suggests that Margaret Thomas may have had an uncommonly self-disciplined attitude as a child. Despite the limited expectations held for women at the time she recalls a rare intensity towards her studies. In this poem she admonishes the female child to actively pursue education in all phases of life and insists on a young woman's devotion to the life of the mind, rather than a preoccupation with trivialities. It is also interesting to note that she refers to nature in the masculine form.

Occasionally Margaret Thomas does refer to concrete impressions from her childhood years which invoke the volatile social order in Melbourne at the time of her arrival. Melbourne society of the 1850s, from all accounts, was a bustling hive of activity and a melting-pot in which the transported class structures of British society were thrown into complete confusion with the rapid influx of wealth from the goldfields. This volatility was expressed in collective violence, a high crime rate and political unrest. In an article written in her late forties she describes scenes from the early goldrush period, one of which is a scene of the diggers coming to town to celebrate their good fortune:
The red-shirted diggers who came to Melbourne 'for a spree' might be seen driving through the streets drinking champagne — which was the most expensive article they could buy — and taking bottle after bottle from the case under the seat; while their wives considered the display of four or five watches, in addition to numerous other ornaments, necessary to their appearance 'in town'. Diggers often gave their nuggets into the care of an innkeeper, and proceeded to 'drink their value out' bidding them to tell them when to stop. They then returned to their toilsome labour on the Diggings, to amass another store of the precious material, again to dissipate it in the same ruinous manner.12

These scenes seem to have had a significant impact on her perception of colonial life. From a young bourgeois woman's perspective the sight of such raucous behaviour might well have been frightening or repulsive. The strangeness of the new environment coupled with the rhetoric that had surrounded the idea of Australia as an idyllic Eden, Arcadia or El Dorado was likely to produce a mixed response in a young educated girl approaching womanhood in an unfamiliar environment. Her impressions of this society consequently contain a mixture of disdain for its purely materialistic bias and lack of cultural refinement, and an intense admiration for the romantic aspects of the landscape and the mythology developing around it.13 In this environment Margaret Thomas saw the arts as a redeeming spiritual power and on a personal level as a protective device. It is from this perspective that she writes her poetry. In her introduction to A Painter's Pastime, a book of poetry published in 1908, she says:

Brought up in Australia in the early days when literature was uncultivated, in an environment neither artistic nor leisured, the writer nevertheless developed, when a mere child, the habit of putting her thoughts into verse. This habit became constant and invincible, despite uncongenial surroundings ...14

In retrospect she portrays herself as if she were conscious, as a girl, of the cultural inadequacies of the colony, and remedied this in a personal creative sense by keeping her own literary records. It also suggests that she felt alone in her pursuit, stranded in a cultural wasteland with no others for support. However, it is quite legitimate to assume that this was an adult rationalisation of the feelings accompanying her first impressions and an expression of the commonly held
opinions of the elite of Melbourne society who mourned the lack of 'culture' in the colonies. The reference to Australian society as "neither artistic nor leisured" ignores the obvious link she enjoyed with the artistic and literary group which formed the basis of a small intelligentsia in Melbourne at the time. Her statement, rather, tends to reflect the comparative difference of her later experiences in Europe and the derivative nature of Melbourne's 'culture', rather than the notion of its complete absence.

In this regard she was primarily reflecting the views of a generation of immigrants who were consciously tied to Britain but searching for a means of interpreting their colonial experience in terms other than the purely pragmatic. As Richard White suggests this group of immigrant elite "saw in culture a means of civilising and educating a materialistic democracy" and saw their British cultural traditions as having a benign effect on the development of the colony.15 Anne Summers describes these views as a form of nationalism held by the "pristine intellectual" who "was revulsed by the barbarism of colonial...mores... [and whose] cultural affinities were invariably with England although he was strongly drawn to the physical immediaacy of the Australian continent".16 Summers treats this as a masculine viewpoint only but the example of Margaret Thomas demonstrates that it was also held by intellectual women.

Present in Margaret Thomas' image of the childhood poet is an allusion to cultural estrangement conveyed as an image of a sensitive child stranded in a cultural wasteland. The motif of the lost child which was to become so commonplace in Australian bush lore in the latter half of the nineteenth century, according to Astbury, had arisen as early as 1859 in Henry Kingsley's novel *The Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn*. Thereafter it was frequently represented in Australian literature and narrative painting and, while Margaret Thomas was still a colonial resident, it was represented pictorially by artists like William Strutt in 1865 and Nicholas Chevalier in 1866.17 The motif of the lost child could well be related to the sense of cultural estrangement that the British colonials felt from the motherland. In the developing consciousness of the young woman artist it appears as a sense of displacement and a lack of cultural support which cannot ultimately be found within the colonial setting. In her poetry it appears as a yearning for an experience which lay more in the realm of the mystical or the mythical than in the brazen rawness of Melbourne's urban life. The romantic desire to transform the everyday is quite in accordance with her age, class and gender however, according to Graeme Turner, it was also incorporated into the larger culture as the "promise
of Australia” which recognised “the threat of banality and spiritual starvation, and the promise of harmony and metaphysical transcendence.”

The class consciousness which permeates this promise is revealed both in Margaret Thomas’ writing and in the social conditions of the time. Despite the developing ideal of egalitarianism there was a continuing attempt to maintain class distinctions or portray upward social mobility in an overt form and this was commonly held to be more apparent in the female sector of the society than in the male. One of the outward signifiers of class had traditionally been dress, women’s dress in particular. In the goldrush days when a great number of people were coming into sudden wealth, this outward display of class status was no longer a distinguishing feature. Many women, regardless of their traditional class placement, were able to dress well. William Westgarth in Victoria in 1857, noting the attire of both sexes, describes male dress and its “customary utilitarian plainness of a commercial people” whereas “the ladies, on a Melbourne promenade, or in a Victorian drawing-room, are attired with elegance and costliness that would scarcely be looked for in the miscellaneous gathering of so young a society.” Beverley Kingston also argues that the maintenance of traditional values of class was often managed by this female sector so that it appeared that the men were more egalitarian and that the women were “a bit un-Australian” in their concern. The value of egalitarianism became a standard against which ‘class consciousness’ was eventually to become inscribed as antisocial and its effects muted.

For a wealthy young middle class woman to distinguish herself from the common fray in the 1850s and 60s she would need to define herself in ways other than her physical appearance. The Australian environment of the time offered a duplicitous form of encouragement to these young women. On the one hand the carry-over of the educational environment was an extension of the British situation where in the 1850s “most well-bred girls were taught at home by governesses”. One of the signifiers of status in a young woman’s education was the intellectual pursuit of literature and the encouragement of creative skills. On the other hand, the only career option available to her in the colony was marriage and the maintenance or bettering of her class position within the developing wealthy bourgeoisie. The well-read young woman would thus be awakened to her limited future and would possibly respond to the concept of the colony as a site of “banality and spiritual starvation” desiring to transcend its oppressive limitations. However, her amateur interests also provided her with a means by which to cope with the disappointing aspects of colonial life. Her romanticisation of the colonial
experience allowed her to mask the harsh realities but also provided her with a space in which to locate sources of her own identity.

In contrast to the image of cultural isolation which Margaret Thomas portrays in *A Painter's Pastime*, it is fair to say that her social world was comprised of a number of cultural influences from a variety of sources. As the child of well-to-do parents she was encouraged in her artistic abilities and was taught art by Charles Summers, a sculptor who had also arrived for the goldrush in 1852.\(^{23}\) As his private student Margaret Thomas was to benefit greatly from his influence particularly in relation to her career. Their friendship continued until his death in 1878.

In 1865 (her mid twenties) she wrote a poem called “Dedication” which, although she does not identify the person to whom it is directed, has all the signs of devotion of a young female student for her teacher. Her consistent attempts to protect the identity of those she refers to makes the reading of her work all the more difficult for a satisfactory understanding of her life. It is quite possible that this dedication may not be to Charles Summers at all but to some other tutor, perhaps to someone who encouraged her in her poetry.

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The seed thou gavest me, these hands have sown
And I have gathered from th'uncultured plant
A few poor flowers. I bring them thee, mine own,
For on life's desert plain, wild flowers are scant.

I place them at thy feet. Unless for thee
I had not stopped to cull their drooping bells;
I gather them as by the wild blue sea
I careless gathered tangled weeds and shells,

And heap'd them in thy lap. Cast not away
The off'ring that 'tis lowly. Gently lift
The flowers and the shells, for 'tis the holy ray
Of love which lends its value to the gift.

Would it be worthy thee! but I have been
A wild, sad wand'rer from my early days.
My songs are scattered memories of a dream,
The chords imperfect of but once heard lays.
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Hence toil and care! the few short hours of peace
Which art permits in the short space of rest
Which life bestows on me, I weave this wreath
And in the labour only, I am blest.

Sweet hours which may so short a space be mine!
(For soonest fade the fairest, and the dearest die:)
Jewels are ye upon the shores of time
Where stones and weeds in thick profusion lie.24

Regardless of its intended target, the gratitude which she expresses, so typical of that of the nineteenth century female art student, becomes the stumbling block which she must surmount if she is to override the limitations of an amateur approach and gain confidence in her creative drive. Her artistic efforts, she complains, are superficial and undeveloped, but are thoroughly driven by love. In terms of the Latin root of the word amateur (‘amat’ means he or she loves) this poem clearly defines the source from which Margaret Thomas’ artistic inspiration is derived. The “scattered memories of a dream” here indicate the tenuous hold she has on art and knowledge and the limited exposure she has had to these aspects of culture. The “once heard lays” do not provide her with the means to produce art or poetry or music that has depth and the “few short hours” granted to art are insufficient to develop her talents to any degree.

Under Charles Summers’ tutorship she became one of the first three students to draw from the casts at the Victorian Museum and in 1857 she received acclaim for her paintings and sculpture at the first and only exhibition of the Victorian Society of Fine Arts. There were two art societies in Melbourne in the fifties, the Victorian Fine Arts Society at the Mechanics Institute which held one exhibition in 1853 and the similarly named Victorian Society of Fine Arts which was founded in October of 1856.25 This second establishment showed Margaret Thomas’ work.26 Here the professional members included Charles Summers, William Strutt, Nicholas Chevalier, Eugene Von Guerard and Thomas Clarke. Charles Summers also organised exhibitions for his own work and for that of fellow artists including Margaret Thomas. The influence of these professional artists on her evolving concept of the artist would have had considerable impact. By her inclusion in professional exhibitions, Margaret Thomas was being accorded a respect that would considerably enhance her self confidence as an artist.
The 1857 exhibition contained work by artists like Nicholas Chevalier, Eugene von Guerard, J.S. McKennal and Charles Summers. Georgiana McCrae was also an exhibitor. Margaret Thomas was given the following comments. The Melbourne Argus stated rather briefly:

...her essays in sculpture betoken the diligent exercise of no ordinary plastic skill, and contain the promise of future excellence.28

The Illustrated Melbourne Post however, gave her a fuller comment:

Miss Thomas, a young lady pupil of Mr Summers, who has been before the public on two or three other occasions, is entitled to special notice for the persevering industry displayed in the works she exhibits. She is manifestly imbued with the true poetic feeling appertaining to the vocation she has chosen. This quality develops itself in the several examples of her skill, despite their occasional lack of correctness in form and proportion. A sedulous attention to the elementary necessities of her art is pointedly indicated, and this is the more desirable in her case, because an undoubtedly spiritual element pervades in a certain degree whatever she has attempted. Her efforts have been evidently dictated by an innate love of the beautiful. There is a refined delicacy and there is pure taste, albeit these are accompanied by imperfections of outline and inequality in arrangement. Her hand requires discipline, notwithstanding that her aesthetic perceptions are so just. Her future excellence is not indistinctly foreshadowed, but the severity of a careful study of the rudiments, cannot safely be disregarded, if she desire to accomplish all of which, with these conditions, she is manifestly capable.29

As a young female pupil Margaret Thomas elicited a considered response from the journalist reviewing this exhibition. Her work was credited with a good deal of merit but because of her youth, and possibly her gender, the writer sees it as his duty to encourage but also correct her. The tone of the article is generous and acknowledges her talents. As well it also reflects a growing awareness of the needs of women in the area of education. By contrast J.S. MacKennal’s work along with a Mr Scurry’s were described as “[having] too much the appearance of being copies to demand praise other than that accorded to successful imitators”.
As Rita Hardie argues, in the Victorian period critical responses to women’s artwork had a serious impact on the attainment of professionalism by women artists. There was an attempt by critics, she says, “to shape women’s painting so that it would comply with their perception of woman’s nature and social role.” She also states that women’s artwork was frequently denoted as imitative and women were often “chided for their lack of study, which resulted in ‘inaccuracy of drawing’, and for ‘shirking discipline’.” In the above critique of Margaret Thomas’ work the accusation of imitation is not made; instead Mr MacKennal and Mr Scurry receive it. She does, however, receive criticism for lack of discipline. Considering her youth this remark could well be accounted not as a gender bias, but as a criticism appropriate to her stage of development. From her resulting success it would seem that she accepted the criticism from this perspective and acted on the advice.

The pure taste and refined delicacy that is also attributed to Margaret Thomas testified both to her upbringing and to her particular training in the visual arts. There is a sense from the review that her developed taste should be put to more use than that which the colony could offer women at this stage. In the same newspaper there had been a long-running debate about the opening of universities to women in the United Kingdom and its implications for women in Australia. Because of the disproportionate number of women to men in the United Kingdom and the reverse in Australia opinions were divided as to the position to be taken here. In an article beginning “What shall we do with our girls?” the writer oscillates between the trite answer “marry them to the boys” and a more considered plea for the treatment of women as men’s intellectual equals. By the end of the article he is exhorting women once they have experimented with the idea of education to return to the true bliss of “the domestic affections, ...the sweet charities of life, and the inestimable comforts of the home fireside.” The ultimate destination of these women, in spite of their advanced educational prospects, was presumed to be hearth and home.

There was obviously a confusion amongst the public as to which side to take on this issue. While it was fashionable for the liberal-minded to support women in their pursuit of intellectual equality there was also the weight of tradition and the pressing needs of a new colony to boost its population growth. Margaret Thomas’ youthful apprenticeship and her talent in the arts made her an obvious candidate for further education in her field. The time was ripe if she were to take advantage of the liberal ideas that were prevalent before a conservative swing would foreclose her options. She had had the best training that the colony could offer prior to the formation of art schools. It was in her best interests, if she were to pursue her
career as a professional, that she go to Europe. In 1857 she was still very young; it was to take her another ten years, until she was in her mid twenties, before she had achieved that aim.

Amongst Margaret Thomas’ other associations was Georgiana McCrae who also showed work at the first exhibition of the Victorian Society of Fine Arts. She was a good miniaturist and had studied at the Royal Academy and exhibited there from 1816 till 1821 and in 1825. Although she had had professional training, family pressures, and the weight of tradition, limited her output and did not allow her to reap any financial profit from her talent. Hers was a typical case in which an aristocratic woman was expected to curb her talents and disregard her professional training, in order to devote herself to developing a refined home environment. Her standing in the community was as a highly esteemed cultural patron with the literati of the period often meeting at the McCrae family home. Although there is no existing documentary evidence to support it, it is highly likely that the young Margaret Thomas, at this stage only a youthful prodigy, would have met with Georgiana McCrae and partaken of her social company.

The people who gathered at the McCrae home included George Gordon McCrae, her son, who was approximately ten years older than Margaret Thomas, Adam Lindsay Gordon and Marcus Clarke. Prior to the formation of literary clubs like the Yorick Club and the meeting-ground at Dwight’s bookshop the McCrae home was a valuable rendezvous where Margaret Thomas may have been exposed to the formative literature of the day. This exposure may possibly have had a significant effect on the style and genres of writing that she pursued in her later life.

How she imagined herself as an artist was determined largely by the examples of artists she had before her. In the field of sculpture they were entirely male and entirely of a professional nature, whereas in painting and writing she had examples of both men and women, and professionals and non professionals around her. In literature the men and women who practised writing did so at many different levels from the private pursuits of diary keeping and letter writing to the publishing of short stories, novels and traveller’s tales.

At this point in time the gentleman amateur was still influencing the direction of culture and men like Sir William a’Beckett, the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria, displayed an amateur’s interest in the arts which gave him an added respectability beyond the confines of his career. The extension of his interest spanned a range of literary genres and he wrote poetry, a love story and travel
sketches. As Morris Miller stated: “It is almost forgotten that during the forties and fifties in Victoria the Chief Justice found an outlet in verse for the sacred thoughts he held in private.” George Gordon McCrae also demonstrated an amateur’s interest in literature while working as a public servant. He practised in a wide literary field writing travelogues, poetry and contributing to journals as well as illustrating books and was later to be described as the “father of Victorian poetry”.

The two categories, amateur and professional, were to have different implications for the development of the female professional. The amateur attitude to the arts was determined largely by the concept of the educated gentleman and gentlewoman. In the extremes of upper class society the restrictions on men practising the fine arts were similar to those on women. The young men as well as the women were exhorted to dabble, but not to excel. One such example concerns a Charles Somers-Cocks, Viscount Eastnor who wished to be a painter but his mother would not allow it. She explained that “while he might dabble in colour if he chose, it would never do for an English gentleman to paint like an artist. English gentlemen, if they insisted on painting, must at least paint badly, so as to show they need not do it for a living.” The pursuit of art or literature by the educated gentleman or woman was encouraged to indicate available leisure but inhibited in its quality by the fear of exposing economic vulnerability.

The professional artist and particularly the professional sculptor moved along a different trajectory. The development of professional sculpture in Britain was associated both with the tradition of an artisan elite and with the intellectual pursuit of ‘high art’. The workshop environment which catered to the professional production of public sculpture contained within it these two separate traditions where a leading artist produced the designs and a group of artisans produced the finished product. Excellence was an expected product of this workshop environment. It was also an exclusively male domain.

Associated with the production of excellence within the artisan community was the Victorian notion of respectability. This notion was, according to Geoffrey Crossick, a way of defining an elite within the working class and the petit-bourgeois which was not necessarily based on an increase in actual wealth. It was a way for a section of the community to define its superiority in terms of ideals such as craft pride. Respectability was also associated with notions like independence of the will, thrift and self improvement through hard work.
The dovetailing of these two traditions in the colonial Australian environment occurred in relation to a similar merging and redefining of class relations. In the reshuffling of status which was occurring in all areas of the goldrush community, leading figures were to emerge from various non-traditional class sources. Charles Summers, for example, probably by-passed a number of steps in his upward mobility on the artistic success ladder simply by appearing in the colony at this advantageous time. As Jane Evans suggests his art was not outstanding and it "[broke] no new ground yet [he produced] an invaluable record of most of the key men in Australian public life in the 1850s, 60s and 70s."42 Because of the isolation of the colonial environment standards often tended to be erratically measured. In the context of the museum display of fine art, the work of Michelangelo (in plaster reproduction) was displayed side by side with Charles Summers' work suggesting, to the horror of a visiting gentleman, that Summers was considered the 'Michelangelo' of Victoria.43

The middle class woman aspiring to an upper class status, such as Margaret Thomas desired, had at her fingertips the possibility of developing her talents very well if she were able to read the signs correctly. The emerging strength of the mercantile bourgeoisie and the desire to associate itself with 'high culture' created a situation in which the daughters, educated to be 'ladies' would be regarded as a symbol of that rising status. While the general wealth of the community was high and women from many class levels could afford to be dressed to look like ladies, only those women who could display talent or education particularly in the 'high arts' would be deemed part of the 'true' elite. As the daughters of hard working businessmen they would justify the expenditure on their private education by demonstrating their family's evolving status through a familiarity with the arts.44

At the same time there was an enormous respect expressed by the mercantile elite for the ideals of respectability engendered amongst working class craftsmen. A shipowner, like Margaret Thomas' father, for example would be critically dependent on the high standard of craft of his shipbuilders for the seaworthiness of his ships. This combination of a respect for craft combined with an association with 'art' as a sign of high status arguably made sculpture a well-respected art form.

From a gender position professional sculpture was of course a man's art form. It had however been practised by a previous woman in the colony in an amateur capacity. Theresa Snell Walker (née Chauncey) (1807-1876) had made many small portrait studies of prominent Australian men as well as studies of Aborigines. She
worked entirely in the medium of wax. British women like Anne Seymour Damer, a wealthy upper class woman in the eighteenth century had already set a precedent. Damer, however, was regarded in her time as an eccentric. In Rome there was also in existence an artists' colony comprised mainly of American women sculptors practising during the period Margaret Thomas was in Australia.

Margaret Thomas’ proposal to undertake sculpture professionally was not, however, treated as eccentric. Prior to the formation of an art school in Melbourne the only way for a student to gain adequate training in the fine arts was to go to Europe. The practice of sending the sons and daughters of the wealthy back to England for further schooling was also a signifier of status. Her obvious natural talent in sculpture, coupled with the expert training she had already received, as well as her friendship with the man who had become the symbol of Victorian artistic respectability combined to make her appear a youthful product of Victoria’s own cultural maturation.

In 1867 she sailed to Britain endorsed by the colonial culture from which she had come and taking with her an experience of colonial life which was to feed into her future literary work. Her effect on the colony was from this time onward to be in an expatriate capacity but to be quite significant nonetheless. The Australian artist overseas was not only an important ambassador for the culture but was also to become an important factor in the development of Australian nationalism as the century drew to a close.

At this point it is necessary to state that Charles Summers also went to Rome at this time. It is hard to say whether the love poems that she published in both Friendship, Poems in Memoriam and A Painter’s Pastime were directed towards him, another man or even another woman. However, her obvious devotion to Charles Summers which is expressed ‘respectably’ in her eulogy A Hero of the Workshop and the timing and nature of the poems suggest that he may have been the object of her eventually unrequited love. Regardless of who it was, her poetry suggests that she was in passionate love with somebody at this time and certain poems suggest that women may have been the object of her affections; whether this was as close friends or lovers is uncertain. Because she is careful to avoid names or direct links these poems remain an intriguing but vague indication of this aspect of her life.

Margaret Thomas spent a short time initially in England, studying at the South Kensington College of Art, but then embarked for Europe where she spent two and
a half years in Rome and Paris. Rome was the sculptor’s Mecca and a number of women sculptors, particularly from America, studied and practised there. Harriet Hosmer, a well known American sculptor arrived there in 1852 and was followed by others like Louisa Lander, Emma Stebbins, Margaret Foley, Florence Freeman, Anne Whitney, Edmonia Lewis, and Vinnie Ream Hoxie in the 1850s and 60s. This group coined by Henry James as “the White Marmorean Flock” provided an example of female professionalism for the young Australian woman artist and demonstrated the relative difference between the two countries of America and Australia in the ‘evolution’ of the professional role of sculpture for women.

The experience of Italy was to have a profound effect on Margart Thomas’ development as an artist and was to provide a standard against which she measured artistic excellence in her future career. It was also to have a profound personal effect and was to provide a mythical space into which she could cast all sorts of imaginative longings. Her praises of Italy appear frequently in sonnet form.

Dear Italy, that ‘neath the shimmering snow
Liest like a bride beneath a bridal veil,
Thy fecund bosom cold and sere and pale,
Till spring, the bridegroom, set thee all aglow–
Hast thou a welcome for the pilgrim who
Comes from the cold, strong north, heartsore and frail,
Smitten by grief for which no cures avail,—
For that caress thou only canst bestow?
As in the sun’s embrace at early morn,
The moon, which through the night has watched, must die,
So unto thy remotest wilds I fly
To lose myself and all I am in thee;
Of all I had, of all I hoped, forlorn,
Hast thou no word, O my beloved, for me? 49

Douglas Sladen in My Long Life wrote many praises of Italy, describing it as “magic”, a “traveller’s joy”, “a land of ecstasy”, “a place where one could rest in content for the rest of one’s life” and so on. These statements reveal the set of concerns that were peculiar to an elite group. The blinkered perception of Italian culture which Anglo-Saxon artists expressed often ignored the contemporary social situation. These artists, specialising in Neoclassicism, were primarily concerned with the aesthetic remains of an ancient civilisation and its mythological importance. Margaret Thomas hints at this blinkered view in “Is it a Myth?”:
Is it a myth? I stopped and turned aside
Out of the clamour of the Tuscan street
Into a quiet cool church, and in its wide
Long aisles, where light and darkness stopped to meet,
Were young and old, and gay and grave, who bent
Before a quaint Madonna’s lamplit shrine
And proffered their requests, were penitent,
Or thanked her for her clemency divine;
All strife seemed banished, all the sad world’s sin
Forgotten, anguish of ambition foiled,
The pain of those who strove and failed to win,
Soothed for awhile in hearts which life had soiled.
I did not smile, I had not faith wherewith
To pray, I only loved – Is all a myth?51

The romanticised idyll of the Italian landscape, combined with the presence of a number of expatriate women artists who lived there, would seem to provide a nurturing environment for Margaret Thomas’ concept of herself as a professional artist. However, her poem suggests the precariousness of an artistic identity formed on the basis of such a myth. While her professionalism is tied almost exclusively to the idea of fame, the possibility of success evades her. Her meditation on the beautiful and the quaint throws into relief her own more complex desires. For her, the “anguish of ambition foiled” and “the pain of those who strove and failed to win” is exposed by the simple ceremonials of a peasant people. Her final question “Is all a myth?” suggests the uncertainty of her belief in her career as a cornerstone of her identity.

The expatriate community’s ability to remove itself through its wealth, class and status from the Italian community within which it resided was a key factor in the formation of this myth. It made use of the romanticised notion of Italian history to exist side by side with this contemporary culture. This group functioned like a permanent tourist class existing in mutual benefit with the Italian community, but its aim was to claim the classical Italian past and appropriate it as if it were the rightful inheritance of all artists, regardless of their individual and national backgrounds. The contemporary life of the Italian peasantry or proletariat could be safely ignored by the artist in this preoccupation with an idealised classical past.
However, a period of study in Italy and exposure to its sculpture was regarded as a mandatory requirement for the professional development of a sculptor. Margaret Thomas and the other artists who flocked to Rome were part of a long tradition of artists who had sought inspiration from this source. She refers to Rome as the artist’s and poet’s country “which is by birthright his home, whatever land may claim him as her own.” However, as the above poem demonstrates, she expresses concern in some of her poems about the ethical nature of this ‘use’ of the classical past and its appropriation by the British. She describes the ruins of Baiae and Cuma and states: “The soil on which our vagrant footsteps tread is ruins beaten into dust...” Her own footsteps and those of her fellows become part of a long line of many which have contributed to the destruction of the heritage of ancient Italy.

When Margaret Thomas returned to London in 1869 she received a studentship at the Royal Academy of Arts. In 1872 she became the first woman to win a silver medal in modelling at the Academy, an achievement which was to secure her career in portrait sculpture in England. By her early thirties she had finally completed her long period of training and now was underway as a fully qualified professional sculptor.

Her comments on the life of art students are recorded in an article entitled “The Schools of the Royal Academy of Arts”. Here she describes the hopes and aspirations of the young art students who work in the basement of the Royal Academy building while the fashionable and wealthy public peruse the paintings of famous artists on the floor above.

> How little do the glittering crowds gathered in those magnificent saloons know of the seething life going on beneath them - of the palpitating hopes and fears - of the pleasures and struggles of a number of their fellow creatures separated from their wealthy leisure only by the thickness of the floor - for the schools of the Royal Academy are under their feet, and in them between 200 and 300 earnest students pursue their beloved studies day by day! 

This image is a convenient metaphor for the process of development that artists in the academic environment had to undergo before being acknowledged as professionals. The young artists’ success was dependent not only on pleasing their professional superiors and having their work placed in the gallery upstairs, but on the whims of the buying public which perused it. While the artists were still at a
student level they remained 'under the feet' of the masters, but also 'underfoot' in relation to the buying public. This condition doubly applied to women whose gender status already placed them in a subservient position.

However, once these students graduated and the best earned their place in the hall above their future career was more secure. Margaret Thomas had already exhibited one small sculpture in the Royal Academy in 1868, a medallion of Frederick Wallis, and in 1873 she showed a portrait simply called Rachel. However, in 1874 she exhibited six portraits including one of a parliamentarian, the Honorary Edward Stanhope and Viscountess Clifden as well as one of her friend Henrietta Pilkington, also an artist. In 1875 and 1877 she exhibited two more portraits. In the same period until 1880 she also exhibited seventeen works at the Royal Society of British Artists and in other galleries including the Society of Women Artists.

Her success at the Royal Academy assured her future employment and also allowed her to associate with the class of wealthy elite in London, including royalty. She made several busts of highly distinguished citizens, particularly those associated with Taunton Shire. The appointment to undertake these sculptures of Somerset worthies followed her portrait of Charles Summers which she made when he died in 1878. These included a portrait bust of Richard Jefferies (1848-1887), a novelist and naturalist, which was unveiled at Salisbury Cathedral by Bishop Wordsworth and one of Wilson Fox (1831-1887), physician to the Queen, which was displayed in the Shire Hall at Taunton. She also made one of the novelist Henry Fielding (1707-1754) from an original sketch by Hogarth and it too was erected in Taunton Shire Hall.

Her milieu in the late 1870s and 1880s consisted of Royal Academy members as well as members of the London bohemia, a wealthy and elite group (not a poor and struggling artistic community). This 'bohemia' communicated through an elaborate club system as well as the more personalised 'at-homes' and posed as a group of displaced or classless artists. However, in reality they were patronised by the wealthy middle class and very often part of this class themselves. The euphemistic name for one of these clubs "The New Vagabonds Club" suggests a reckless irreverence that the guestlist contradicts. This club had guest speakers like Lord Kitchener, Captain Scott of the Antarctic, Lord Leighton, Sarah Bernhardt, Christabel Pankhurst and so on. Margaret Thomas' contacts through this club network included royalty and the peerage. In 1868 she exhibited alongside Princess Louise who was also a sculptor and who showed a portrait of HRH Prince Arthur. Princess Louise was noted as "a gifted sculptress who made her home welcome to
artists [and] wrote magazine articles as ‘Myra Fontenoy’. The Princess’s most noted work was the statue of Queen Victoria in Kensington Gardens. Margaret Thomas was also an associate of Sir Charles and Lady Eastlake. Lady Eastlake edited “The Letters and Journals of Queen Victoria” in 1926.

While the suffragette movement was keeping the ‘Woman Question’ in high profile, these clubs were demonstrating a circumscribed liberal openness towards its cause. The number of famous women who attended these functions and the respect given to them convinced this social set that it was progressive and egalitarian in its views. Margaret Thomas was one of the women who received honour and even temporary fame in these circles and she appears to have had no cause for protesting the limitations on her own rights and freedoms. The art academies had accepted women prior to her entry and her personal career was secure. However, this group’s claim to egalitarianism was smug at times and did not always penetrate beyond a superficial level. Douglas Sladen, for example, was to say “I insisted on having Christabel Pankhurst and her mother as guests of the evening [for the Savage Club]. I was always in favour of giving women the vote, except when they tore up golf greens or the like.”60 He also commented on the suffragists “smashing the windows of the hot-houses at Kew and thereby killing the tropical plants in them.”61 In other words equality for women was possible, as long as it did not interfere with the privileges and pleasures of the rich. Margaret Thomas’ association with those privileges and pleasures and her desire and need to remain on good terms with this class made her a poor activist for women’s rights; her achievement in this area was on the level of personal attainment rather than as a wider acknowledgement of more political intent.

The area in which she did see herself as having some political sway was, however, in relation to colonialism. She was an avid supporter of all things Australian and keenly worked towards the acknowledgement of Australian culture within Britain. She was associated with a group of expatriate Australians which was active in London in the 1880s and 1890s. This group included Mr and Mrs Patchett Martin, Mrs Mannyntgon Caffyn (Iota), Rosa Praed, Hume Nisbet, Lala Fisher and Douglas Sladen. Many of these individuals had either grown up in Australia or had been long term visitors. Their impressions of Australia were generally warm but were often highly romanticised. Many of them wrote novels, short stories and articles dealing with Australian or Anglo-Australian themes and their material published in the 1890s fed into a fashion for Australiana then popular in Britain. Margaret Thomas published alongside them in Coo-ee: Tales from Australian Life by Australian Ladies, 1891, and in By Creek and Gully, 1899.62
By the 1890s Margaret Thomas had also earned enough from portraiture to subsidise a period of travel. For the next two decades she spent her time travelling through countries like Spain and Portugal, the Holy Lands and Denmark and wrote travelogues and executed sketches and oil paintings. The illustrations accompanying the texts were comprised of architectural studies, landscapes and portraiture. A discussion of her work as an observer of cultures will be dealt with in chapter four.

The last art historical writing she produced was *How to Understand Sculpture* in 1911. She had already published a handbook on painting *How to Judge Pictures* in 1908. By the time she was in her early seventies she had amassed a considerable knowledge of the art museums and galleries of Europe. Her knowledge of sculpture was quite broad and she insisted on communicating this knowledge from an artist’s viewpoint, with the intention of inspiring the amateur art lover. She contended that there was a need to communicate the love of art to the general public in a way that the experts and academicians were not doing.

She continued to write poetry well into her eighties; the last poem in her published writing was dated 1927, two years before her death. Even though her youthful poetry had referred romantically to death, the poems of her latter years dealt with its inevitability. One of the most touching of the latter poems describe her feelings towards her body. It is entitled “To My Earthly Frame”. It reads as follows:

*Friend, we have travelled many years together*  
*And shared a changing fortune, good and ill,*  
*Full soon must come the hour when we shall sever,*  
*For life is fleeting, guard it how we will.*

*I once did love thee; thou wert brave and strong,*  
*Well hast thou served me as we stood alone;*  
*Now thou art weak and weary and not long*  
*Canst face the bitter world and hold thine own.*

*The seed thou sow’d brought forth no precious grain,*  
*The loves we chose are either false or dead,*  
*Too well we know the past to hope again,*  
*Too tired, we seek not joys that ever fled.*
Before in utter weakness thou shalt fail,
Before the eyes grow dim, and hearing cease,
Before the hands shall shake, the cheeks grow pale,
Good friend and faithful, let us part in peace.\textsuperscript{63}

She died on 24th December, 1929 in Letchworth, England. In her will she bequeathed twenty five of her unframed oil paintings, mostly travel sketches and a few portraits of friends including Charles Summers and Henrietta Pilkington, to the Letchworth Museum. There were no surviving letters or documents. Her effects totalled the sum of £10,314.16s 2d, a considerable sum for a spinster who had supported herself through her professional artwork.\textsuperscript{64}

Margaret Thomas' career followed a path of lengthy studentship, from her teens until she was thirty, then nearly twenty years of intensive portraiture, followed by approximately twenty more years of intermittent travel, writing and sketching. Her last creative years appear to have been taken up with poetry. Her overall career demonstrates her involvement with mixed groups of amateurs and professionals. Those who were amateurs were all members of an elite class and their available leisure testified to their wealthy status. A wide ranging interest in the arts acted as one of the signifiers of this status. Throughout her life Margaret Thomas attempted to negotiate the demands of her class, which required her to demonstrate an overall interest in the arts, with the demands of a career in one specific artform. This negotiation took a circuitous path and itself became one of the major influences on her identity formation. The following chapters will demonstrate in more detail the means by which she articulated her artistic identity.

\textsuperscript{1} Douglas Sladen, \textit{My Long Life: Anecdotes and Adventures} (London; Hutchison & Co, 1939) Book II chapters IV, V and VI.
\textsuperscript{2} David Cannadine, \textit{The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy} (London: Yale University Press, 1990) 238.
\textsuperscript{3} Bede Nairn (general editor), \textit{Australian Dictionary of Biography} Vol 6 1851-1890 (Melbourne University Press,1976) 261.

Genealogical sources reveal the only Thomas in Melbourne at the time in the shipping trade to be a T.C. Thomas who set himself up in business as:
T.C. Thomas & Co.
Shipping Agents and Coal Merchants,
132 Collins St West, corner of King St.,
Melbourne.

wealthy elite in the 1850s to a site of manufacture and working class poverty by the 1890s depression era.


6 Chapter Six will enlarge this theme more fully.


10 Thomas, *A Painter's Pastime* 139.


13 See Chapter Three for her descriptions of the landscape.


15 Richard White, *Inventing Australia. Images and Identity* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1981) 87. The following generation of educated elite who were Australian born and who were to become the bohemian artists of the 1890s considered that their indigenous viewpoint was preferable towards a sense of national identity. As White points out this was simply an altered version of the search for an Australian identity driven by as much self interest and incorporating as much romantic idealism as did the older version.


17 Astbury 158.


22 Turner 26.

23 Summers and his wife arrived in Australia and after building his house in Docker Street, Richmond, he proceeded to try his fortune in the goldfields. His interest in gold-digging was short-lived and when a position as sculptor was offered for work on the new parliament house he was quick to seize the opportunity. He then rose to fame due to his work on the Burke and Wills statue and consequently founded the Victorian Society of Fine Arts in 1856. He was to become the most noted sculptor in Australia at this time. See Chapter Two.


27 Kerr 497.

28 *The Argus* January 5th, 1863.

29 *The Illustrated Melbourne Post* January 3rd, 1863.


31 Hardie 82.

32 *The Illustrated Melbourne Post* 19th July, 1862.

33 Kerr 496.


35 *Georgiana's Journal* does not extend to the years when Margaret Thomas may have been in her company.
40


37 Miller 107.

38 Miller 115.


40 Chapter Two will demonstrate this more fully.


43 Francis Adams, "Melbourne and Her Civilization" *Colonial Voices. Letters, Diaries, Journalism and Other Accounts of Nineteenth Century Australia.* Edited by Elizabeth Webby (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1884) 282.

44 The search for a 'true elite' was to become a continual preoccupation amongst writers. Francis Adams in 1884 noted in his perusal of a well known Melbourne bookshop that the dominant middle class was demonstrating a keen interest in reading the popular scientific, theological and literary books of the day.

45 Sturgeon 19.

46 Chadwick 141.

47 Christine Downer who has researched the work of Charles Summers, in conversation with the author, refutes a romantic/sexual association with them. Summers appears to have been, according to Downer, a faithful and providing husband.

48 Chadwick 198.

49 Thomas, *A Painter's Pastime 3.*


51 Thomas, *A Painter's Pastime 7.*


53 Thomas, sonnet "Baiae and Cuma" from *A Painter's Pastime.* See Chapter Five for a further discussion of this theme of appropriation of the classical past and its relation to the professional woman artist.


58 Arthur Patchett Martin, intr. *A Scamper Through Spain and Tangiers* by Margaret Thomas (London: Hutchison & Co, 1892) x.

See also *The Times* 26 Oct, 1888: 8.

59 The clubs that proliferated at this time also included the Arts Club, the Authors' Club the Savage Club, the Lyceum Club and the Reform Club. The Arts Club contained a fresco by Angelica Kaufmann. The Authors' Club was founded by Sir Walter Besant and had speakers like Aubrey Beardsley and Arthur Conan Doyle. Margaret Thomas belonged to the Lyceum Club but her published works are introduced by members of other clubs. *A Scamper Through Spain and Tangier* for example is introduced by Arthur Patchett Martin of the Reform Club, and she dedicates *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* to Sir Walter Besant who was also the secretary of the Palestine Exploration Society.

60 Sladen 167.

61 Sladen 164.


64 Details of her will obtained from Christine Downer.
Margaret Thomas
*Portrait of Charles Summers*
Held at the State Library of Victoria
Oil on canvas, 127.5 x 102 cm
Margaret Thomas’ first contact with a practising professional sculptor was in the person of Charles Summers, her teacher and later her friend and mentor. In the formation of her artistic identity his influence was to be profound, particularly because of the lengthy period they spent together in Australia when he was her main artistic educator. He became her major role model and on his death in 1878, she wrote his memoirs in a forty eight page publication elaborately entitled:

*A Hero of the Workshop*

*and*

*Somersetshire Worthy,*

*Charles Summers,*

*Sculptor.*

*The Story of His Struggles and Triumph.*

This chapter will examine *A Hero of the Workshop* in terms of Margaret Thomas’ identity formation. The myth of the artist as hero was by definition a myth of masculinity. Margaret Thomas’ narrative account of his “struggles and success” draws heavily on this heroic myth. What was important for her, and for her fellow women artists, was to find some means of interpolating female experience into the construct of the artist as hero. There is considerable evidence within the construction of *A Hero of the Workshop* to suggest that Margaret Thomas manipulated the myths surrounding the artist to create a space for the female artist, although this manipulation does not seem to be a conscious act on her part. The key factor in a deconstruction of her eulogistic account is to examine not necessarily her admiration for him but her empathy with him. This is suggested by her preoccupation with his class struggle. If she could draw some analogies from the class struggle in which he engaged and relate this to a gender struggle, then she had at her fingertips the stuff of inspiration.

*A Hero of the Workshop* was written when Margaret Thomas was a fulltime professional portraitist in England in 1879. She had by this time been practising as a graduate of the Royal Academy for seven years and had a number of portraits
hung at the Academy and at various other galleries and societies. The eulogistic nature of these memoirs did not therefore reflect a paralytic devotion to male genius but rather an exaggerated gratitude for his influence and example. As a study of romantic female devotion to male genius, however, *A Hero of the Workshop* cannot be surpassed; it professes adoration on every page. But in its form as a panegyric of the hero as worthy citizen it is typical of its period and not solely indicative of gender relations.

The lengthy format of the title provides a useful framework through which to examine the ideologies and assumptions upon which Margaret Thomas based her understanding of the role or function of the artist. The following analysis is comprised of a discussion of each of the main signifiers within the title namely ‘hero’, ‘workshop’, ‘worthy’, ‘story’ (or journey), ‘struggles’ and ‘triumph’. As the underlying assumptions are then extracted, there follows a discussion about the extent to which the woman artist is able to identify with these assumptions. It is interesting to note that while Margaret Thomas refers to Summers at various times as an artist, and even on one occasion as “one of the greatest artists of our age”, she does not incorporate this term in the title. However, the notion of the artist as hero is present by implication.

*A Hero of the Workshop* reveals the discourse of the artist as hero as it merges into the developing notion of the professional sculptor in the Australian context. Margaret Thomas’ success in the field of sculpture was partially dependent on her ability to come to terms with the potency of this myth. While the paradigm of the artist as hero was a significant factor in mythology, its more concrete product, the artist as professional, could only emerge in Australia once an infrastructure was created to support a ‘profession’ as such. At the time of Thomas’ and Summers’ residence here this infrastructure was not fully in place. During this formative period the artist was co-opted into the process of mythmaking upon which the class-based and economic notion of a profession would be founded.

In Australia, at the time of his death, Summers was celebrated as a major sculptor and a local hero. Despite the fact that he had left the country twelve years previously his reputation was firmly in place. In the latter part of *A Hero of the Workshop* is an account of the presentation of his last major works to the National Gallery of Victoria. These were the four statues of the Royal Family: the Queen, the Prince Consort and the Prince and Princess of Wales. Summers had completed the statues in Europe in August, 1878 and was intending to follow them to Australia in September. However, his health failed him and he died, after a six week illness, on
24th October of the same year. The speech was given by Sir Redmond Barry, the first puisne judge of the Victorian Supreme Court and one of Melbourne’s best known citizens. Barry described Summers as:

\[ the \ diligent \ man \ of \ genius \ whom \ we \ may \ almost \ claim \ AS \ A \ CITIZEN \ OF \ VICTORIA, \ who \ laboured \ hard \ here \ for \ many \ years, \ and \ who \ has \ made \ his \ name \ ever \ memorable... \ he \ was \ taking \ his \ stand \ among \ the \ great \ artists \ of \ the \ world. \]

A few sentences later he went even further to describe the figure of the Queen as “a work of the greatest genius of modern times”. Margaret Thomas’ opinion of Summers as a genius was not merely her own personal opinion but was shared by the elite of Melbourne society of the period. However, it was a particularly provincial judgement which did not stand the test of time.

One of the important characteristics of Charles Summers as an artist was that he had risen from the obscurity of a working class background to become the most eminent Australian sculptor of the period. Margaret Thomas’ record of his life emphasises this rise to fame as the struggles of a self made man. In this context Charles Summers was an ideal citizen who had made good use of the opportunities of the ‘Working Man’s Paradise’ to become one of the ‘true’ elite without betraying his humble beginnings. He thus became far more important to Australia’s colonial history than he did in British art history. A small exhibition was, however, held in England in 1978 celebrating his work, one hundred and forty years after he had lived and worked in Weston-super-Mare. The curator described him as “better known on the other side of Australia than in England, the country of his birth.”

Summers’ lowly beginnings and gradual social progress reinforced the Victorian notion of progress through the virtues of diligence and hard work. But if he was to emerge as a hero then he must achieve much more than this. The pattern of heroic development as portrayed in legend is generally based on the hero undertaking a journey during which he undergoes various ordeals. The attainment of his goal is only achieved through much pain and suffering, but if he is a true hero he will surmount these obstacles and serve as a reminder to ordinary humanity of the possibilities available to a few of its members.

While the \textit{Hero of the Workshop} is intended as a biographical and thus a factual document, the element of myth which pervades it can be demonstrated to be quite significant. A structural analysis based on Vladimir Propp’s \textit{The Morphology of the}
Folktale is explored in detail in Appendix 1 and reveals remarkable similarities between the plot of *A Hero of the Workshop* and the morphological structure of the folktale. The following account points out the main features of this analysis.

Margaret Thomas describes Summers as taking the journey of the hero and on its completion arriving as ‘victor’, that is, attaining success through public recognition. He begins his career humbly. As a small poor boy, “instead of learning to read or write”, he “was sent, as soon as he could walk, into the labour market, to earn a shilling a-week by scaring crows from the wheatfield.” He rapidly improves his situation, overcoming various ordeals and trials: “the lad’s industry and quickness never failing to make head under the most adverse circumstances.”

In his heroic journey he is assisted by a character which Propp calls the ‘donor’, a friendly helper often aligned with magical powers. In Charles Summers’ case this is M.L. Watson, an elderly sculptor who becomes his teacher. The donor transmits a magical agent to the hero. This involves the hero completing a task or request. It sometimes involves the hero rendering a service to a dead or dying person.

Watson’s health now entirely gave way, and sending for his favourite assistant, he desired him to break up all his models. Mr Summers hesitated to perform this task, begging a few might be spared, but the dying sculptor, wrapped in a blanket, was determined and watched his beloved works shattered one by one.... About a week after his models were destroyed, Watson died, but not before he had given Mr Summers one of the most eulogistic letters that could be penned, and which would have secured his entrance into any sculptor’s studio.

A further magical agent is delivered to the hero which liquidates the hero’s original deprivation or lack. In Charles Summers’ case, this is in the form of medals from the Royal Academy. This magical agent is also accompanied by a service to a dead person. Before Summers can begin work for the competition he visits his dying mother.

...he at once placed his name on the list of competitors for the silver medal for modelling from the antique. This competition takes place in October; but at the commencement of that month he received a letter to hasten to Somersetshire, if he wished to see his mother.
before she died. The affectionate son lost no time in proceeding thither...He modelled her bust while she lay a corpse, and returned to London ten days after the other competitors had begun work for the medal...(He won) the silver medal for the best model from life and the gold medal...for the best group of historical sculpture (and) a bronze medal...There was not a little surprise and a great deal of cheering when the unassuming student from the country received...the honours so quickly won and so well deserved.12

The hero’s achievements now signify the end of what Propp calls the ‘First Move’. A new lack is announced and the hero must begin a new adventure, a search which is located in another kingdom.

But the career which seemed opening so brilliantly became speedily clouded. The strong and vigorous constitution he had brought with him from his native country gave way under his intense application...he was told that the only means of preserving his health was a sea voyage...he resolved to proceed (to Australia).13

The hero is unrecognised on his arrival. He pursues some menial work which conceals his identity. Summers builds a house with his own hands. “There are many persons still living who saw the apparently untiring man work from daylight till dark, and needed confirmation of the medals to believe that he was an artist.”14 New characters, ‘false heroes’, appear in the action and act as a foil to the hero, stressing the hero’s spiritual superiority. Summers proceeds to the goldfields, “where his brothers were already realising much money”.15 After six months of work in the goldfields Summers departs and “within a week of his departure from Poverty Creek, Tarnagulla, gold was found there in such abundance as to make the fortunes of all concerned. Mr Summers gained nothing thereby.”16

The brothers capture a false prize (material wealth). However the true hero pursues higher ideals and claims the true prize: “...but the old love of art had not died out. He saw an advertisement for modellers...The work required was for the Houses of Parliament, then in the course of erection.”17 Through this further task the hero is transfigured and given a new appearance. Summers becomes recognised as a pioneer of the arts in Australia. The hero ascends the throne. “His services to art cannot be overestimated...[He became] the first President of the Victorian Academy of Fine Arts.”18
The questions to be asked, following the above account, are what value did Margaret Thomas' mythologising of Charles Summers' career serve, and to what extent did it affect the identity formation of women who undertook an artistic career? As Kris and Kurz demonstrate, this traditional treatment of the artist's life had involved the element of myth since Greek civilization in the 4th century B.C.19 Once the work of art had surrendered its purely magical function, the figure of the artist had begun to assume more importance, and his life took on a certain mythical status.20 The "artist's anecdote" began to assume an important role in the creation of the image of the artist and had eventually become interwoven within the writing of art history per se.

The Romantic myth of the artist as hero which had arisen in the late eighteenth century had, by the latter half of the nineteenth, differentiated into several forms. Poetry, considered the 'supreme art', strongly influenced the visual arts and poets like Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and Keats had varying influences on the interpretation of this myth.21 The overall impact of these poets, according to Donald Stone, was the creation of an aura of "egoism and diabolical wilfulness" around the idea of the artist.22 A counter reaction to this view followed with writers like Sir Walter Scott who, although maintaining many other aspects of Romanticism, was also "the popularizer of the image of the artist as dutiful citizen, obedient inhabitant of a world of law and order."23 These poles also reflected alternative reactions of the individual (as artist) to the confusing effects of radical changes in the social order: the Revolutionary period in Europe, its following period of peace and the rise of industrialisation with its extreme shifts in social structure.

However, the myth was also based on an accumulation of ideals from both the Renaissance and Medieval periods. The ancestor of the moody Romantic figure could be found in the renaissance characterisation of the artist as 'Saturnine' that is, "contemplative, meditative, brooding, solitary, creative."24 The artist as 'dutiful citizen' working in harmony with society had more in common with the medieval artisan, the 'Mercurial' "cheerful, lively [man of] action" who experienced himself as part of a rigidly constructed social order.25

In 1840 Thomas Carlyle attempted to redress what was then the flagging popularity of the heroic with a series of lectures on Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History. In academic circles the concept of the heroic had been under some attack. According to Carlyle hero worship had gone out of fashion, a situation he felt obliged to remedy. His lectures glorify the 'Great Man' and hero worship as the
very foundation of society:

*Worship of the Hero is the transcendent admiration of a Great Man. I say great men are still admirable; I say there is, at bottom, nothing else admirable! ...Hero worship, heartfelt prostrate admiration, submission, burning, boundless, for a noblest godlike Form of Man, - is not that the germ of Christianity itself?*  

The heroic ideal had never really disappeared from popular interest but Carlyle reinstated it on the agenda of intellectual debate. Thus the latter half of the nineteenth century saw an amalgamation of concern with the heroic which gave licence to the representation of the hero as “all heroic”, what appears to twentieth century eyes to be veneration in the extreme. In prior periods the notion of the heroic had contained within it seeds of suspicion or at least a prompt towards cautionary reserve. In ancient Rome too much praise was seen to attract ‘the evil eye’: Roman conquerors, for example, were jeered, heckled and mocked at the tail end of their victory parades. In the Renaissance period a less superstitious approach was urged by Machievelli who suggested that heroes “should not be revered ... uncritically” but that their successes and failures should be studied analytically.

*A Hero of the Workshop*, published in 1879 was produced in the heyday of hero worship. In the colonial context Summers had risen to a place of public importance. Margaret Thomas portrays him as a public hero both in terms of his role as an artist and as a citizen, describing him as “as much beloved as a man as he was admired as an artist.” He thus personifies Sir Walter Scott’s ideal of the artist as dutiful citizen. His early adversities and his rise above them “His Struggles and Triumph” form the basis of her admiration for him. The self-made man was a Victorian ideal; the romantic rise from poverty to wealth via the process of hard work, a celebrated achievement. The argument was that poverty could be overcome, and that those who have risen from such depths are even more worthy of heroic status than those whose progress has been less hindered.

However, the theme of the artist rising from a humble birth was by no means limited to nineteenth century concepts. It had in fact been a key factor in the myth of the artist from ancient times. The association between the artist’s humble birth (often in a rustic setting) and his lack of formal education reinforced the notion of creativity as a divine gift, a quality that could not be developed through the normal process of education.
The bourgeois woman played no obvious part in this construct of the artist as hero, apart from being cast into the role of worshipper. She could not claim an evolutionary development involving humble birth, contact with misfortune and villainy, and conquest over readily perceived obstacles. Additionally, while the hero was glorified for his ability to prove himself through brave actions and deeds, the nineteenth century bourgeois woman was celebrated for her opposite characteristics. Hers was an ornamental function and as such she was not readily able to insert her personality into the role of the protagonist.

However, Margaret Thomas presents her vision of the ideal artist with such conviction that she betrays a sense of identification that goes beyond a vicarious participation. The attractive power of the myth of the artist as hero and his psycho-spiritual evolution via the heroic journey provided a deep source of emotional identification which resonated within a colonial community. As migrants many Anglo-Australian men and women had experienced the motif of the journey in terms of a long sea passage of mass migration to an unknown land. The process of venturing to this unknown territory carried with it implicit dangers for both men and women. As Margaret Thomas demonstrates, the dangers which threatened the bourgeois woman were a result of her contact with a barbarian element which emerged in the recasting of British social structures into the more fluid environment of the gold rush colony.

So identification with the heroic journey myth was not altogether beyond the identity needs of the colonial woman particularly as she was thrust into the discomforts of a more 'primal' community. However, her ability to identify with the hero was limited. If Margaret Thomas was to find other sources of identification with Charles Summers as her hero then she would need to draw out aspects of his character that would present points of reference for the woman artist. As a consequence A Hero of the Workshop focuses more on Charles Summers' character traits than on his actual artistic achievements.

As an artistic role model Margaret Thomas portrays Summers in the role of 'dutiful citizen' rather than brooding bohemian. Her portrayal of him also reflects, as has already been indicated, the esteem in which he was held in the Australian community. As a mythologised hero his character serves to define a paradigm of behaviour for the members of a newly developing culture. But it also serves Margaret Thomas herself with a paradigm befitting her career choice. The type of hero she eulogises in many respects relates to her own needs and projected
ambitions as an artist.

By 1879 the Australian colonies had experienced nearly thirty years of prosperity since the gold rush of the 1850s. In this boom time the influx of migration was enormous and industries of all kinds had prospered. Accompanying it was a marked change in social structure. The rigid class system that had operated in Britain and had formed a loose base for Australian conditions was totally transformed in the volatile conditions of the era. As Michael Cannon points out “swift upward and downward social mobility became common”. In the chaotic jumble of changing fortunes the self-made man was not a rarity, but, on the contrary, very common. If Summers was to be regarded as a hero in this particular period then his image as a self-made man was to represent much more than a simple acquisition of wealth.

However, one of the concerns which presented itself around this time was that Australians were concentrating their efforts on material gain to the detriment of cultural pursuits. Summers was an example of the new type of citizen that was required to fill out the ‘national character’. He had proven that it was possible to demonstrate a deep concern for the arts in a period which was almost solely concerned with the acquisition of material gain. In this regard he was valued more highly in Australia, because of its dearth of culture heroes, than in Britain. As a sculptor he combined practical and conceptual skills, and thus filled a transitional role between the hero as ‘man of action’ and as intellectual. Margaret Thomas made it quite clear that his intellectual interests were not wide, but that he was singularly focussed on producing sculpture. “Literature came in for a very small share of his attention” she said.

As a culture hero his range was limited but this was a limitation which suited the Australian environment at the time. The typical ‘artist-hero’ that was evolving in Europe was beginning to display anarchic tendencies, and these were unsuitable as yet for conditions here. It was important that an Australian hero demonstrate a stabilizing effect on a community that was already being disrupted by chaotic social conditions.

Defining the artist among such shifting conditions meant maintaining an openness to the contribution of an individual from any class towards the cultural development of the colonies. Margaret Thomas’ portrayal of Summers as an anonymous migrant (in mythical terms, the unrecognised hero) is in keeping with the conditions of the time and reinforces the new colonial situation as a seeding ground for cultural democracy. Summers had his roots in the working class but had transcended its
boundaries. His ethos celebrated the middle class value of diligent application: he had succeeded through ‘hard work’ rather than through privilege. The subject of his work, however, fell clearly into one of the preoccupations of the elite, the ‘high’ art form of sculpture. Summers’ role in the formation of a ‘natural’ elite is thus quite crucial here.

The image of the artist needed to reflect the particular cultural conditions in which he was nurtured. Summers was celebrated not only for his contribution to Australian culture but for his personal characteristics which differ markedly from those associated with the artist as bohemian. In the Australian press he was described as:

*simple in manners, frank and gentle in speech, modest and unassuming by nature and entirely free from that self consciousness and self assertion which make some artists so intolerable in private life.*

This emphasis on his character suggests that ‘the people’ (represented by the press) preferred to see the virtues of humility and modesty as attributes of their cultural heroes rather than signs of affectation. While Australian popular culture continued to glorify the artist as hero, it recoiled from one of the consequences of this construct, the vanity and pretentiousness of the ‘artistic’ persona. In the eyes of the Victorian press Charles Summers’ modesty served to authenticate his position as an artist, if only for a public which understood little about sculpture.

But the significance attached to Charles Summers’ virtue is relevant not only to the colonial situation but also to the emergence of women into the practice of sculpture. It was useful for Margaret Thomas to develop an image of the artist which was going to aid her in her own development in the field. While she was unable to draw on other women as models she needed a hero figure onto whom she could project her own ideals.

This projection of ideals, as Elaine Showalter demonstrates, was part of a general tendency in women’s writing at the time. By the 1850s women novelists were creating their heroes more from an amalgamation of their own needs than from any clear understanding of male experience. These heroes were either impossibly good (like Charles Summers) or the devil incarnate, like Rochester in Jane Eyre. “When women wrote”, Showalter says, “they identified with the power and privilege of the male world, and their heroes enabled them to think out their own unrealized
The virtues that Margaret Thomas attributes to Summers were those that were related also to the expectations placed on middle class women of the time. These included such qualities as modesty, sincerity, concern for family, temperance, amiability and popularity. The flawless nature of his character is sometimes hard to believe, but if its Victorian proclivities are taken into account, the narrative becomes more intelligible. If interpreted according to Showalter’s thesis, then his impossibly good behaviour could represent not only how she felt men should behave as artists and citizens, but also how she herself would behave if she were in Summers’ position.

By concentrating her attention on his virtues she was making a stand against the rising notion of the artist as outlandish bohemian and even moral degenerate. It could also be argued that she was actively (though not necessarily consciously) protecting the image of the artist for the future inclusion of women into its realms. Few women were acknowledged as professional artists but many were considered as bona fide ‘students’ of art. However the progression from the status of student to that of artist was still very difficult to achieve. If the concept of the artist and the idea of responsible citizenship were to be happily linked, as they were in the figure of Charles Summers, then the middle class women who had access to artistic training and sufficient talent may eventually be admitted to the coveted status of artist.

The singularity of purpose that Charles Summers manifested in his career reflected a working class attitude towards the professions rather than an elite or aristocratic attitude. Margaret Thomas’ desire for upward class mobility as well as professional status required that she make some compromise between the single-minded attitude of the working class hero and the wide ranging desire for knowledge for its own sake as well as an expression of aristocratic leisure and freedom. She was caught between embracing her artistic development either laterally or linearly. Charles Summers provided the linear example whereas her genteel acquaintances, as I have already argued in the previous chapter, provided the lateral model.

It is important, here, to consider the aspects of his character that she either quickly passes over, or ignores altogether. For example, she regards the gold rush as ‘[unsettling] the minds of men at that time’. But she is careful not to emphasise to what extent his mind became unsettled and portrays him as travelling to Australia for the sake of his health. His health, though, can’t have been too impaired for he
set sail with a ready-made house, and erects it, and another brick house, single-handedly when he arrives in Melbourne.  

Her description of him when he arrived, of building his own home in a spirit of fiery independence, gives credence to her thesis that he was the exemplary new man, and a candidate for honour and position in the colony.

...he arrived in Melbourne, and fixed his house on a piece of land which he bought in what is now called Docker-street, Richmond. The wages of labouring men in the Colony were then twenty shillings or thirty shillings per diem; and not caring to pay so extravagantly for work he could perform himself, Mr Summers commenced to build a six-roomed brick house with his own hands, and actually completed it, even to the roof.

After setting up his home and family in Melbourne she portrays him as proceeding to the goldfields in search of fortune but tiring of it after six months and returning to his old love of art. Her short story “Struck Gold”, included in the anthology By Creek and Gully relates this episode more clearly than A Hero of the Workshop.

The tale of his departure, where he leaves “Poverty Creek” to return to Melbourne to undertake sculpture for the Houses of Parliament, and the subsequent discovery of gold in the following week from the same site, is an anecdote which she must have found very appealing. In an analogy between the search for gold and the search for a cultural elite, Summers emerges in the shaking and washing as the rare metal separated out from the dross.

But the artist, who for the love of Art had left the claim before gold was struck, had no share in their prosperity, he reaped no reward for his long and arduous labour in it. But he had that reward which is greater than riches - success in the art he loved, a career full of honour and glory; at his death his adopted country mourned him greatly, and a monument was created to him in his native country, where his name is still held in reverence, as it would not have been had he merely ‘struck gold’.

What she fails to mention is that he chose to go to Australia rather than take up a travelling scholarship he had won to study in Rome. The question arises, if he was so devoted to art then why did come to Australia? Jane Evans, the curator of an
exhibition of Charles Summers' work in 1978, wrote that he “[preferred] to wait until his own taste was sufficiently matured to appreciate the beauties of Roman Fine Art”.40

Regardless of his motivation for coming to Australia what is important to the ‘legend’ is that he undertook the journey which led him to a new site where he was to prove his worthiness and to attain the status of culture hero. He is portrayed as achieving this through his innate genius and virtue. What she fails to acknowledge is that the very conditions which supply the test which proves his superiority (the gold fever which he rejects) also supplies him with the opportunity to practise his art. His career development was very much dependent on the prosperity generated in the country by the goldrush: the erection of the new Houses of Parliament and the concomitant requirement of sculptural decoration were only possible because of this boom in the economy.

She is equally as vague in the area of his personal relations. While approving of his rise from the working class to his position as cultural pioneer she makes very little mention of his marriage to Augustine Amiot, the “daughter of a farmer”.41 She mentions his marriage only in the context of the completion of a successful year, that is 1851, and refers to his wife only once: “...and leaving Mrs Summers, went to try his fortune at the diggings”.42 The omission of comment could well be a result of her own infatuation with Summers, but equally likely, could reflect an uneasiness with the ongoing links he maintained with his working class background.

On the whole, however, her efforts to bring the artist back to a world of law and order could be seen as her construction of a bridge for women which could link their social training with the possibility of their becoming a professional artist. For Margaret Thomas, the creation of such a noble ideal greatly facilitated her decision to pursue her career as an artist, and despite its fairytale qualities, gave her the moral courage to at least set out on her own journey.

Charles Summers’ ability to surmount class barriers in his progress through his career was an important factor if he were to be regarded in some respects as a role model for women artists. His experience of marginalisation both as a craftsman and unsophisticated young countryman placed him in an analogous position to women in the academies. Discussing his application for an academic sculpture competition she comments on the “jokes among the students at the countryman who had put down his name”.43 The class barriers that Summers overcomes prefigures the
gender barriers that women in the field needed to surmount. The disbelief that accompanied Summers' transcendence of his class position would have approximated that experienced by Margaret Thomas herself when she was the first woman to receive the Silver Medal at the Royal Academy in 1872.

His class struggle combined with his regional status produces a cultural hero who comes from the margins of society to achieve a central status. By becoming the founding father of Victorian sculpture and the first president of the Victorian Academy of Fine Arts he represents a new order and symbolised working class virtues and artisanship metamorphised into an elite form. Women, as Burrage and Torstendhal point out, were among the natural inheritors of this class struggle. In relation to the professions, women's rise from an underclass to professional status evokes the heroic struggle to emerge from a position of servitude to a position of relative power.

However, as I will demonstrate in the chapter on poetry, Margaret Thomas' struggle is seemingly more vague and intangible (though no less real) than Summers'. The series of tests that she must undergo arises from a discomfort with her position in the world which manifests as an inner tension rather than an easily defined set of concrete tasks to be undertaken. Her construction of an ideal in Charles Summers may have been useful in a colonial context but it had its limitations when used as a paradigm for women sculptors.

The opportunity to develop through clearly defined stages was unavailable to bourgeois women. Their upbringing protected them from the workshop situation and the hard manual labour such as that experienced by the journeymen: the pointers, polishers and stonemasons. Summers' 'struggles' represented an opportunity which Margaret Thomas, as a member of the wealthy middle class, was denied. Whereas his career was developed out of the adversity of a working class background, her career was facilitated through her position with both financial backing and moral and cultural encouragement. As she perceived him, his struggle was tangible, an easily recognisable development from a social position of poverty to a place of middle class respectability. Her struggle was less clear and also would seem to be inauthentic by comparison.

The innate 'genius' of the artist is seen to be present despite the circumstances of his birth, but the craft aspect of his profession is, at least to nineteenth century eyes, a skill that can and must be learned over a lengthy period. If the artist is to emerge as hero, then he must apply himself diligently towards this aspect of his
career.

Margaret Thomas goes to great lengths to describe Summers’ craft in this regard. Her description of his apprenticeship in stonemasonry traces the stages of laborious work through which he passed from the tedious mixing and carrying of mortar to the squaring and facing of stones and then to the more satisfying carving of ornamental stonework. Progressing from this common building work he had the opportunity to assist a sculptor from the Royal Academy, Henry Weekes, and from then on Summers determined to become a sculptor himself. Going to London, “a place full of such dreadful wickedness and temptations”, he gained employment as a polisher in the studio of Henry Weekes. In the evenings he learnt the art of pointing marble, and progressed to pointing a large portrait group for the eminent sculptor, M. L. Watson. His experience as a craftsman in the studios of these sculptors gained him probationary admittance to the Royal Academy and in 1850, at the age of twenty two, he gained full admission. By this stage he had been employed in the craft of masonry for over a decade. He emerges from this process as a consummate craftsman.

Margaret Thomas points out that his long apprenticeship enabled him to be able to “cut his idea at once in marble without forming it in clay”. She goes as far as suggesting that this apprenticeship placed him in a superior position to other sculptors who had trained solely as fine artists.

He was steadily laying in that stock of practical knowledge of the mechanical part of his art, which is too often, from its arduous nature, neglected by sculptors, but of which he was a consummate master.

In this respect her assessment of his development from lowly apprentice through to craftsman and finally to artist and ‘genius’ embodies a concept of the artist as an evolving being, progressing through the various stages in order to reach the status ‘artist as hero’. Charles Summers’ progress in microcosm reflected the perceived development of the role of the visual artist in history. This tallied with the current popularity of Darwinian theories of evolution as well as with concepts of organic progress in relation to the artist.

Sculpture was a hybrid profession. The workshop situation combined the skilled labour work of the artisans and the professional artistic training of the sculptor-in-charge. The artist was expected not only to have a high degree of professional skill
and be qualified from a recognised institution but also to treat his work as a ‘vocation’, maintaining an “ethical and honorary commitment to ideals”. In doing so the artist reaped the benefit of being at the top of a hierarchy in which the name of the individual sculptor was recognised independently but masked the co-operative labour upon which his reputation was built.

In *The Marble Faun*, written in 1883, Nathaniel Hawthorne comments on the relationship between the anonymous stonemasons and the artists in charge of the sculpture workshops. Apart from the original clay design which the artist produced, the stonemason generally did all or most of the carving of the marble. In an age of meticulous realism in portrait sculpture, he makes this observation:

> And how much of the admiration which our artists get for their buttons and buttonholes, their shoe ties, their neckcloths - and these, at our present epoch of taste, make a large share of the renown - would be abated, if we were generally aware that the sculptor can claim no credit for such pretty performances, as immortalised in marble! They are not his work, but that of some nameless machine in human shape.51

Workshop production had been the basis for much commissioned sculpture in the British and European context and is rooted in the guilds of the Middle Ages. But in the transition from the British situation to the colonial Australian the emphasis on a large team of craftsmen dominated by the master sculptor waned. Margaret Thomas described Summers’ work in Australia “consisting principally of portrait busts; some in marble executed entirely by his own hands, for it was impossible to procure skilled labour of the kind at the time.” Summers’ lengthy period of apprenticeship as a mason in British workshops combined with his artistic training in the Royal Academy guaranteed that he had more than enough qualifications for professional work when he arrived in Australia. However, there was no workshop structure in place here at the time. For his monument to Burke and Wills, a thirteen foot bronze statue, he had to build a foundry in the backyard of his Collins Street studio and employ labourers unskilled in sculpture production.53

The workshop facilities and the infrastructure to support them developed, however, in the following decades. By the building boom of the 1880s there was the beginning of a workshop situation based on the British model. But the artists who undertook the commissions were generally transient, having studied in Europe and often returning there. The National Gallery School was founded in Melbourne in
1870, after Summers and Thomas had left Australia, but even then there was no actual training in sculpture apart from the copying of plaster casts. Those artists intent on a career in sculpture were to continue to go to London, Paris or Rome for their training and Australian sculpture was to be dominated by a flow of artists back and forth from Europe to Australia well into the twentieth century.54

In its relationship to the architectural development of Melbourne during the gold-rush and the boom of the eighties, sculpture was tied as much to building as it was to the fine arts, therefore its accessibility to the women of this period was restricted. The organization of the building industry at the time was based on the British system in which the hierarchy of architect, builder, journeyman and apprentice represented a class structure based as much on social differentiation as on levels of skill.55 The support staff of sculpture workshops had always contained a mixed element of young aspiring artists and tradesmen perfecting their craft and as in any profession there was a tension between levels of the hierarchy. Until the twentieth century when Australian sculptors began to obtain quality training here, aspiring sculptors differentiated themselves from their tradesman fellows by travelling overseas. The 'profession' was thus protected from invasion by artisans like the stonemasons, many of whom found a surplus of work in the building trade or developed into employers and subcontractors themselves.56

As the nineteenth century drew to a close sculpture was beginning to shift from the extensive studio comprised of a number of artisans to become more and more 'professionalised', with art students rather than artisans as assistants. The emphasis changed also from immaculate reproduction using the method of pointing to direct carving by the artist, thus demanding less and less from the skilled craftsmen. What had been an inter-class relationship between different sectors of the community now was to become more exclusively the domain of an educated elite. At the time of the entry of women into the field, the thrust from the building sector, involving a tradition of artisanship, was diminishing and sculpture was becoming more exclusively the domain of the educated middle class artist.

Margaret Thomas appeared on the Australian art scene prior to the formation of specialist art schools and was seen by the press early in her career to be a product of the training of one man, rather than of a system of art education. She was, however, part of a structure whereby "professional artists...made a substantial part of their income from giving lessons to young ladies."57 As a precursor to the art schools and in combination with the push to women's university education, this instruction of young ladies was to build a significant quota of young women who
desired entry to the Australian art schools when they opened. At the second annual exhibition of paintings and drawings by the students of the art classes connected with the National Gallery, held in 1887, the company present was described as “numerous and representative, and...composed largely of ladies”.58

The sculptor’s workshop had never been a place for the woman artist and she had no historical connection with the work ethic involved in a relationship between a sculptor in charge and his assistant craftsmen. However, the inherent power relationship between sculptor and assistant was not an unfamiliar scenario as far as men and women were concerned. The anonymity of the artisan had reflected what was seen to be a ‘natural’ relationship between master and servant. Margaret Thomas refers to the relationship between Summers as an apprentice and the sculptor M.L. Watson as a “cordial understanding that existed between master and servant.”59

The women who entered the art schools were, however, of middle class origins. It could be suggested that the anonymity of the working class assistant and the power of master over servant found its parallels in the sculpture studio to which women were admitted. The doting admiration of a group of women students for the leading male sculptor would serve to reinforce his superiority (and undoubtedly his ego). It could possibly assist in contributing as much to the maintenance of the superior status of the dominant male as did the class relationship with the masons.

Women’s status also depended on the perceived inferiority of their physical nature. Sculptors were interpreting the female form as alluring and dangerous (note Bertram Mackennal’s Circe, 1893) and art’s role in this regard (that is art made by men) was to demonstrate power over this ‘dangerous’ female force. Women in the sculpture studio needed to show some form of deference towards the dominant male in order to dispel the sense of a feminine threat; their fawning admiration and eagerness to please very often acted as a device to maintain the hierarchy but also to protect their own place in the studio. A Hero of the Workshop is a supreme example of the kind of deference that a woman sculptor willingly would give to her personal ‘master’ in the field.60

I have argued in a deconstruction of A Hero of the Workshop that there is a considerable amount of material contained in this text which reveals aspects of the ideological construction of the artist with which the woman artist needed to come to terms. In the formation of Margaret Thomas’ identity as an artist these aspects are significant as they delineated the dimensions within which she could function.
Because she wholeheartedly embraces the romantic myths surrounding the artist (and at this stage in her career she doesn’t appear to question the value systems on which they are based) she has difficulty finding a space for the woman’s identity as an artist. However, she does find subtle ways to deal with the status quo that allows her the possibility of interpolating the woman artist’s story into the structure of the myth.

Her eulogy of Summers can be viewed, then, not simply as a conventional biography but also as a demonstration of the renewable potency of myth. Such a myth, as we have seen, had implications both for the Australian community as a whole and for the artist in particular. In the latter case it functioned to prepare the young artist for a future career in much the same way as fairytales prepare the child for his or her future journey into adulthood. In one of her next published writings Margaret Thomas makes a claim for her own rite of passage by mythologising the woman artist’s journey in a short story entitled “The Story of a Photograph”, the subject of the next chapter.

2 Thomas, A Hero of the Workshop 37.
4 Puisne judge - below the rank of Chief Justice. Sir Redmond Barry was also the first Chancellor of the University of Melbourne when it was founded in 1853. He was widely read in literature, history and the classics and was actively involved in the National Gallery and the Melbourne Public Library. He was also the judge who convicted Ned Kelly. See Peter Ryan, Redmond Barry: A Colonial Life 1813-1880 (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1980).
5 Thomas, A Hero of the Workshop 41.
6 Thomas, A Hero of the Workshop 41.
8 Appendix 1.
9 Thomas, A Hero of the Workshop 1.
10 Thomas, A Hero of the Workshop 4.
11 Thomas, A Hero of the Workshop 11, 12.
12 Thomas, A Hero of the Workshop 14, 15.
13 Thomas, A Hero of the Workshop 15, 16.
14 Thomas, A Hero of the Workshop 17.
15 Thomas, A Hero of the Workshop 17.
16 Thomas, A Hero of the Workshop 18.
17 Thomas, A Hero of the Workshop 18.
18 Thomas, A Hero of the Workshop 19.
20 Kris and Kurz 4.
23 Stone 5.
25 Zolberg 115.
28 Burns 31.
32 Thomas, *A Hero of the Workshop* 32.
35 Showalter 136.
36 Thomas, *A Hero of the Workshop* 16.
37 Thomas, *A Hero of the Workshop* 16.
38 Thomas, *A Hero of the Workshop* 17.
41 Evans 1.
42 Thomas, *A Hero of the Workshop* 17. Christine Downer suggests that he left his wife well provided for.
47 Margaret Thomas' italics.
50 Burrague 120.
53 Thomas *A Hero of the Workshop* 20.
Graeme Davison. *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1978) 75. However, the erratic nature of the gold-rush community meant that this 'system' was not necessarily honoured.

For a discussion of the status of the stonemasons see Davison, Chapter Three "This Modern Babel".


*Melbourne Argus*, 26th April, 1887: 9.


CHAPTER 4

THE LADY ARTIST AND
"THE STORY OF A PHOTOGRAPH"

In her short story "The Story of a Photograph" Margaret Thomas outlines the artistic development of a fictional lady artist who leaves colonial Australia to study and practise her career in Europe. Margaret Thomas applies the theme of the artist’s passage in reverse as she traces the protagonist’s journey from the colonial setting back to the site of ‘true’ civilisation, the Italy that she terms “the artist’s true home”. Although highly romanticised the protagonist’s journey reflects aspects of Margaret Thomas’ identity and the negotiations she needed to make in order to apply the notion of artistic success or fame to the female situation. In this story she examines the trajectory of the career of a lady artist and her path to artistic success but questions some of the consequences of that success. The experiences of her fictional character to some degree represent those of Margaret Thomas herself but also offer a romanticised view of the young woman artist’s heroic journey into a wider world of culture.

"The Story of a Photograph" was published in London in 1891 in an anthology by expatriate Australian writers and artists living in England; titled COO-EE: Tales of Australian Life by Australian Ladies, the volume was edited by Mrs Patchett Martin. The other writers represented in the anthology include ‘Tasma’ (Jessie Couvreur), Mrs Mannington Caffyn (Kathleen Caffyn otherwise known as Iota), Mrs Campbell Praed (Rosa Praed), Mrs Henry Day and Mrs Lance Rawson as well as work by the editor.¹ The only other Australian anthology of its type, published in 1899, was By Creek and Gully edited by Lala Fisher and it also included a short story and a poem by Margaret Thomas as well as stories by Mrs Patchett Martin, Hume Nisbet, E.W. Hornung, John Elkin, Douglas Sladen, Mrs Caffyn and Lala Fisher.² These anthologies tended to include work by writing friends of the editors and many of these were women.³

As Valerie Shaw notes, the 1890s were proclaimed “the heyday of the short story”.⁴ This period, she says, was “closely linked with the emergence of the characteristic figure of the modern artist, and with anti-Victorianism in its widest sense.”⁵ It was also a period which saw a proliferation of young female writers posing the heroines in their novels and short stories as active agents in their own
artistic and worldly success. As Joan Aiken suggests "they were all writing the same kind of story" and the literary world responded in a variety of ways. Nathaniel Hawthorne's oft-quoted remark "a damned mob of scribbling women", although penned as early as 1855, still voiced the underlying resentment of the male literary establishment towards women writers. As Jane Tompkins demonstrates, those women who chose the medium of romantic or sentimental prose to voice their artistic ideals were the most common target of this resentment. However, regardless of these early protests there was a dramatic increase in the amount of material being published, particularly during the 1890s.

The 1890s was also a period which saw the rise of the New Woman in the Victorian novel. The New Woman was emancipated, earned her own living and scorned traditional feminine roles of marriage and maternity. She was the feminist ideal of the decade but she came to be characterised with sinister overtones. Sensationalised as vulgar and sexually aggressive she was seen as a powerful threat more dangerous than the traditionally scorned prostitute or ‘fallen woman’. While Margaret Thomas' protagonist, Alma, was certainly emancipated, financially independent and unmarried, a clear distinction is made between her character and that of the New Woman. She is portrayed as a ‘lady’ and sexual voracity does not figure in her characterisation. As a lady the protagonist combines the manners of the well-bred woman with the career drive of the New Woman. This synthesis of ideals is a typical strategy represented in Margaret Thomas' writing.

It is in her own capacity as a ‘lady’ that Margaret Thomas writes and publishes this story. Along with the other stories in the anthology it is written to demonstrate the effects of the colonial experience on the well-bred woman. The paradox exposed in the anthology is one that virtually endorses Nathaniel Hawthorne's viewpoint. The well-bred young lady was expected to demonstrate accomplishment in a variety of artforms, writing being a particularly important one. But the emphasis on her education was not to develop her skills beyond a certain level of proficiency. Therefore a ‘lady’s’ perception of her colonial experience constructed in a fictional form was by definition an amateur venture, regardless of the level of experience of the author. The Sydney Morning Herald at the time described most of the stories in COO-EE as "more or less amateurish and conventional" and added "[a] rather curious feature of the volume is the amusing way in which it evidences many of the peculiar characteristics of the ‘woman writer’, especially of stories." In Margaret Thomas' case the ramifications were compounded. She had been trained to a professional standard in her visual art but was drawing on this
experience to write mediocre prose about the issue of being a ‘lady artist’. She was, in fact, writing about being a professional but using an amateur means to do so. The result is that both the fiction and the issue it describes are potentially devalued and, as far as the literary world was concerned, she could be classed as one of Hawthorne’s “damned mob”.

Conversely, as a colonial, her material was perceived as highly valuable. She had the advantage of being able to draw on a set of experiences that were classified as exotic or romantic by the Briton living at home. During this period when there was a great demand for information about Australia in England and Europe it seemed that as long as an individual had spent at least some years in the country then their experiences were considered as authoritative and useful in terms of understanding the effects of a strange new continent on the British personality. Douglas Sladen was among the group of colonial Australians living in London with whom Margaret Thomas associated. In his reminiscences of the period he remarked that “being identified with Australia [had] been the making of [his] name”. He also had only visited Australia, though this was as the first professor of history at the University of Sydney. He stayed for seven years and on his later tours to America was received with acclaim as an ‘Australian’ poet.

The Australian experience was useful in reflecting not only the adaptability of the British as a people but also provided a new source of cultural material, grist for the reworking of a mythology around the experience of migration. One of the most significant motifs, therefore, was the journey. A sea voyage half way around the world and the cultural shifts associated with it were seen to have a transformative power over the individual and over the large mass of individuals participating in the migrant experience. Kevin Murray describes the romantic and fictional aspects of travel as having “the potential to reveal the hidden order underlying life at home...whereas travel as fiction opens overseas up to the possibility that forms of life will be revealed in the world which transforms one’s life back home.”

The combined effect of revealing a hidden order but also transforming life ‘back home’ seems to form the ideological basis underlying the short stories and sketches in COO-EE. In these romantic fictions it is the effect of the colonial experience on women, and particularly women classed as ‘ladies’ which is the central theme. The subtitle Tales of Australian Life by Australian Ladies suggests that the women who wrote these tales had managed to retain their essential ‘lady-likeness’ despite their exposure to the raw and uncivilised Australian environment. The stories included all seem to draw attention to the ways in which the ‘true’ lady upholds her sense of
refinement while being exposed to the deprivations of the bush or the 'bad' company (convict, working class or native) with whom she is thrown in contact. These experiences, the likes of which she would never have encountered in the strict confinements of English society, combine to produce the lady transformed into something more than simply a genteel woman, but a woman perceived as having an added strength of character.

As a special kind of lady, the female artist (either visual artist or writer) was perceived as being innately sensitive to her surroundings and therefore capable of interpreting the colonial experience in a meaningful form. Transformed through art the experience and the person undergoing it was elevated. Unlike the actress, however, the female visual artist or writer did not need to stress her respectability; this could be assumed. Her task was to establish herself as a professional and to do this she needed to display the intensity and durability of her ambitions. Her colonial experience, brought back to the homeland via the medium of her art, helped to establish her as something more than a genteel or amateur lady artist, but as a woman with the muscle to survive as a professional.

A key factor in the formation of the image of the colonial lady artist was the fictional treatment of the remembered experience by the writers concerned. The stories in COO-EE constitute colonial life as it was recalled both from a physical distance and through a span of time. The potential for mythologising and idealising this experience is magnified by virtue of distance. The yarns originally told round the bush campfire were fashioned and remoulded as they were passed from shore to shore and retold around the English fireside. Then, in a further layering process, these same stories echoed around the Australian domestic hearth in their written form. The title COO-EE and its accompanying introduction describes this aspect of myth formation:

It is certainly 'a far cry' from the Antipodes to England and back again. Yet in the name of my Australian sisters who have contributed to this little volume, I venture to express a hope that our 'Coo-ee' may succeed in making itself heard on either shore, and that its echoes may linger pleasantly around the Bush Station and by the English fireside. To our kind friends and readers I would therefore only say: 'Coo-ee! Take up the cry and pass it on—Coo-ee! and again—Coo-ee!'
There is a stress on the selectivity of memory. In an introductory poem to *By Creek and Gully*, Lala Fisher celebrates the power of writing to evoke such memories but also to mould the past in accordance with the desires of the author:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{And men and maids long lost arise -} \\
&\text{Memories of past colonial experience.} \\
&\text{A magic power indeed we hold} \\
&\text{Who wield the sweet, enchanted pen;} \\
&\text{To more old hearts than could be told} \\
&\text{Thou bringest back life's youth again!}^{16}
\end{align*}
\]

In relation to both memory and the journey, the terms of loss and ‘lost’ become recurring motifs incorporated into the very fabric of the colonial experience as part of the implicit danger of physical travel, migratory shift, and cultural displacement. Being lost or losing something are the risks an emigré, an adventurer or a colonial must face.

“The Story of a Photograph” describes a young woman’s search for artistic identity and her choice to abandon her Australian home for the artistic opportunities which the wider world offers. The story utilises the motif of a photograph, which is lost and found several times throughout the plot, to signify the complexity of her search for identity. The photograph is an image of her friend, Caroline, who had died in the bush, a victim of the harsh environment. Caroline’s experience encapsulates the physical and spiritual deprivations suffered by the young bourgeois woman in Australia. Alma, the protagonist, sails to Rome to pursue her career, while her young female companion, Caroline, remains in the bush to marry. Many years later Caroline’s husband arrives in Rome to ask Alma to paint a portrait of his wife from a small photograph which he carries with him. The story then traces the fate of this photograph which had once been lost and now in Alma’s hands becomes lost, and found, again.

Caroline, “a tall fair girl of apparently eighteen years of age”, is contrasted with Alma, “one of those quick, energetic personages of whom it may be safely predicted that they will cut some pathway for themselves through the thorny thickets of the world.”\(^{17}\) Alma is described as “short and strong, with dark, curling hair,” and her appearance is compared with Caroline’s: “she formed a complete
contrast to her friend who rose up languid and lily-like beside her." The plot and the character descriptions suggest that the traditionally beautiful young woman, equated with nature by being likened to the delicacy and fragility of a flower, is incapable of worldly success and ultimately even of survival. The plainer woman, by contrast, is described in terms of more robust character traits. The metaphor employed, of Alma, cutting her way through the "thorny thickets" of life, suggests that the woman who is prepared to take an assertive approach to her career, rather than simply wait to be appreciated for her physical charms, is the one more likely to survive. This survival, however, is not without cost. The story suggests that in the young woman’s pursuit of an artistic career, severe losses are incurred. “For success - and success Alma had obtained - is ever mingled with sorrow: the loss of youth, the loss of friends, the loss of hope; - perhaps failure and success are more nearly allied than we imagine.”

The opening scene is located in Studley Park, near Richmond in Victoria in the 1850s, when it was an image of untamed bush. The scene represents “that weirdness and wildness which are so characteristic of Australian scenery”.

In those days a man travelling in the bush might well fancy his own eyes were the first white man’s to gaze on some romantic scene, or indulge the fancy, dear to the poetical spirit ever innate in the human breast, that he stood face to face with untouched nature.

The Australian bush, romanticised and idealised, figures largely in this story and indeed in much of Margaret Thomas’s writing.

Twenty years ago Studley Park was a wild and romantic spot, whose glades the revelry of picnic and pleasure parties invaded during the intense heat of Christmas. The tall white gums, with shattered untidy bark rattling in the fierce hot wind, presided like huge genii over the scene.

It is an idyllic bush, before the advent of civilisation. The picnic domesticates its wildness. The story includes lengthy paragraphs describing the settings, saturating it with the atmosphere of the bush for the purpose of appealing to an English audience. The flora is described in vivid terms:

On the hills and in the valleys the sweet-scented wattle threw its yellow tassels to the breeze, and beneath it blue star-shaped
wildflowers — cyclamen, sundew, purple sarsaparilla, and the scarlet pea — peeped up from the short, crisp grass, where the children looked for the white, sweet manna in the season when it fell.

The sunset captures the imagination of the three young people, Alma, Caroline and John:

All three seemed wrapped in admiring the extreme beauty of the sunset which dyed the rippling waters beneath their feet in the colours of the dying dolphin, gilded the brown leaves of the gum trees with a tinge of red, stretched across the grass like a flood of fire, and crowned the sombre she-oaks with a blaze of glory.

There is no overt indication of the class of the characters in the story, although the relationship between the three characters seems to be a genteel one signifying at least a middle class status. John and Caroline marry and settle in the bush. John becomes a bushman, "burnt brown by the sun and bearded like a pard". Like the character of Charles Summers, the bushman, John, represents the dissolution of class barriers in a colonial environment. At home in the bush he demonstrates the adaptability of the pioneer and a confidence in his relationship to the world of nature.

The description of the bush foregrounding John Walton's appearance as the weathered bushman is vastly different from the initial image of picnics, sunsets and wildflowers. The bush now takes on a more threatening tone. The text is filled with adjectives describing the harshness, rather than the picturesqueness of the Australian landscape:

...round you everywhere, an interminable plain, covered with scorched grass; overhead, the clear Australian sky, palpitating with heat...Fierce blasts of the fiery north wind speed across the plain, and when they come to the road arouse thick clouds of white dust, which either rush along in dense masses, or curl round and round in a kind of vortex, carrying dead leaves high in the air, as if they were enjoying a witches' dance.

The appearance of a snake adds a sinister touch:
But stay! there is something else alive: in the dry grass beside the road a huge snake is curled...with true bushman’s instinct, before it has time to escape, he hits it a heavy blow with his loaded stock-whip...27

The bush becomes a place of uncertainty for the woman. The appearance of the snake is a convenient reminder of its hostility. While the bush itself is romanticised and is portrayed as having a transformative effect on young men, it is malevolent and takes the lives of young women. This Eden is no place for the woman aspiring to be an artist.

Although the bush represents the quintessential Australia for Alma, as a young artist her future career depends on her travelling to Rome to study. The young protagonist sets out to “go and try to make a name for [herself] and be a credit to Victoria.”28 The artist is shown not as departing from one form of civilisation, the town of Melbourne, for another, the city of Rome, but from the mythologised bush to the mythologised past. As in her biography of Summers, Margaret Thomas constructs a mythical account — her protagonist, Alma, passing from one mythological site to another. The natural world is contrasted with the ancient classical world. Rome becomes the antithesis of the Australian bush, and yet shares in the same descriptive language and a similar mythological aura.

Around her were the gigantic ruins of the glorious past: broken column and statue lay at her feet; above her towered the noble pillars which have been for ages the models and admiration of the world.29

The tall Australian gums are equated with the tall Roman pillars, their shattered untidy bark akin to the pieces of broken sculptures scattered on the Roman soil. Rome, unlike the Australian context, is also the site of great historic events.

The Capitol was behind her; the stony road over which Caesar passed in triumph encircled its base; the white and graceful arch which commemorates the victory of Titus over the Jews crowned the nearest height; to the left, the huge bulk of the Colosseum filled an enormous space...30

Alma’s dream is to engage herself completely in a myth of the past. Her Arcadia now exists in ancient Rome, the epitome of civilisation, and no longer in Australia. It seems that Australia’s influence in this regard was beginning to wane. In her
accompanying short story "Victims of Circe", Iota wrote, "somehow, arcadia in the flesh, as it were, right under one's nose, appeals but slightly to the modern mind, especially if this should be a feminine one." Of course, for the visual artist, Rome's attractions were paramount, and becomes the cultural source which had previously been denied to women. The soil which for generations had become eroded under the feet of countless pilgrims, and "is ruins beaten into dust" becomes the ideal destination and a fresh inspirational source for the young woman artist.

Italy, as Roslyn Cooper suggests, was a popular destination for Australian tourists in the late nineteenth century, either as a stopover to Britain, or as a destination in its own right. But they came generally from "the ranks of the Protestant colonial bourgeoisie" and they travelled there, not to experience Italian contemporary society but to participate in the myth of the past. As Nathaniel Hawthorne pointed out, many women artists from America flocked to Rome in this period in an unprecedented spate of migration. He defines the attraction of Rome as offering:

...a glimpse far backward into Arcadian life, or, further still, into the Golden Age, before mankind was burdened with sin and sorrow, and before pleasure had been darkened with those shadows that bring it into high relief, and make it happiness.

Rome becomes for Margaret Thomas and her protagonist Alma, the 'sublime' experience:

Where else on earth is such a scene? Where such poetry, so much grandeur? What memories crowd around the very name! The history of the long centuries during which she has existed is all comprised within the one word - Rome! and the poet and the artist will ever turn to her lovingly, as to the country which is by birthright his home, whatever land may claim him as her own.

In the 1890s when bush mythology was becoming a significant aspect of the visual arts in Australia it seems that the woman artist was to have very little place in this mythology. Alma's choice between Bush or Rome (Nature or Culture) also signified the choice for women between marriage or spinsterhood. Marriage, like the bush, swallowed up women, and ultimately destroyed their independence, if not their life. In this story the bush and marriage are equated, while spinsterhood is linked to the freedom of an independent artistic life.
The photograph of Caroline which forms the central motif of the story is used to convey the idea of loss. As a metaphor for the place of women in a developing Australian mythology the ‘woman in the picture’ is both lost and found throughout this story. Firstly the photograph is lost in the bush after Caroline’s death, but it is found pinned up in a bushman’s hut and then retrieved by her husband. When he brings it to Rome for Alma to paint Caroline’s portrait it is again lost in one of Alma’s letters, but then found by a diligent woman friend.

This theme of the woman’s image (or identity) becoming lost and found within both contexts is revealing. It suggests that the appearance of the woman within these two mythological constructions is uncertain. The woman in nature has to undergo a death if she is to become retrieved as a symbol, and, if she is to find a place within ‘true’ (masculine) culture, she must also firstly lose her identity. Her appearance at the site of antiquity is problematic. Positioned in the act of rediscovering culture she is represented as insignificant in comparison with the immense construct of classical history.

_Here in the Forum, one bright Spring day, a lady artist sat sketching. Around her were the gigantic ruins of the glorious past: broken column and statue lay at her feet; above her towered the noble pillars which have been for ages the models and admiration of the world. The Capitol was behind her; the stony road over which Caesar passed in triumph encircled its base; the white and graceful arch which commemorates the victory of Titus over the Jews crowned the nearest height..._37

In both cases, the Australian and the Roman, the landscape is mythologised, and the woman is positioned within the landscape which dominates and overthrows her with its grandeur. The “huge genii” of the “tall white gums” and the “towering noble pillars” evoke a similar image of phallic power. In each case the woman is diminished in size and stature beside them. The imagined Caesar and his Roman troops adds to an overwhelming sense of history as a masculine experience. The image of the lady artist, sitting and sketching in the Forum, conveys the sense of her diminutiveness in relation to Culture in its grandest sense.

Margaret Thomas often pitched the myth of the bush and colonial life against a construct of the classical past. As an artist she is formed by both processes, and thus has access to two sets of mythologies which, through the descriptive process, blend almost into one. In both they are an idyll, in which women do not fit. Despite
her outward protests, a subtext emerges in which she seems completely at home in neither. The mythic bush destroys women, the myth of Rome leaves the woman artist feeling lost and dissatisfied.

Yet despite her feelings of discomfort the woman artist abroad served a useful purpose within the development of Australian nationalism. She was encouraged to maintain the links with a deeper western tradition in much the same way as women were expected to maintain culture or civilisation within the colony itself. While the men were out forging a new myth within an unknown terrain women artists were maintaining the bonds with the ancestral aesthetic sources of the classical past. They also then became agents in facilitating a double-sided myth that served both the colonials as well as the Britons at home. Straddling two continents their presence and views provided anchorage at both ends.

Reinforcement of this argument is provided by another short story in the anthology entitled “Tragedy in a Studio” by Mrs Patchett Martin. This story also describes the fate of a young Australian woman artist who journeys this time to England to further her studies abroad. The narrative centres around an experience the artist has just prior to her embarkation for Britain. The artist is requested to paint a portrait of a dead woman. The model is a young woman who had died in her father’s bush hut. She was a cultivated woman, signified by the copy of Browning’s poems by her bed. As a consequence of the ordeal of rendering her portrait the protagonist suffers from the recognition that this could have also been her fate if she too were confined to the life of the bush.

The implications of this story are that the genteel woman cannot survive the deprivations of the Australian bush if she does not assert her own creativity in a courageous form. Mere passive absorption of ‘culture’, however sensitive, is not enough to ensure her survival and in the philistine conditions of colonial Australia is more likely to guarantee its opposite. The cultivated woman who brings an awareness of the arts in order to improve the cultural atmosphere, must, if she is to survive herself, embrace these arts actively and assume an authorial voice. Implicitly, she must advance beyond the limitations of amateurism and take up a professional role. In her idealisation of the role of the woman artist this seems to Margaret Thomas to be the only solution to her entrapment within a colonial culture. As Sue Rowley suggests the nationalist myth developing in the 1890s did not allow women to become agents in their own quest but constrained them as objects to the quest of their men. In this story Margaret Thomas suggests that when women do become the protagonists, opting to forfeit direct participation in a
nationalist myth, and leave Australia, they can become agents in a wider mythology.

The closure of the two short stories indicates the precariousness of their position. In "The Tragedy in a Studio" the woman artist, once she disentangles herself from her morbid identification with the model, is free to return to her former stability. She chooses to marry and the conclusion of the story describes the 'happy ending' of her decision. However, there is a final twist in which her identification with the dead model seems to have gone too far. After a passionate embrace (and in a pathetic piece of fiction) she bangs her head and dies. The story seems to imply that marriage equates with death. In Margaret Thomas' story, however, the protagonist is left continuing her career but with the uneasy realisation that artistic success is not what she had imagined and does not provide the resolution to her dilemma.

In both of these stories the impressions which form the memory of the Australian experience are significant. In each the most evocative memory is that of the woman who has perished in the harsh Australian environment. In "The Story of a Photograph" it is the protagonist's close friend who dies after settling in the bush and after childbirth. In "The Tragedy in a Studio" it is the young cultivated woman whose birthday is the same as that of the protagonist. In each story the fate of the cultivated woman, or the woman who retains her interests only at an amateur level, if she is to remain in Australia, is potentially grim. If she identifies too strongly with the young woman in the bush she may also succumb to extinction. The act of leaving Australia for overseas becomes not a whimsical treat for the wealthy artistic woman, or even a wise career move, but is represented as a critical choice for her ultimate survival.

This is the myth which Margaret Thomas builds around the lady artist for narrative purposes and possibly to sustain herself. In comparison with the myth of the male artist in Australia (in Margaret Thomas' case, Charles Summers) the journey is portrayed in reverse. Summers received a thorough education in his craft in England in an art school of high repute. The female artists in these stories are colonials and have received a preliminary artistic education in Australia. In the colonies of the 1890s, this amounts to a faint imitation of that available on the Continent, a mere simulacra of the real. The women are searching for a more authentic education: where they once had access only to a few tatty plaster casts in draughty halls they now look to Rome itself where the very dust constitutes the disintegrated remnants of former masterpieces.
Charles Summers had proven his heroism by his ability to ascend the class ladder through the mastering of his craft. Coming from a working class background his rise to fame suits the standard mythology as I have shown. For the male artist Australia could indeed become the promised El Dorado. In the case of the lady artist her unchanging middle class status throughout the journey does not offer such an easily identifiable barometer of achievement.

The two different paths, however, intersect in Italy. For Charles Summers Rome becomes the culmination of a long period of dedication to art in the colonies, a lengthy spate of participation in the formation of a new cultural outpost. Rome comes as a natural reward for diligence and 'genius'. He thus enters a mythological space where the select few of each generation of artists (men) become canonised on the successful completion of their heroic quest. For the woman Rome is also a mythological site, but it is one to which she is admitted only as student, and is never fully recognised for her independent artistic worth. Her "vagrant footsteps" make little or no impression on the already compacted dust of centuries of art production.

In her poem "Is it a Myth?" Margaret Thomas reinforces her impression of Italy as a mythological site and demonstrates the way in which it satisfies a different need for those (women) "who strove and failed to win". Italy becomes an escape rather than an affirmation of achievement and success. The journey of the expatriate woman artist is therefore not rounded off in a neat closure. She is essentially homeless and, in the active pursuit of her quest, is left unable to complete her task full circle, and return to an "incontestable and determining explanation of beginnings". It is as if she is travelling in the wrong space, attempting to complete a journey that is only partially her own. In "The Story of a Photograph", however, there is the suggestion that the artist will continue her career regardless of this sense of incompletion or failure. She will not be entirely crushed by the weight of history and yet it is unclear where her destination really lies.

In relation to the formation of the myth of Australia the lady artist had a peripheral, though not necessarily insignificant role. Even though she was denied any of the leading parts she was acknowledged as a disembodied voice offstage, calling 'coo-ee' from the wings. As this interjection both embraces and merges the simultaneous conditions of being lost and found, her 'coo-ee' can become both a painful reminder of her experience of separation, as well as providing a signal or contact across the farther reaches of western culture. In the act of searching for but not necessarily finding her deeper connections, she still provides a model of the heroic
gesture. Whether or not she was able to reach her destination in the 1890s, she took the first tentative steps on a quest that other Australian women artists would complete.

Margaret Thomas’ attempt to deal with the predicament of the lady artist in such fashionably romantic terms could have served a number of purposes. The future for the young colonial woman involved a choice, as I have already stated, between the social sanction of marriage, and its less desirable alternative, spinsterhood. Both options involved risks for women and therefore emerged frequently as a motif in women’s literature of the period. In the context of emerging nationalism the choice between marriage and an artistic career for women was equated with the choice between remaining in Australia or returning ‘home’ to Britain.

If Australia offered marriage for women then it did so at a price, as Margaret Thomas considers; but concomitantly, the choice of returning to Britain meant facing the greater possibility of spinsterhood due to the disproportionate number of women there. Britain may have been regarded in the colony as ‘home’ but in an ironic reversal for the single woman ‘going home’ could well mean a life of spinsterhood. In order to provide an alternative to the traditional romanticisation of home and family, it was necessary that the woman intending to become a professional artist build for herself an equivalent ideal. Success or fame as an artist provided this alternative aspiration.

In “The Story of a Photograph” Margaret Thomas suggests that the woman who chooses to search for fame abroad becomes a potentially freer agent than the woman who chooses to contribute to the growth of the nation as ‘mother’. In the masculine construction of Australian character, I would argue that both finally contribute in the role of nurturer. Both act as protectors of cultural values whether they are ensconced in either actual domesticity or positioned geographically at cultural ‘homebase’. Both are defined by their inclusion in the domestic space of culture but in order to reach this space the colonial woman as artist must launch herself on a quest which is both active and dangerous, but which also offers an alternative model of heroism.

Enticed by the lure of culture overseas and by the opportunity for social and cultural ‘improvement’ the young woman artist is led away from the immediate context of the Australian environment and takes the position of cultural intermediary. However, she progressively admits to the ineffectual nature of this role. In the
story Alma tells of her achievements but news of her success does not reach the
"remote part of the bush" where the real Australian myths are formed.42

While she gradually abandons the possibility of deriving any tangible recognition
for her worth, she tends, however, to maintain her links with the Australian
experience as a source of personal renewal. The duality of the "promise of
Australia" sustains the woman artist in a slightly different way to the man. Its
"banality and spiritual starvation" provides her with a reason to leave and a purpose
for beginning her quest; its natural charms provide her with a mythical framework
to which she can resort whenever she needs to restore her imagination, and
wherever in the world she happens to be. Alma's parting words to her friends
endorse this conclusion:

Meanwhile I shall think of you both in your happy bush home, and
sometimes, sometimes, in the midst of all the art treasures of Rome,
almost wish to be once more with you.43

While the Australian bush has claimed her romantic interest, it is clear that its
charms offer the woman artist cold comfort. Rather than remaining in the colony to
grapple with its harshness and to overcome or survive it, the female artist uses the
situation to develop the inner resources which take her away on the beginning of
her personal quest. Her artistic talents lead her away from rather than towards the
colonial context. She thus becomes an agent in the interpretation of the new nation
from the viewpoint of the expatriate, and this role is not insignificant. As Graeme
Turner suggests the formation of the nation's narratives is not dependent on the
author's birthplace or in what country she wrote "but rather by the bank of
ideologically framed myths, symbols, connotations and contextual associations
upon which [she draws]".44

The female artist's search for fame in the wider world also serves another purpose.
Success and fame had traditionally been incentives for the public sector
professionals who "for the most part focussed on the non-monetary rewards, on
honour, fame or power."45 The possession of ambition set the woman artist apart
from her genteel lady companions for whom a proficiency in the arts demonstrated
their class status rather than their propensity towards a career. 'Fame' became one
of the catchcries of the women writers of romantic fiction and their young heroines
were very often in search of it. Gilbert and Gubar's treatment of Charlotte Bronte's
ambition also discusses the accompanying "secret inward wound" which it
opens.46 Margaret Thomas' protagonist, Alma, finds the success she is after, but
ultimately feels dissatisfied. This sense of dissatisfaction echoes Margaret Thomas' personal experience which she alludes to in her poetry.47

"The Story of a Photograph" suggests that the Australian colonial experience had a profound influence on Margaret Thomas' identity and particularly on her identity as an artist. The experience of migration and return offered her the opportunity to equate the literal aspect of her journey and cultural experience with the mythologised heroic passage of the artist. Her colonial sojourn provided her with a framework in which to test her personal and spiritual survival mechanisms against the formidable environment of the goldrush community. Shipped literally to the ends of the earth to a topsy-turvy land where social values were turned frequently on their heads the young woman discovers personal strengths that will last her lifetime.

Furthermore, she discovers these strengths without recourse to the traditional female roles of marriage and maternity. She emerges as a New Woman in the 1890s but one who has utilised the colonial experience, rather than adventures in sexuality, as her rite of passage. In doing so she earns respect and the right to be classed as a lady in the most elite circles. This initiation, and particularly her independent return to the homeland and a career, overrides the protective nature of her bourgeois upbringing. In a sense she has made an equivalent claim to become an artist as did Charles Summers in his rise from the working classes. Her colonial experience, from this mythical point of view, has empowered her.

Conversely, however, the colonial experience has exposed the flaws in the ideological construct of the patriarchy which work against the needs of the woman artist. She has come up against the incompatibilities and contradictions within ideology which Catherine Belsey calls the partial truths.48 As this interpretation of The Story of a Photograph suggests, the contradictions exposed in her mimicry of the heroic artist's passage leave her lost and uncertain, unsure of the relevance of this borrowed myth to the real conditions of her existence. As much as she would like to represent the lady artist entirely in a professional capacity, and as serving the cultural development of the community in a heroic form, she finds that the inbuilt limitations of a patriarchal ideology constrain the woman artist and do not grant her full professional recognition. The woman artist is left vaguely dissatisfied but never sure of why she feels this way. While Margaret Thomas recognises that a singularly amateur or genteel approach to the arts is not enough for the woman to prosper in the colonial environment, her move towards professionalism does not grant her the satisfaction she had expected.
1 Of these women Tasma', Lotta and Rosa Praed have all succeeded in gaining strong reputations as Australian women writers even though they only spent a portion of their lives in Australia, and much of their writing, although on Australian themes, was produced in Europe. See Dale Spender's Writing a New World: Two Centuries of Australian Women Writers (London: Pandora, 1988) and The Penguin Anthology of Australian Women Writers (Ringwood, Vic: Penguin, 1988).


3 Patricia Clarke, Pen Portraits: Women Writers and Journalists in Nineteenth Century Australia (London: Pandora, 1988) 156.


5 Shaw 4


9 Cunningham 3.

10 Sydney Morning Herald, 23 May 1891.


14 The relationship between expatriate women writers and the colonial experience was influenced through these and other anthologies such that by 1905 The Englishwomen's Yearbook was recommending colonial journalism for women writers who had lived in the colonies and returned home. Writing for the colonial papers afforded a better salary than what was generally offered "by working for the home papers only".

15 Patchett Martin, Introduction.

16 Fisher 3.

17 "Thomas, "The Story of a Photograph" 258.

18 "Thomas, "The Story of a Photograph" 258.

19 "Thomas, "The Story of a Photograph" 264.

20 "Thomas, "The Story of a Photograph" 257.

21 "Thomas, "The Story of a Photograph" 257.

22 "Thomas, "The Story of a Photograph" 258.

23 "Thomas, "The Story of a Photograph" 258.

24 "Thomas, "The Story of a Photograph" 258.

25 "Thomas, "The Story of a Photograph" 258.

26 "Thomas, "The Story of a Photograph" 260.

27 "Thomas, "The Story of a Photograph" 261.


29 "Thomas, "The Story of a Photograph" 263.

30 "Thomas, "The Story of a Photograph" 263.

31 Patchett Martin 115.

34 Pesman Cooper 47.
35 Hawthorne 62.
36 Thomas, "The Story of a Photograph" 264.
37 Thomas, "The Story of a Photograph" 262.
39 See chapter one, page 33.
42 Thomas, "The Story of a Photograph" 265.
43 Thomas, "The Story of a Photograph" 260.
47 See chapter six for a further development of this theme.
CHAPTER 5

THE WANDERING PROFESSIONAL:
TRAVEL AND THE LADY ARTIST

In the 1890s Margaret Thomas set out on a period of travel which was to span, intermittently, nearly two decades. She recorded her expeditions in both visual and literary form in a series of illustrated travel books. These were *A Scamper Through Spain and Tangier*, published in 1892, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* (1900) and *Denmark, Past and Present* (1902). She also illustrated *From Damascus to Palmyra* (1908), accompanying the author, the Rev. John Kelman and his team on a tour of the Holy Lands. She generally travelled accompanied by a fellow lady artist. By all accounts, this companion appears to have been Henrietta Pilkington.

Throughout these travelogues Margaret Thomas makes a conscious choice to define herself as an artist rather than a tourist, a professional rather than an amateur observer of cultures. She begins her first travelogue, *A Scamper Through Spain and Tangier*, with the following definition of herself and her companion:

*Being artists, we considered it would be advantageous to study the paintings of the immortal Valesquez, and, for the same reason, had to do it as economically as possible. In common with many others we had heard dreadful accounts of Spain, of the badness and dearness of the food there, of the brigands and of the cholera, and of the difficulties of all kinds attending travellers—reports which have prevented many otherwise adventurous persons unprovided with a full purse from penetrating there; but we, two lady artists, decided to risk all this, and try with our moderate means to accomplish what the rich only usually undertake.*

Nevertheless, while she attempts to separate herself from the wealthy traveller, it becomes apparent that she draws on the advantages of her class and race in relation to other cultures. As this chapter will demonstrate, the tradition of travel as a preoccupation of the dilettante is woven into Margaret Thomas’ ideological position and has a particular bearing on the way in which she interprets her experience. As a ‘lady traveller’ she belongs to a tradition which reflected the imperialist rule of Britain, a world, in Mary Pratt’s terms, in which “class and race and privilege is presupposed”. Margaret Thomas is, to a certain degree, aware of this. But she
also travels as an artist and her intention is to utilise travel to reinforce her professional development. This chapter will argue that she draws equally strongly on both her professional background and on her elite status, and that each provide fortification for her role as an observer of cultures. In her travels her race, class and professional status empower her, but her gender often undermines her position. The resulting conflict in her identity negotiation is revealed at various points throughout her travel writing. This chapter will also examine the visual material which accompanies her travel texts.

The conflicting aspects of her identity are reinforced by the ideological differences between her own culture and those she visits. Margaret Thomas observes through the eyes of an educated and comparatively wealthy British colonial woman. She takes note of the customs, art and architecture of different cultures but also observes social issues such as those associated with poverty and the treatment of women. When she discusses these issues she does so from conflicting perspectives. On the one hand she deplores the condition of the poor and the plight of women, but alternately sees them as colourful artistic subjects.

In the act of observing she is also being observed and frequently makes the reader aware of the ways in which she is viewed by the inhabitants of the cultures she visits. She is seen by them on various occasions as an unnatural woman or a substitute male, as a fool or at least an oddity. The fact that she travels often without male protection, accompanied only by a female companion, Henrietta Pilkington, reinforces these judgements about her; but she defiantly works against the traditional confinement of women within the private space. This chapter will trace her travel writing in terms of her identity formation and will examine to what extent both the amateur tradition of the ‘lady traveller’ and her professional status combine to overcome the social limitations of her gender.

The experience of migration had prepared Margaret Thomas, as it did many colonials, for the adventure of travel. Despite her protestation that she had been a "wild, sad wand’rer from [her] early days", she seems to have thoroughly enjoyed the process of travel.6 The Italian experience had filtered through into her poetry and had retained a mystical and mythological aura. In her travels to the exotic lands, however, she turned to prose to grapple with the strangeness of foreign cultures.

In one of her travelogues Margaret Thomas used a quotation from Sir Richard Burton, the famed nineteenth century traveller, “voyaging is victory” which reflected not only the personal advantages of travel but also the wider concept of
imperialism. The victory that Margaret Thomas could claim, wandering from place to place, was a personal sense of power in relation to the world. By travelling openly in the very public spaces of cultures very different from her own and negotiating her way amongst all classes and many religious, political and cultural groups, she would most certainly have developed her personal skills to a great degree. In an age which celebrated the ‘angel in the house’ and which tried to keep women of her class enclosed in a private domestic space her ability to negotiate the wider world of foreign cultures was quite remarkable. Of course, she was one of a number of women who were undertaking travel in a similar way at this time.

In the course of these travels her activities bear a resemblance to the role of the *exploratrice sociale*, in Mary Pratt’s definition, “the exploratory activity identified with urban middle-class women of the early nineteenth century.” Like these earlier women whose social reform work took them to a variety of institutions, Margaret Thomas visits factories, prisons, harems, schools and many religious institutions in an attempt to perforate the barriers between cultures.

Margaret Thomas states that her purpose in these travel books is to record “just the simple impressions and experience of an artist, and not the profound reflections of an archaeologist, the conclusions of a historian, or the romantic visions of a poet”. In *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* she says “I have no theory to support, no opinions to sustain.” However, it is clear that neither does she wish to be seen so simply that she be regarded as a tourist. She implies that the artist as ‘trained eye’, observer and illustrator, has an authority which the tourist lacks. The artist’s skill relates to the visual perception of cultural difference but as far as she is concerned, this does not incorporate an analysis of these differences.

The activity of travel becomes a vital part of her professional development. In a period prior to the reproduction of artwork on a massive scale a thorough knowledge of the visual arts was dependent on the ability to travel, particularly in those countries in which classical art was found in its original state. Margaret Thomas’ expertise and reputation was greatly enhanced because she could boast a familiarity with the great masterpieces scattered throughout the museums of Europe and the archeological sites of Asia Minor. Her accumulated knowledge incorporated a familiarity with the painting, sculpture and architecture of this wide domain.

As Arthur Patchett Martin states in the preface to *A Scamper Through Spain and Tangier*, Margaret Thomas, “with her fresh and unpretentious notes and sketches”, needed no introduction in the field of letters and art. The development of her
reputation was one of the major achievements of this period of travel but, as this chapter will demonstrate, it becomes clear through her writing that her sense of herself as a professional artist was still in the process of development during this period. In defining herself as a professional she needed to come to terms with the elements which distinguished the traveller as artist from the traveller as tourist. In a similar way to her earlier need to prove herself as something more than just an amateur lady artist, she now needed to distinguish herself from the hordes of English tourists which were found in so many parts of the globe at this time. Her status as a combined artist/writer would give weight to this claimed difference.

As Malcolm Crick points out, in the relationship between professions which purport to evaluate the ‘otherness’ of different cultures (he discusses anthropology) and the practice of tourism, there is a very close resemblance in the means they employ; both take home what they want from the Other. In relation to these professions tourism has traditionally been seen as an inauthentic activity, the tourist being cast as amateur as opposed to the professional observer of cultures. The artist, in a similar category to the anthropologist, must strive to prove that the travel experience is something more than a self indulgent pleasure seeking activity and has meaningful cultural currency.

In the nineteenth century the travel genre’s open nature contributed to making it a rich source of ideas. The traveller’s tale was a frequent recourse for the expression of a whole range of concerns from the geographical, biographical, scientific and historical to the aesthetic. Margaret Thomas focuses on the people, art and architecture and incorporates titbits of social, historical, geographical and anecdotal information. She also makes use of the form to explore issues that relate to her personally and professionally. In an attempt to weigh up her own place as a professional woman she is drawn to study the lifestyles and conditions of women in other cultures. As a result her artistic observations of women play a very important role in her travel books.

The rationale behind the representation of the Orient in an artistic form was that the essential ‘colour’ and individuality of the East was disappearing in the wake of westernisation. Margaret Thomas was one of an army of literati who attempted to document the external evidence of cultural difference before it was swamped by the insidious sameness of the West. She states:

*Before the country is transformed, before the Bedhouin is replaced by the European colonist, the camel by the railway, the tent by the*
suburban villa, and the khan by the hotel, I propose to endeavour to depict by means of pen and pencil a likeness, as it were, of the Palestine and Syria of today, and so far as possible, from a secular point of view.  

The preoccupation with the outward manifestations of cultural difference was a characteristic of the travel writing of the period. This was to be criticised later as a superficial form of documentation. In 1915 Clayton Cooper in a text called *The Modernising of the Orient* stated that the travel books that proliferated on booksellers’ shelves “relate to the dress and outward customs rather more than to the structure of the civilisation”. In the light of more recent theory this ethnographic preoccupation, when read more closely, can be interpreted as indicating possibly more about the author’s culture and the power of the ‘Imperial Gaze’ than about the culture under observation. The travel text as a representation, not a mirror of the Oriental world, is then treated as a coded and rhetorical form which articulates the social relations between cultures.

As an artist Margaret Thomas saw her role as capturing and portraying the ‘local colour’ of the cultures with which she comes in contact. One of the strategies employed by nineteenth century travel writers was to verbally create images in the reader’s imagination that were akin to paintings. Mary Pratt discusses the viewer-painting relationship as a key factor in the “monarch-of-all-I-survey” trope which predominated the genre’s form at the time. In this trope the owner of the colonial gaze maintains a power over the scene he or she surveys which reflects the inherent power relations involved in the political relationship between first and third-world cultures. As both visual artist and writer, Margaret Thomas employs both means in a way that reinforces these inherent power relations.

In the vocabulary of the visual artist the descriptor ‘local colour’ has a specific meaning and one which can be particularly relevant when applied to the nineteenth century travel writer. ‘Local colour’, according to the *Longman Dictionary of Art* is “the actual colour of an object or surface; the colour an object reflects under white light, unaffected by shadows or reflections from surrounding objects.” In her search for local colour Margaret Thomas assumes that the images before her are natural and correct under the reflection of her ‘white’ imperial gaze. What she often finds difficult to accommodate is that her own presence as a woman artist can colour the scene around and the reactions of the inhabitants of that scene.

Her painting of the Jaffa Gate conveys a picturesque scene of a marketplace
entrance to an oriental city. It suggests the richness of the costumes, the ‘colour’ of the characters and the ancient but solid structure of the architecture. It employs hues which convey a raw and brilliant light and an intense heat. It is designed within a vertical rectangular frame, allowing a portrayal of the relationship between the figures and the architecture. The artist’s line of vision is elevated above and overlooking the scene. The result is a feeling of detachment from the scene; a ‘safe’ distance is created between observer and observed. The figures are small in relation to the picture as a whole, adding to the feeling of distance between the observer and the characters practising their daily trade. There is no suggestion that the observer is at all involved in the activities of the marketplace. This image reinforces the cultural distance between the occidental observer and the oriental subject.

Margaret Thomas tends to convey visual images through this form of trained detachment, but occasionally she relates the feeling of being caught up within a whirlpool of Oriental experiences. On reaching Jerusalem she describes “the quarrelling, shouting, pushing, screaming, pulling, swearing, and striking which is the inevitable experience of every traveller who sets foot in an Oriental city.”18 She complains of offensive smells and of the “high-toned, nasal, quivering voice peculiar to Orientals.”19 Standing as if in the middle of a three hundred and sixty degree arc of Otherness she occasionally allows herself to be jostled by the strangeness of the experience. But on the whole, her training and general acculturation maintains her within a separate sphere. Only occasionally does she describe a sense of being caught up in the experience. When this occurs the experience is highly uncomfortable and tends to be related to senses other than the visual.

Treating the sights as a picture plane before her eyes she often uses the terms ‘scene’ and ‘panorama’. In Jerusalem she describes “the varied costumes moving like a panorama, before the eyes of the traveller.”20 When referring to the beggars and lepers in the town she comments on how their “importunate insistence frequently mars the traveller’s enjoyment as he gazes on the scenes he has so long dreamed of and travelled so far to see.”21 The beggars and lepers spoil the scene like ugly spots of mould would spoil a treasured oil painting. She creates no paintings of these individuals.

Her painterly approach to the cultures she visits is a product of her artistic training, but there are other ways in which she attempts to define herself as a professional artist and travel writer. Firstly, she differentiates herself from the class of elite who travel internationally in a show of wealth and privilege. In “[trying] with [her]
"The Jaffa Gate, or Babel Khalil, The Gate of the Friend of Hebron"

Two Years in Palestine and Syria
moderate means to accomplish what the rich only usually undertake” she adds “[the] plutocrat travels from hotel to hotel, and meets only his own kind; we will go from casa de huespedes to casa de huespedes and study the Spanish people”.22 In her preface to Two Years in Palestine and Syria she quotes Luiz de Morales on the virtues of frugality.

Each man’s happiness depends upon himself and his ability for doing with little. The world has not yet learned the riches of frugality. If a man knows how to spend less than his income he has the philosopher’s stone.23

By virtue of her attempts at simplicity she argues that she and her friend qualify to make the authentic observations which are denied to the rich, who only meet with their own kind. She therefore plays down her class status and celebrates her professional status as a more authentic viewing position. She constructs a relationship with the Spanish and Palestinian peasants which is intended to appear roughly egalitarian and non-exploitative in comparison with that between the wealthy tourists and their poorer hosts. Her construction is based on the assumption that the ‘poor’ or ‘bohemian’ artist can more easily relate to the deprivations of poverty than the habitually indulged rich. Yet this is a false analogy. Her position as a portraitist of elite London society places her far out of the income range of the Spanish peasants. But the bohemian artist affected to spurn mundane needs like income in a fever of creative activity and therefore the artist’s consequent financial instability would mitigate against luxurious or expensive travel.

Given the tentative nature of her claim for legitimacy as an observer it is questionable that she has any real understanding of the lives of the peasants whom she describes. While she is attempting to discard a colonial attitude she makes her true feelings apparent with statements about the poor being ‘happy in their own way’. She contrasts Spanish poverty, idealised and colourfully romanticised, with the British poverty generated by industrialisation. Poverty exoticised becomes an exciting object of artistic study.

The poverty of the Spaniards is conspicuous on every side - it almost excites compassion; yet they do seem happy - happier than we are in our wealthy island....and...As in most foreign countries I have visited, the lower classes seem to lead happy and contented lives: they have their fair share of the good things of this life... Nowhere is seen the sordidness and hopelessness of English
She also refers to class differences and compares them with those in Britain. In Spain she observes "the familiarity (never impudent) of servants with their masters" and comments "there is none of the absurd slavishness in which it is supposed to be the thing to keep English servants ... and the servant is acknowledged to be a fellow-creature."  

Her emphasis on class is a key factor in the determination of her identity formation. While she attempts to celebrate the dissolution of class differences she often benefits by the advantages of her class position during her travels. She reminds the reader frequently of how she tries not to take advantage of this position, but nonetheless does not seek to disrupt the status quo. As she does with the poor, she also describes servants as 'happy in their own way' and thus does not seriously contest the master-servant relationship. This lack of serious challenge implies that, while she finds some points of class distinction to criticise, she has no personal need or desire to abolish its basic assumptions. Extending from this argument her own status as a 'dilettante' or 'lady traveller' is kept intact. For Margaret Thomas, her class is equally as useful as her professional status in allowing her access to experiences beyond those normally available for women.

Her visual and literary portrait studies also reveal the conflicting aspects of her artistic training as it impinges on her cultural standpoint. In Spain she attends the bullfight and describes "the disgraceful scene" with a predictable sense of outrage:

...the horses were absolutely disembowelled, and the brutes of men remounted these poor beasts and continued to ride them with their bowels laying half a yard out...At the sound of the trumpet the poor animals were withdrawn, I hoped to be killed, but I have since heard that they are sewn up for another day's sport.  

She and her friend "could bear no more" and left. The scene, she says "is not for English eyes"; she notes that very few women were present.

The visual studies she makes of the bullfighters, the "banderilleros", however, contain nothing of this outrage. The line drawing of a banderillero demonstrates an ineffectual gesture, hardly the fierce, threatening and brutish performance that she describes in her words. The fact that there is no suggestion of the bull in the picture detracts considerably from the emotional impact of the image. The portrait study "A
Spanish Peasant”, which also accompanies the text, lacks any suggestion of Margaret Thomas’ emotional reaction to the occupation of her sitter. Rather she tends to rely on the costume as the subject matter for her study, instead of the character of the sitters or her personal response to them. This example conveys the impression that her formal artistic training has not provided her with the ability to connect her emotional reaction to her visual observation. Consequently, there is an internal split between her role as visual observer, coolly but ineffectually rendering the figure objectified, and her emotional and very human response to the cruel treatment of another species.

Though the draughtsmanship describes the forms well there is a sameness about the composition of this and the majority of other portrait studies. The subjects are mostly posed centrally within the picture frame in attitudes that reflect their occupation. For example, a snake charmer has a snake raised to his mouth and a Moorish girl poses with a vessel on her shoulder. But there is no attempt to relate these figures to a context; the backgrounds are simply scrubbed in areas of paint and in the pen and ink sketches there is no description of a background. Separated from their context and painted without regard for reflected light or shadow, these studies exemplify the argument about the extended interpretation of the term ‘local colour’ in relation to the travel artist. Margaret Thomas is careful to paint the costume details and describe their ‘actual’ colour but her design of these portrait
“A Spanish Peasant”
A Scamper Through Spain and Tangier
studies tends to create the figures as specimens or types in an overall typology of the Other.

Contrasting with the portrait studies are her many architectural studies. In these, figures are included, but are small and indeterminate. Only occasionally does she portray a scene in which the inhabitants are shown in a more complete relationship with their surroundings. "The Wailing Place of the Jews" is one such example where a dozen figures are placed in an attitude of lamentation against a stone wall structure. Adhering to the principles of two point perspective the figures are sufficiently small in the picture plane so as to place the observer comfortably apart from the emotional context of the situation. The Wailing Wall image becomes a study in the curiosity of foreign customs rather than a portrayal of any real sense of emotion. The distance that Margaret Thomas indicates is perhaps not surprising considering the contrasting nature of English emotion; this intense public expression of emotion and its institutionalised nature is in sharp contrast with the 'stiff upper lip' of her cultural background.

Occasionally she does attempt a more insightful portrait study. She is introduced to Rabbi Moses ben Abraham, the Rabbi of the Karaite Jews and after the formal introductory ceremonies are over produces a portrait of him which conveys a sense of his wisdom and sensitivity. This portrait employs a head and shoulder study rather than the full body and is rather odd considering that she said of the Rabbi that he "consented to sit for the picture which helps to illustrate this book 'in order' he said, 'that future generations might know what he wore".28

Now and again she reminds the reader that she is also under scrutiny. Sketching in the street she becomes as much an object of curiosity as the peasants are to the tourist. However, the tools of her trade, easel, paints and paintbrush, set her apart from the common tourist. The uncomfortable sense she relates of being watched while trying to proceed with her professional occupation reciprocates the usual relationship between tourists and their host cultures and authenticates her position as an empathic observer. She describes sketching in the street as a "trial of temper" in which "the boys are a nuisance" but if "one is good-natured sketching is quite possible around Madrid".29 This assumption of a tolerant attitude approximates the stance that host cultures must take towards invasive tourist communities in order to continue functioning near normally. The process of sketching (generally more time consuming than the twentieth century activity of tourist photography) temporarily places the artist, in the act of observing, also as the subject of observation.
She records the sense of invasion made towards the tourist in the process of baggage checking. The examination of baggage is redolent of a clinical medical examination and conveys the emotional distance of the English woman traveller:

But the examination of our baggage was conducted with the utmost liberality and courtesy: gentlemen just thrust their gloved hands lightly into our boxes, chalked a mark on the outside, and all was over. Rather different from the account I read lately in a French book as to how a lady threw handfuls of gold to guitar-playing officials to bribe them to let her luggage pass! 30

In all of the above examples, both literary and visual, Margaret Thomas’ identity is defined by her emotional distance, by the protective devices which her social and artistic training has given her. While she admits occasionally to a sense of emotional involvement, her general emotional imperturbability, conveyed through the medium of her art, provides her with a protective mantle that neutralises her personal presence, rendering her a detached observer.

In her last travel book Denmark, Past and Present she seems to be much more aware of the nature of her own presence and introduces the book with a poem by Havamal of Odin the Old. She indicates her awareness of the sometimes presumptuous and foolish aspirations of the traveller. It reads as follows:

Good sense is needful
To the far traveller,
Each place seems home to him.
He is a laughing-stock,
Who, knowing nothing,
Sits 'mid the wise.

On the whole, though, she loses sight of the reciprocal nature of this relationship between tourist and host and her preconceptions based on her white, middle class and British position are predominant. Mostly she sees the characteristics of the Other as more significant than her own. In cultures where the role of women is defined purely in economic and sexual terms Margaret Thomas as a woman artist would have been seen as an unnatural woman — if not a fool, then at least an oddity and sometimes a burden and a threat. Occasionally she admits to being the object of curiosity or the butt of a joke but mostly adheres to the position of power delineated by the figure of European as dominant outsider. The sight of a young
"Snake Charmer"
*A Scamper Through Spain and Tangier*
"The Wailing Place of the Jews at the Ancient Wall of the Temple"

*Two Years in Palestine and Syria*
“Moses Ben Abraham, the Rabbi of the Karaite Jews”

Two Years in Palestine and Syria
Turkish man with European aspirations becomes an inversion of her own situation.

_There is no sight more ridiculous than that of a Turkish 'masher', or youth who has European aspirations. Over his petticoats he wears an English cut coat, encases his feet in elastic-side boots, and on his head remains the inevitable tarbush. Drinking wine and spirits regardless of the injunctions of the Prophet, he believes himself equal to the European he affects to despise._

The English cut coat over the Turkish man's 'petticoats' becomes a metaphor for the equally curious image of the woman artist. Over her petticoats, a symbol of European femininity, is a mantle of masculinity implied by the authoritative implements of brush and easel. She feels uncomfortable at the sight of his mixture of customs, and yet is unable to draw an analogy with her own.

The image she portrays of the 'intrepid' lady traveller, while presenting a disturbing view of woman in some of the countries she visits, nonetheless ratifies her position as a capable professional and separates her again from the 'common' tourist. She recounts a number of situations in which the term 'intrepid' could readily be applied to her. Disembarking from the ship at the port of Jaffa is a perilous experience for her and her female friend. Considering that she was not a young woman but nearing fifty the experience seems all the more courageous.

_Our captain feared we should not be able to land because the waves ran, as the saying is, mountains high, and the snowy surf dashed wildly over the black sullen rocks which stand, eternal sentinels, before the port. The vessel would have carried us on to Beyrout had landing not been possible, an event of frequent occurrence during the winter months on this coast, so unprovided with natural bays or artificial shelter. Happily good-fortune attended us, and the gallant Jaffa boatmen, perhaps the best in the world, succeeded in bringing a large boat close to the steamer. I was literally thrown by a man on the ship into the arms of another in the boat, who had to wait until the crest of one of the huge waves carried him within twenty feet of the deck to catch me, the result being that I found myself at the bottom of the boat amid all my belongings (which were thrown in before), saturated with salt and fresh water, for it was beginning to rain heavily... A dragoman enlivened the rough journey with an account of how seventy lives had lately been lost._

in an attempt to land at that storm-ridden port.\textsuperscript{32}

She compares her own situation with that of the "poor Russian and Coptic pilgrims on the deck, who had looked during the voyage like animated bales of merchandise".\textsuperscript{33} The Russian pilgrims form an interesting group in the town of Jaffa, where Jews, Muslims and Christians congregate. She is touched by their devotion and enthusiasm, which has led them all this way in the name of their religion.\textsuperscript{34} Yet she fails to acknowledge her own pilgrimage in the name of art. She is equally as strange in a city full of strangers, and yet continues to relay the experience as if all the curiosities lay outside of herself in the domain of the exotic.

Her observation of the attitude of the nomadic Bedhouins seems to indicate an insight into her own attitudes. She describes the relationship between the Bedhouins and the village Arabs as a demonstration of the psychological and attitudinal positions formed as a result of differing social and economic realities. The Bedhouins, she says "look down upon and despise" the villagers, whom they feel have static and predictable lives.\textsuperscript{35} As nomads the Bedhouins retain the ability to stand outside as observers, in much the same way as all travellers can look upon and criticise the habits of more static creatures. By placing herself in a position of superiority as a 'professional observer' she often falls into a similar mode of perception.

Being an artist and a 'lady' she is given certain privileges and recognition by authorities in a way that would have been unavailable to her otherwise. Her profession and her status act as talismans, keys to her right of passage through foreign cultures. In Jerusalem she is firstly spat upon when she visits a synagogue but returns a few days later "through the influence of a Jewish acquaintance" and is admitted to the central platform during a principle festival, the Feast of Tabernacles. Here she is given privilege over the Jewish women who had to sit behind barriers to watch.\textsuperscript{36} In Denmark she comments "the fact that I was a painter aroused the hostess's friendliest feelings" and she is given permission to visit the Gedhus, the Goat-House or local prison.\textsuperscript{37} As she was able to move within an elite in both Melbourne and London society, so in her travels she possessed the skill of meeting influential and important people wherever she visited.

In a Jewish girls' school she requests an opportunity to paint a young Jewish girl and her request is granted. But in her attempt sets up a confusing situation which becomes a farce in cross-cultural misinterpretation:
Anxious to secure the type of a young Jewess for one of my pictures, I asked the mistress of a Jewish Girl’s day School to allow me to sketch one of her pupils. I borrowed a few yellow beads which were on the neck of a Christian teacher (also a Jewess), and a white handkerchief from another girl, and put them on the throat of the child I had chosen to see the effect. It was then arranged that I should commence work the next day. But when I arrived I found one of the pupils (jealous perhaps that she was not the chosen one), had told the Rabbis that I had dressed the child up as Christ, and was about to worship her. The Rabbis told the mother that the mere act of painting her (photographing they called it in their ignorance) would make the child a Christian, and that if she permitted it to be done they would turn her out of her house and burn it. She appeared on the scene in hot haste, had beaten the girl, and said ‘Not for a hundred pounds would she allow her to be painted’. She threatened to withdraw her child from the school, and watched most narrowly till I was safely off the premises, a move I hastened to make for fear of compromising the most obliging teacher. Such are the obstacles to painting in Jerusalem at the present day.38

This tale with its references to the power of the image and representation in general and its further connotations of heresy, witch burning and the impersonation of the Christ, makes it a veritable cornucopia of cultural misrepresentation. Margaret Thomas’ assumption that as an artist she had the power to manipulate the model into any position or place her in a costume of her choice, an innocent strategy in the repertoire of a western portrait painter, was seen, in the context of the Middle East as dangerously invasive and inappropriate. This seemingly innocent strategy, however, concealed class differences and she had assumed that this class relationship could be directly translated into a racial form. In terms of Edward Said’s thesis, she was also ‘creating’ Orientalism, a process whereby Western cultures produce images of the Orient that have more to do with Western expectations and needs than with the Oriental cultures themselves.39

Apart from the occasional faux pas Margaret Thomas finds considerable power and justification in her role as an artist in her travels. The situations which most illustrate this sense of power but also its problematic nature are the ones in which she subjects women to her artistic gaze. Perched behind her easel as a strange, foreign woman Margaret Thomas’s observations of women are particularly
“Fountain, Patio de las Naranjas, Cordoba”
A Scamper Through Spain and Tangier
revealing. They are perhaps the most important preoccupations of her travelogues in which she attempts to distinguish herself as a female artist from woman as the object of art.

For an Anglo-Australian woman trained in a masculine tradition of art, the oriental woman becomes an ideal subject. Distanced by virtue of nationality or race Margaret Thomas can observe women in the way she has been trained without undue reflection on her own position. She comments on women as victims and beasts of burden. "Women and donkeys do nearly all the work in Spain", she says. As an overall observation she adds "When shall this slavery, or rather suppression of women, come to an end in the East?"

But, in contrast, she comments that the work women do adds to their physical charms:

> The women are beautiful and quite classical in feature... They have that grand undulation of carriage which is only attained by the practice of carrying heavy weights on the head, and wearing very slight or no shoes... The act of carrying water is always one of the most graceful imaginable — I have remarked in many places the different ways in which it is done. A Capri woman puts her large jar on her head and supports it with one hand nearly to its brim, in Spain it is carried on the hip, in Sicily one of the handles is held by a hand across the head, the jar being on the opposite shoulder, at Ain Karim it is kept in its place by the two hands raised behind, while the women by the Nile balance the great weight without any support whatsoever.  

Remarkably, she regards the carrying of heavy burdens as a beauty treatment, and adds "I think if I had a school for English girls, I would make carrying weights on the head one of the principal exercises in deportment."

Unresolved aspects of the relationship between the observer and the observed persistently interfere with the security of her racial superiority. Admitted into a harem in Tangier she is again thrown into a conundrum. She comments on the predicament of the women in the harem with condescension, but acknowledges the reversal of opinion. "Poor creatures" she says, "they looked happy, perfectly vacant-minded, and laughed merrily with and at us." In these descriptions she is clearly seeing herself as foreign to the women she observes but there is an
uneasiness in her attempt to differentiate herself from them. In a description of a synagogue she says “Jewesses had to look on through closed lattice work, as ladies do in the House of Commons”.45 She makes an unusual analogy between Jewish and English women which suggests an equation between the predicament of women in terms of their lack of political influence in both cultures.

She is sensitive to the injustices done to women in different cultures and comments on the abuse of women in the name of religion. She discusses the anxiety for male offspring in the Jewish community and the consequent fate of Jewish women, and is thankful, as are the men, that she is not one of them. She cites one particular example of a woman giving birth to two girls followed by a set of girl twins, being abused so violently by her husband that she died.46

However, in her aesthetic observations she objectifies women herself. She searches for physical beauty in both women and men, and comments on the women’s physical flaws. Of Spanish women she says “their faces are very beautiful, but they are nearly all short and large-headed, which, artistically speaking are great faults.”47 In a Spanish tobacco factory she describes the working girls:

About five thousand girls are there, seated at low tables, making cigars and cigarette, chattering and laughing the whole time, and dressed, or rather undressed in the gayest colours. They take off their dresses, boots, &c., on entering, and hang them around the room; some keep flowers in their hair, others put them in water to keep fresh till they leave their work.48

There is an air of moral and sexual freedom conveyed in this image. Flowers worn in the hair signify this same sensual freedom. However, she notes “sometimes, I am very sorry to say, [these flowers are] made of paper.49 The foreign woman exoticised and eroticised becomes an ideal that sometimes bears touches of inauthenticity.

The image conveyed of Margaret Thomas and her friend, middle class Englishwomen, surveying a tobacco factory full of half-dressed working women has all the signs and the classic patterns of Imperialism. In this case the artist is entertained as the honoured visitor representing an imperial culture which had proven itself in its industrial and economic development as Spain’s superior. The artist’s impressions are given a status in accordance with her race. Also her gender is important. If a middle class Englishwoman approves of the working conditions
“A Spanish Girl”
A Scamper Through Spain and Tangier
of Spanish proletarian women, then, as in the case of the earlier *exploratrices sociales*, her approval signifies a humanitarian stamp on the factory conditions. Margaret Thomas does approve and comments on the cheerfulness of the workers. Furthermore, she equates their ability to work ‘undressed’ not only as an indicator of their comparative sexual freedom, but also of their sexual security. The workers apparently feel so comfortable and safe that they can remove their dresses without fear of sexual harassment.

The stereotype of the sensual exotic woman appears to manifest all the suppressed elements of an Englishwoman’s upbringing. As an artist operating as the monarch-of-all-she-surveys Margaret Thomas can ‘possess’ the exotic while safely maintaining her racial superiority. One of her more ludicrous but telling statements regarding the objectification of the exotic woman appears almost as a Freudian slip when she says, “Talking of the women reminds me somehow or other of the melons, which they also shovel in with the knife. The flavour is indescribable, like the Mosque.” Protected by her comparatively drab attire and posed behind her authoritative easel she is not perceived as sexually available in comparison with the more colourful oriental woman. In fact she can feign a temporary separation from her gender and utilise her artist’s garb as a form of protection while observing the lifestyles of women in other cultures.

In her artistic engagement with the exotic woman she can fortify her position as an artist, gaining a power that is not so far removed from the power perceived in the superstitious belief she cites, of an image maker possessing a mysterious hold over the subject of the image. As she is escorted as a visitor into large groups of women, into harems or factories, her class, race and profession elevate her status in relation to the foreign women *en masse*. In the pyramid of power operating in the colonial or imperial context the authority of the English professional and the English ‘lady’ is assumed to hold sway over large numbers of individuals from other cultures be they servants, workers, slaves or natives. The artist, while not given the status of the administrative official, is still recognised as an important figure, primarily because he or she is expected to portray the outward signs of this cultural power relationship and represent the overseeing eye of imperialism.

But it is not just over women that she holds this power. When she discusses beauty in various cultures she also refers to the men and objectifies them in terms of their colourful plumage. She refers to a mounted Bedhouin in full costume as “the most gorgeous creature to be seen in Jerusalem” and gives a full description of his costume and the weapons he carries in a highly sensual description:
A mounted Bedouin in full costume is a figure which cannot escape notice... He wears an undergarment reaching below the knee, confined by a belt or sash around the waist, in which is stuck a dagger, perhaps a pistol mounted with silver, and a red leathern purse or tobacco-pouch. Over this is the 'abba,' common to all Arabs. It is a wide cloak, which falls about him somewhat like the drapery of classical statues, and is generally made in broad stripes of brown and blue and yellow. On his head is a richly coloured or white shawl called the 'keffiyeh', turned back in front; it falls gracefully behind and over the shoulders. It is bound round the skull with two dark heavy bands made of camel's hair, and called the 'agal'. He wears high red leather boots, with curious iron heels, and blue silk tassels hanging down before... A silver-sheathed scimitar hangs at his side, and to complete the equipment he sometimes carries a spear eighteen or twenty feet long adorned with ostrich feathers.51

Clothing, colourful, elegantly draped and gracefully worn stands in for the erotic. While the male European artist was obsessed with disrobing the female form for voyeuristic purposes Margaret Thomas, as a woman artist, drew as much delight from the sensual effect of clothing on both men and women. For her clothing becomes titillating because of its visual delight. She describes the people of Jerusalem in the following terms:

There are no handsomer people to be seen anywhere than in Jerusalem. Armenian and Greek priests are selected for their good looks. Beauty is cultivated among the natives; a pretty wife is selected for a good-looking youth, and Syrians and Bedouins are by nature handsome races, their flowing draperies add dignity to their good looks, and freedom to their movements.52

But when fashions are mixed she finds them abhorrent. The same colour that is appealing in exotic dress becomes gaudy and tasteless when worn as European dress. “The women,” she says, “dress as nearly as they can in European fashion, but may always be distinguished by their unfailing attachment to the most gaudy colours, worn without the least regard to taste, and the quantity of jewellery they contrive to hang about their persons.”53 She would prefer to maintain the oriental and occidental in separate spheres and finds the mixture of the two visually repulsive.
Beauty, in a woman, becomes dissociated from education. The educated woman, she rationalises, is clearly not the object of art. Hence she can stand behind the easel in perfect confidence that her education (and race) imbues her with privilege, protection and authority. For her education becomes a decisive tool to distinguish levels of female humanity. When she looks for education and independent thinking she seems to be searching for kindred spirits. Only in a western country does she find the type of woman with whom she can identify, the type of woman who has an active voice in the formation of culture, rather than one who is passively objectified by the male or tourist gaze. Her visit to Denmark provides her with access to a female tradition which she seems to regard with more respect. She mentions a female writer, Countess Thomasine Gyllemborg-Ehrensvard (1773-1856) "the first great authoress Denmark can boast". She also refers to Mary Wollstonecroft’s impressions of Denmark.

Her overall appraisal of Denmark extends beyond the observation of customs, as in her oriental sojourns, to a discussion of its literature, both ancient Scandinavian and Old and Modern Danish. She also translates many poems. Her main argument in Denmark, Past and Present is that the Nordic races are ancestral sources of British culture and an understanding of Danish art and literature is useful both for British subjects, Americans and colonials.

Denmark becomes a place of rest from the excitement and colour of more exotic cultures. The explanation for Denmark’s quiet and introverted lifestyle, she says, is that it “sleeps, tired, perhaps after the mighty sea-fights of her Vikings and the glorious battles of her Valdemars.” Her study of Denmark brings her closer to an understanding of British imperialism. By scorning the imperial drive of other countries like Britain, Germany and France, and refusing to partake in the carving up of Africa, Denmark, she argues, exposes the colonial mentality and the power drive behind it.

*Lying far removed from the vortex of European politics, conspicuous only by its absence from the council of nations, unambitious of a slice out of Africa, and indifferent as to the future possessor of Constantinople, China, or Jerusalem, Denmark is like the house of a man who is absorbed in his own affairs.*

Her period of travel constitutes a personal quest in which she actively searches for her cultural roots, firstly by contrast with cultures vastly different from her own
and then by tracing the parallels with a more closely related culture. In a period
dominated by the imperial drive of Queen Victoria, her travel writing reflects a
woman’s experience of the wider world, a world which was fast disappearing in
the wake of modernisation. Her artistic observations of Denmark revolve more
around its literature, rather than its visual art and illustrate her growing
preoccupation with writing over this time. Her lifelong love of literature here
extends to a search for sources and in examining ancient Scandinavian mythologies
she contacts her cultural roots. The strangeness of this culture transmutes into the
familiar rhythms of childhood. In the poems of the ancient Danes she discovers the
sources for English nursery rhymes like “London Bridge is Falling Down” and
fairytale like “Jack the Giant Killer”, “Cinderella”, “Bluebeard”, “The Giant who
Smelt the Blood of an Englishman” and “Puss in Boots”. These were “all creatures
of the imagination of the old Norsemen”, she says.58

Her period of sojourn into foreign cultures comes full circle with this trip to
Denmark, and here she reposes for a short while, claiming that Denmark offers her
a “place to rest [her] overwrought brain and aching eyes.”59 Here the differential
between her own culture and the one she observes is not so great. She also has an
opportunity to compare the aspects of British culture which she dislikes with those
of a culture that she regards as having moved beyond Britain socially. She
particularly notes the lack of poverty and gross class distinctions and the provision
of social welfare. She amusedly describes the level of social stability in Denmark in
the following remark:

As Denmark has no exaggeratedly wealthy inhabitants, so she has
no submerged tenth; life flows on calmly and happily, rarely
disturbed by throes of ambition or by gusts of passion. Thus there
is little fear of revolution there; the last attempt of the kind was
easily subdued by the simple means of a fire-hose.60

Denmark provides her with a degree of familiarity which allows her to adjust, after
her lengthy period of travel in exotic countries, to the familiarity of a culture not too
distinctly different from her own.

Her travel acts as a quest for her place in the world as a professional artist. It was to
provide a turning point to her career in which her role as visual artist was expanded
to that of professional and highly esteemed cultural observer. It could be said that
she steered her professional career quite deliberately, reading the cultural signs which placed her earlier career choice of portraiture in jeopardy. Unlike Harriet Hosmer, the American sculptor whose Neoclassical sculpture eventually became unpopular, Margaret Thomas continued to express her creativity but in forms that suited the topical interests of the day. Her shift away from portraiture of the British aristocracy reflected both the decline of the aristocracy and the rising popularity of photography. Perceiving the changes she embraced her literary interests and dealt with themes that appealed to the British reading public of the late nineteenth century, that is, life in the colonies and stories of romantic foreign cultures.

Despite the extent of her personal, artistic and literary development in this period it is disappointing to read her assessment of her own work in the second of her travelogues. In a self-deprecating tone she calls her work “a trivial book like this”. This statement suggests that she felt that her writing failed to achieve the professional standard that she was capable of in the visual arts. However, she is also a perspicacious artist, who, as I have said, was quite aware of the trends and tendencies of the art and publishing worlds. She was aware that her travel and other writing was part of a fashion that included many writers, and much that was written would not survive the test of time. Wisely, she celebrates the creative act itself rather than the hoped-for accompanying success. She says, in a rather touching conclusion:

> When I look at a beautiful picture, a noble statue, or hear a delicious melody, I reflect not so much on the pleasure they impart to me as on the delight their makers must have felt, as the painting grew under the artist’s hand, the figure emerged from the marble beneath the sculptor’s chisel, the air breathed from the violin at the musician’s touch - in fact, on that greatest of ecstasies, the sense of creation, an ecstasy shared with God Himself. This creative faculty is irrepressible and indestructible; so for ever artists will continue to produce works which the world will never see, musicians to compose oratorios which will never be heard, poets to write epics which will never be read. But these have their reward, not the reward of gold or fame, but that far greater one bestowed by this sense of creation. So will the writer of a trivial book like this; no one will have the pleasure in reading it the writer has had in writing.61

It is true that Margaret Thomas’s travel books made no serious literary impact at the time but their importance for today lies in the way they expand our notion of the
Victorian woman artist. Not only was Margaret Thomas an adventurer but she makes a serious critique of the concept of the professional observer, even if this critique occurs obliquely rather than intentionally. The fact that she kept within the dictates of the genre, but that her gender status qualified the type of observations she made meant that her work exposed a number of aspects of this profession. Much of the authority of the profession, when practised in foreign cultures, relied on the political power of the British Empire. That authority was transmitted to Margaret Thomas partly because of her class position and partly because of her experience and reputation as a professional artist.

Along lines of gender her position is more precarious. She simultaneously desires to feel as if her western education entitles her to feel superior to women in exotic cultures and is also aware that women the world over have a number of similar problems to face. She capitulates to the dictates of gender, that is to ‘modesty’, by making self-effacing statements within her travel books, statements that some readers would probably agree with. Yet there is a double message here that permeates all her travelogues. While she assumes the mantle of authority of the professional artist she simultaneously exposes a sense of embarrassment at the arrogance of this position. Her books are not the products of a confident writer but this lack of confidence is not wholly the result of lack of practice. I would argue that they represent her as grappling with her expectations of her role as cultural observer. She tries to emulate the authoritative gestures of the imperialist but also feels uncomfortable with these gesture’s assumptions.

Her journey into foreign cultures thus has a duplicate nature. She is also journeying in a realm in which the artist is constructed in a masculine form. As we have seen Margaret Thomas is used to negotiating this foreign space; ever since her first attempts at sculpture she had operated in a world of men. Her ability to travel in foreign spaces, both inter and intra-cultural, and to negotiate her way is, as we have seen, quite remarkable. But ultimately she feels some disappointment, primarily, it would seem, with herself.

As a combination of a dilettante lady traveller and a professional artist she is invested with an authority that equates with a patriarchal view of the world. But as a woman she is subliminally aware that this authority is a sham, a cultural construction that, as a mask, may not always protect her from adverse consequences. If she lets this mask slip she is in danger of being observed as any other woman, and of being subject to abuses traditionally accorded women. Consequently, while aware of the duplicitous nature of her identity as a traveller
and of her observation position, her writing suffers because it cannot ultimately contain the conviction of a purely imperialist view. As a result her travel writing lacks conviction and becomes itself a little like the Spanish woman with the paper flower in her hair or the Turkish masha in European dress as she attempts to fulfill the dictates of the genre and her perception of the professional artist's role while travelling in exotic places.

1 Margaret Thomas, *A Scamper Through Spain and Tangier* (London: Hutchison & Co, 1892.)
2 ——— *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* (London: John C. Nimmo, 1900).
5 Henrietta Pilkington was recorded as exhibiting in Victoria in the 1860s and 1870s and is known only by two undated oil paintings. See Joan Kerr's *Dictionary of Australian Artists: Painters, Sketchers, Photographers and Engravers to 1870*.
6 There was also a Henrietta Pilkington recorded as exhibiting at the Royal Academy prior to this between 1839 and 1856. She was noted as a London painter of genre, portraits, animals, landscape and interiors.
7 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 47.
8 Pratt 160.
9 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 18.
10 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 277.
13 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* ix.
16 Pratt 205.
18 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 14.
19 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 44.
20 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 55.
21 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 55.
22 Thomas, *A Scamper Through Spain and Tangier* 2. A casa de huespedes is a boarding house.
23 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria*, preface.
26 Thomas, *A Scamper Through Spain and Tangier* 44.
27 Thomas, *A Scamper Through Spain and Tangier* 44.
28 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 46.
31 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 55.
32 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 2.
33 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 2.
34 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 52.
35 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 53.
36 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 43.
37 Thomas, *Denmark, Past and Present* 38.
38 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 34.
40 Thomas, *A Scamper Through Spain and Tangier* 63.
41 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 212.
45 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 44.
47 Thomas, *A Scamper Through Spain and Tangier* 79.
48 Thomas, *A Scamper Through Spain and Tangier* 152.
51 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 54.
52 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 54.
53 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 34.
54 Thomas, *Denmark, Past and Present* 236.
55 Thomas, *Denmark, Past and Present* 6.
56 Thomas, *Denmark, Past and Present* 126.
57 Thomas, *Denmark, Past and Present* 2.
58 Thomas, *Denmark, Past and Present* 259.
59 Thomas, *Denmark, Past and Present* 302.
60 Thomas, *Denmark, Past and Present* 117.
61 Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* 332.
Margaret Thomas’ last published prose volumes were two art manuals entitled *How to Judge Pictures*, published in 1908, and *How to Understand Sculpture*, published in 1911, both written when she was in her sixties. During a period of great concern for the education of the general public she felt that her professional role as an artist should incorporate some contribution towards this end. Crucial to this process of education was the employment of a language form which was non-threatening to the general reader. Her belief that much academic literature on the subject was obfuscating and a barrier to appreciation determined the form of her own texts. She saw her role as a mediator between academia and a lay public genuinely interested in forming an understanding of the arts.

As a writer and visual artist these handbooks represented an amalgamation of her two professional areas of practice and focussed on the two areas of the arts, painting and sculpture, with which she was most familiar. They express her accumulated artistic knowledge developed over a lifetime of exposure to the fine art of Britain and the Continent. Despite their overt simplicity the material in these handbooks draws on a wide variety of theoretical genres available in the early twentieth century such as art criticism, connoisseurship, antiquarianism, aesthetics, iconography and art history. They demonstrate her acquaintance with such authors as Flaxman, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Nietzsche, Lord Leighton, Goethe, Ruskin, Lessing and Sienkiewicz. She also refers to contemporary women writers on the arts such as Leader Scott and Lady Eastlake.

As in her travel books she argues that the artist’s viewpoint has a unique significance that should not be ignored. In the preface of *How to Understand Sculpture* she states:

*The title of the book speaks for itself; I have only to add here that it differs from most works of its kind in being the production of an artist endeavouring to explain the technicalities of a beautiful and little understood art; for this reason it is hoped that it will not be judged from a purely literary standpoint ... as I have mentioned in the text*
famous authors have written profound and erudite treatises on the same subject, all of which seem to lack the intimate touch which artists only can supply... There is much useful matter in the Lectures of the Academicians, but unfortunately it is so obscured by old-fashioned verbiage and rhetoric that the reader who would find it, has to dig very deeply indeed.³

She claims that the artist has a capacity to explain the arts in a way that critics and intellectuals cannot, and is more likely to convey the love of art by providing an "intimate touch". She regards her texts as "differing from other works of the kind" because they are written by an artist rather than an academic. The treatises on art by Reynolds, Fuseli, Barry, Leighton and even Leonardo da Vinci she says “are too abstruse or too technical for the amateur” and of little practical use to the professional artist.⁴

There were, however, other artists who produced such manuals on art over this time. One of her compatriots, Hume Nisbet, a Scottish visual artist who had migrated to Australia in 1865 and then returned to London in 1872 had published The Practical in Painting in 1880 and Lessons in Art in 1891. Nisbet was an associate of John Ruskin. He taught art at Edinburgh and exhibited with the Royal Scottish Academy.⁵ It is possible that she knew of these because one of his short stories was published alongside hers in By Creek and Gully.

In a period when the professions were becoming a significant branch of the elite in Britain arguments had arisen concerning the power of the professions over the public. George Bernard Shaw had claimed that the professions were a "conspiracy against laymen".⁶ He implied that there was often a spurious base for the way in which a group trading on its intellectual capital rather than material property set itself up as an authority and created a need for its services.

Margaret Thomas, in her handbooks, implied that she didn’t want to be part of this conspiracy. She didn’t want to employ language that acted as a divisive strategy aimed at the exclusion of anyone but the initiated so looked for a way to bridge "the gulf...between the professional critic who can neither paint nor draw and the smallest man who can paint and draw."⁷ She argued that the visual arts, while on the one hand providing a profession for the elite few, should still remain a viable activity for the many, and that the exchange of concepts between this elite group and the amateur should be oiled by an accessible form of language.
The task she set herself was to interpret complex ideas about art and to transform them into a manageable form suited to public consumption. In doing so she was responding to a drive which E.J. Hobsbawm describes as “the democratization of culture”. As a democratic ideal it had become the raison d'etre for much that was published on the arts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She asserted that the artist was more capable of reinforcing a democratic approach to cultural matters than the critic.

The contradiction in her argument was that while she had a strong sympathy for the needs of the public she still reinforced the professional artist's segregation from the rest of the community by employing the notion of the artist as hero. Her ongoing drive to claim her professional space as a woman artist necessitated that she maintain a personal distance from the concept of the amateur. Writing books on art for the amateur would seem the perfect solution, retaining her as an authority while demonstrating allegiance to the common good. She approached it with a high degree of seriousness stating at the end of How to Understand Sculpture “great is the responsibility of those who would form the taste of the public.”

Her audience consisted of that portion of the public (mainly the middle classes and some sections of the working classes) which had become increasingly interested in spending its weekends wandering through the public galleries and museums. Behind the rationale of late nineteenth century mass education lay a combination of influences from various sectors of the community. The middle classes actively sought an understanding of the arts in order to reinforce and embellish their upward social mobility. Margaret Thomas, herself a member of both English and Australian middle class society, had been trained in an area of the arts that had remained recondite at least to a British (and by extension an Australian) public. She saw herself in an ideal position to understand the needs of the middle classes and to impart information on the subject of the visual arts from the viewpoint of an initiate.

Also implicit in the drive to educate was a fear of the power of the urban masses which were becoming a large and potentially dangerous force which, according to the elite, required education to diffuse their underlying barbarism. Besides the practical alleviation of poverty, an inculcation of ‘culture’ was seen partly as a benevolent, humanitarian and democratic tool for social control. In Highbrow/Lowbrow, Lawrence Levine argues that the disorder and turmoil seemingly introduced into America in the nineteenth century by the Italian and Irish immigrant workers prompted a search for order and a reinforcement of cultural hierarchy amongst the elite. According to Levine the strategy employed by those
in power was to “transform public spaces by rules, systems of taste, and canons of
behaviour of their own choosing”. An appreciation of the arts and an acquisition
of ‘culture’ was as much about demonstrating a standard of appropriate moral
behaviour as it was about an understanding of aesthetics.

In her career, Margaret Thomas had already seen the public transformed in their
attitude to the art museum. In Australia, in the 1870s there had been lengthy debates
about the advantages and disadvantages of Sunday gallery opening. When
Summers’ statues of the Royal Family were presented to the National Gallery in
1879 Sunday opening was announced. The debates had revolved around
religious concerns as well as the need to supply a form of recreation that would
educate rather than simply entertain the working classes. As a consequence of this
decision it was necessary to educate the working public, previously prohibited
through time constraints from attending museums and galleries, not only in matters
of content but also in the form of behaviour and dress suitable for these institutions.

By the time Margaret Thomas wrote these manuals, though, the need for the
public’s behaviour to be modified, at least in relation to the appreciation of art, was
passed. The public was now displaying such respect for ‘the work of art’ that
artists like Marcel Duchamp and the Dada group were soon to find this attitude itself
worthy of mockery. Persisting as a commonly held belief, though, was the notion
that the general public as a group would gravitate towards the ‘vulgar’ if not guided
otherwise. At various points Margaret Thomas alludes to this notion and represents
images of crowds surrounding particular paintings as an indication of the drawing
power of the vulgar over the populace.

The appreciation of painting, by this time, had become popularised, and one of her
arguments was that the public needed to refine its understanding by developing a
taste for sculpture as well. Sculpture had remained isolated as an elite artform
situated virtually outside the perceptual and cognitive realm of the public. Most
sculpture, lacking colour and often bereft of any obvious narrative failed to capture
the immediate attention of an audience which had so few hours to devote to its
study. The visual stimulation of pictures still held sway. She compares the popular
appeal of painting over sculpture with the following remark:

*The man in the street who does not lift his head to look at Marochetti’s great Coeur-de-Lion will yet spend his Saturday afternoon in the National Gallery, happily and intelligently; and among the thousands of visitors who crowd round the canvases*
representing the drunken festivities of Dutch boors, scarcely one remarks the marble busts which adorn the vestibule.\textsuperscript{13}

The painting she refers to is, however, a curious example and one which illustrates much about her perception of the public and the conditions of the time. The painting is probably one of Bruegel’s images of a peasant wedding feast, either the \textit{Peasant Wedding Dance} of 1566 or \textit{Peasant Kermis} 1567-8.\textsuperscript{14} “Colour”, she argues “independent of form, has a far greater attraction for the uneducated mind than the finest Greek statue...Its appeal is rather to the intellect than the senses.”\textsuperscript{15} Colour, she says, also appeals to dwellers in a cold climate which “renders the whiteness of marble and the dark tint of bronze less satisfactory to the eye than the glowing warmth of pictures.”\textsuperscript{16}

She accounts for the appeal of this painting on formal grounds alone. However, she doesn’t examine its content. It is reasonable to argue that there is as much understanding of the human form in a Bruegel painting as there is in any Greek statue. The difference is that the Greek statue idealises the body and the concept of beauty in repose, whereas Bruegel demonstrates a raw and immediate aspect of human life in the celebrations of a group of peasants.

The choice of this painting is not a random one. Whether she was aware of it or not, it raises a dilemma confronting those advocating public education in the fine arts. If, as I have already stated, one of the aims of late nineteenth century mass education was to quell tendencies towards brutish behaviour, then Bruegel’s scene would certainly present some difficulties. Clearly it slots into the category known by this time as ‘high art’: it is a masterful piece of painting, brilliant in its draughtsmanship, design, use of colour and form and represents a vibrant school of Dutch art in the period of the Northern Renaissance. Yet Bruegel’s art had always appealed to the people, even during his lifetime, and this was due primarily to the content rather than the form of the paintings. Max J. Friedlaender, in 1956, stated:

\textit{He instructed the people, delighted and entertained them, a public that enjoyed robust humour and caricature. With rather unskilled prints after his drawings he satisfied an uninformed longing for pictures and he drew inspiration from the eternal sources of popular imagination whilst on a higher level, and on the surface, Netherlandish painting was being paralysed by Romanizing culture.}\textsuperscript{17}
As does all of Bruegel’s work it has profound historical importance as a record of the changes in peasant lifestyle after the peasants’ revolt in 1524. It is therefore a valuable cultural record from both an aesthetic and historical perspective. However, its representation of revelry and sensuality, particularly in relation to the ‘crowd’ combined with the political tensions of the fin de siecle had dangerous implications. The various uprisings and revolts such as the Paris Commune of 1871, the Russian Revolution of 1905 and revolutions in Turkey in 1908 and Persia in 1909 had demonstrated the dangerous volatility of the urban working classes and the oppressed peasantry. In 1902 Charles Masterman, writing from the point of view of the working classes, was to ask in regard to the apparent “eruptions of savagery” of the hooligan in the London streets “do they record the fermenting as in a laboratory of some strange novel explosive destined to change the future history of the world?”

Bruegel’s painting acted as a reminder of such volatility and the close proximity between crowd revelry and revolt. This image, shown by the National Gallery, celebrated as its subject matter the history of an oppressed group and portrayed images of sexuality, feasting, drinking and celebration in the context of the crowd. It is no wonder, then, that an English crowd would be attracted to it much like Bruegel’s contemporary peasants. Much of the appeal would have been that of either identification (amongst those who saw themselves as working class) or the desire to be differentiated (amongst those who defined themselves as middle or upper class).

But Margaret Thomas was not unaware of class differences. She displayed a concern for social justice and an interest in the ideas currently being aired by members of the Fabian Society like Sidney and Beatrice Webb and George Bernard Shaw. It is not clear from her writing what her actual politics were, whether she actively pursued socialism or was content to remain politically conservative. However, two poems published in A Painter’s Pastime in 1908 demonstrate an understanding of the class struggles in England at the time. As I have already pointed out, one of her interests in Denmark was its fairer social structure in comparison with Britain’s. In “London-Early Morning” she portrays the plight of the poor in the daily rush to the workplace:

Do you hear the tramp of thousands
As they march with ceaseless tread,
To the struggle for existence,
To the battle-field for bread?

Through the darkness of the morning,
Through the storm and through the snow,
Certain as the day’s returning,
To the cruel fight they go.

Women in the ranks are tramping,
Children follow in the train;
Those who stumble fall unheeded,
Never to rise again.

O my brothers! still in hunger;
Sickness, sorrow, on they go,
Bearing all the heavy burden
Of their heritage of woe,

Till to each a brighter morning
Rise, when of the legion dread,
One is wanting, and his comrades,
Sternly marching, utter “Dead”.

These ‘hungry masses’ are clearly not the group that her art manuals are directed towards; they are too downtrodden to experience the available leisure time that art appreciation demanded. But the distinction between the masses as a potentially revolutionary force and the general public as a malleable, educatable and upwardly aspiring group is alluded to by the comparison of this poem with her other writings. The group that she was directing her writing towards was the section of the working classes, the skilled craftsmen whose children were now being schooled and encouraged towards middle class values and the middle classes themselves. In other words those groups not solely preoccupied with physical survival on a day to day basis.

As she implies in the above poem, there is a class which remained untouched by the expansion of educational opportunities, and herein lay the danger to social stability. The wealthier classes, she says, do not perceive the needs of those lower down on the social scale and avoid their social responsibility to these groups. While discussing the politics of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s intellectual practice Deidre David makes a similar observation. Browning, she says, conveys
sympathies towards lower class hardship and expresses a distaste for middle class values. While not pretending to compare their literary and intellectual talent there are similarities between Browning's and Margaret Thomas' perspectives. These appear to reflect the traditional role of middle class women with regard to philanthropic services to the poor. The poem "The Two Funerals" illustrates Margaret Thomas' perception of the ignorance of one class towards another.

Lady Anne (an invalid) loquitur

*Carter, is that a funeral I see?*
*Go and inquire whose funeral it may be.*
*Carter*
*The railway-man, my lady, to the grave*
*They bear, who died the little child to save.*
*Lady Anne*
*The porter? O, a worthless youth was this,*
*Who flirted with each shameless village miss,*
*And never went to church but once a year,*
*And never was at Sunday school, I hear.*
*Sure things have come to quite a pretty pass*
*Now they've such funaeals for the lower class!*
*But there's another funeral in view.*
*Carter, I can't quite make it out, can you?*
*Carter*
*My lady, 'tis Lord Matchem's hearse you see.*
*Lady Anne*
*Matchem, poor fellow! only twenty-three!*
*Of what a fine old Norman race he came,*
*Renowned for fortune, family, and fame.*
*He went the pace—if one must speak the truth,*
*Was seldom sober—but youth will be youth.*
*Carter, go see that ev'ry blind be down,*
*Then help me on with my new mourning gown.*

As Raymond Williams points out a variety of terms like the masses, the people and the public were available at this time, with varying interpretations which often produced confusing and contradictory results. Contempt for the majority traces back to Roman times when the common people were expected to have low tastes. In the sixteenth century the term 'vulgar' lost its neutral status and became a term of
contempt, and by the late seventeenth century the Latin phrase *mobile vulgus*, the unstable common people, became shortened to the English 'mob'. The term *massa* from the Latin was “a body of material that can be moulded or cast” and by the period of revolution another interpretation of ‘mass’ suggested the idea solidarity, a potentially positive force. Margaret Thomas incorporates all of these interpretations referring to taste, vulgarity, instability, malleability and solidarity into her treatises invoking a mixture of ideologies which tend to complicate her intentions. Her desire to define her role as professional in relation to the development of a public sensibility towards the arts is somewhat confused by this mixed concept of what the term ‘the public’ actually means.

Her middle class position acts as a parallel with her position in relation to the arts. On the one hand she dislikes the class differences which create poverty and oppression and opposes the power that the upper classes has over the poor. Similarly, in the appreciation of art she dislikes the power that the professionals, like critics and academics, have over the public. She wants to democratise the appreciation of the fine arts but her mixed assumptions about the public problematise the solution. She is torn between trusting in the innate sense of members of the public to make their own judgements, saying “whoever has real intuitive feeling for sculpture will recognise a good or bad work without knowing why”, and the doubt that this same public will remain ‘vulgar’ in its tastes.

Her dilemma creates a situation where she seems to be arguing both for and against her professional position. She is not entirely convinced of the need for a strong division between the public and the art professions and is not comfortable with employing language that deliberately obscures and segregates. She wants to be regarded as a professional amongst her peers and in the eyes of the public but senses the degree of sham that sometimes accompanies this position.

One of her solutions to this dilemma is to draw on a moral interpretation of the visual arts. A moral reading of art was seen to be extremely useful in the proliferation of mass education and moral principles were expected to be applicable to all. Ruskin was a favourite critic whose writings dealt with such an interpretation of the arts. He interpreted Classicism and the Gothic as opposing styles indicating stages in human development. The Gothic he argued, represents a state of human imperfection, whereas classicism represents its opposite, perfection. Transposed to the moral realm, he calls classicism “not the licence of pleasure, but the law of goodness”.

Margaret Thomas defends Classicism at various points in her writing. As Svetlana Alpers argues in *The Art of Describing* the Italian tradition had become so much the definitive measure that all other traditions suffered in their interpretation by being placed unfavourably beside it. Margaret Thomas' academic training had involved an internalisation of this relationship. In spurning the art of the northern Europeans (she often expresses a sentiment that the northern Renaissance artists were 'behind' the development of the Italian Renaissance) she was drawing on accepted lore concerning the differences between the 'barbaric' northerners and their 'civilised' southern neighbours. In 1883 Ruskin in *Classic and Gothic* had stated:

> And you have, north of Greece and Italy, innumerably and incorrigibly savage nations, representing, with rude and irregular efforts, on huge stones and ice-borne boulders, on cave-bones and forest stocks and logs, with any manner of innocent tinting or scratching possible to them, sometimes beasts, sometimes hobgoblins - sometimes, heaven only knows what: but never attaining any skill in figure drawing, until, whether invading or invaded, Greece and Italy teach them what a human being is like, and with that help they dream and blunder on through the centuries, achieving many fantastic and amusing things...Nevertheless, in due course we get a Holbein out of them...25

Influenced by his moral interpretation of the arts it was understandable that Margaret Thomas would defend classicism so intensely. Like many women writers of her time and as bourgeois and conservative she acted in the role of "guardian of culture". In the prevailing social conditions of Europe at this time when nations were teetering rather dangerously on the brink of a new barbarism, Margaret Thomas' stance would be quite understandable. The preservation of moral and social order would serve to protect not only the general interests of the community but women's interests in particular as they were often the first victims of barbarism. When discussing "the Post-Impressionist's and Futurist's revolt against the chocolate box inanities of the mid-Victorian epoch" she concludes "truth is not always ugliness, and ugliness does not need perpetuation. Beauty is what we need, in life, in thought, in art."27

In this light her reaction to early Modernism was predictable. Her reaction to "the violent propaganda of Signor Marinetti" demonstrated her alarm at the caprices of the Futurists because they not only mocked but claimed to want to destroy the basis of culture. If art was returning to such a barbaric state, then what hope the people?
In her art manuals she actively sought to establish a relationship between herself as artist and writer and the public, whereas the avant garde artist, as Catherine Stimpson argues, "[demanded] that the artist self consciously and aggressively plan for the dissolution of the relationship between the writer or artist and the public." She hopes that the present "insanity" is but a passing fashion and then finally restates her belief in the artist’s responsibility:

...but the firm foundations of art laid by the Greeks nearly two thousand years ago remain unshaken against the attacks of Pre-Raphaelites, Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, Futurists et hoc genus omne... Probably artists quietly at work in their studios, unknown, but trying to realize their conceptions and work out their ideals patiently, sincerely, and industriously, are doing better service for art than those iconoclasts who hastily fling a few colours on canvas and shriek to you to admire their system, or who cut a head and a few limbs roughly out of a block of marble and hurl defiance at the Greeks.

The concept of decadence in the arts was a feature of the late nineteenth century. R.K.R. Thornton’s remark that the “Greeks and Romans stood firmly behind any Victorian’s understanding of [her] own society” is endorsed in Margaret Thomas’ frequent references to classical art. The prosperity of the British Empire was a reminder to many of former empires, in particular the Roman and Greek, and consequently, to their decay. The apparent social decay that Margaret Thomas observed in the operations of an industrial society, despite protestations of progress, seem to be reflected in the artistic styles that were developing in the new century.

In this atmosphere of artistic decadence educating the public in the arts proves even more problematic. Another of her solutions lay in providing a hierarchy or canon of great works from which readers could develop their own opinions; she argues that the audience needs to know the order in which to rank artist’s work and aims to give “the amateur who loves it...a few principles for his guidance to a rational appreciation of the best works.” Such a ‘rational’ appreciation is based on descriptions of the technical aspects of art production. In sculpture such processes as casting, modelling, moulding and carving are described in detail and reflect her own competence in the practical aspects of the field.

She is able to describe the stylistic changes from one historical period to the next,
but her qualitative assessment, once it enters the realm of ‘the great’ is often vague and unsupported. She also explains some of the ‘rules’ which are taught to the art student, in order to clarify that which constitutes ‘good’ sculpture. Rules of proportion are discussed but with the qualifying statement, “I hope I do not appear to dogmatise; dogma would destroy art as it has destroyed religion. Rules are not made for genius, and every artist must do as his consciousness dictates.”

She bridges the gap between academic discussion and amateur interest with a construction of the heroic that slots artists into a preconceived hierarchy. Using the appeal of the concept of ‘greatness’ to lure her audience, she simplifies the historical progression from one artist to the next and one era to the next using a convenient gradient. The concept that art should have declined since a golden age was not uncommon in literature and criticism and in Margaret Thomas’ opinion (an opinion shared by many) Michelangelo becomes the pinnacle towards which all sculptors prior to him worked and after which all progressively faded away. She appraises the various sculptors throughout history, but for Michelangelo she reserves the highest praise. She describes him as a “demigod of art” and a “superhuman genius” and equates his status with that of Shakespeare in literature. But his achievements are beyond the capabilities of other mere mortals, and thus his talent becomes prohibitive, rather than enabling to others.

Woe to the student who at the commencement of his career takes Michelangelo for his guide and example, for that supreme artist stands alone on the pedestal to which his superhuman genius and profound study have raised him; to none is it granted to reach the same elevation.

Michelangelo’s position is seen as not only prohibitive to the individual artist but to sculpture as a whole because “his mighty spirit” overshadowed sculpture causing it to “languish in decay”. (Again, references to decadence often supposed a former golden era.) She mourns the fate of sculpture, as an art form that is overlooked, not only by the English general public, but by the British Museum which treats it as an afterthought. She lays part of the blame for sculpture’s low profile on Michelangelo and Donatello’s shoulders saying that since their supreme achievements sculpture had retrograded.

Her appraisal of Michelangelo’s work does not, however, involve her in a much more lengthy or indepth discussion than that which she apportions for other artists. As she progresses through the Renaissance she allocates generally one or two
paragraphs to a page to each major artist and Michelangelo is granted two and a half pages. There is no real examination of why Michelangelo’s work is so superior. The discussion of his work amounts to a series of laudatory phrases like “the mere name of Michelangelo inspires admiration, wonder and awe”, “we are face to face with miracles of art which have never before been equalled”, “that truly divine man”, “the mighty master” and “in fertility of imagination he has never been excelled, and in facility of execution none has surpassed him.” 38 In this regard she has adhered to Thomas Carlyle’s admonition that the truly great should not be questioned but revered adoringly. For those of lesser status, though, she is capable of a more critical approach.

The construct of the artist as hero provides a conveniently simplified explanation for the assumed superiority of the work of a select group of artists. The complex reasons for the work’s success are glossed over with superlatives to satisfy the limitations of public interest. The construct serves the purpose of creating the artist as one of the cornerstones of the community. By substituting this myth for complexity of language Margaret Thomas does little to illuminate the role of the artist beyond its established status and seemingly nothing at all for the elevation of her fellow women artists. She also maintains a vast distance between the artist and the public.

She aligns herself with other artists but claims that her system of understanding art is suitable for the layman. This system is highly mythologised, placing some artists, such as Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci, in almost godlike positions, and ascribing other artists a position in a sharply defined hierarchy. She disregards the indepth analyses that the critics make as too abstruse. Yet she substitutes a system that, while simpler, still depends heavily on the theses of these critics, but invokes the language of myth rather than that of argument as reinforcement.

While there seems to be a contradiction between Margaret Thomas’ desire to elevate and inform the public and her need to maintain an elite professional status there is a sociological argument which suggests that these two ambitions are not mutually exclusive but in fact mutually supportive. Magali Sarfatti Larson argues that in the proliferation and certification of knowledge “public education” (organised into hierarchical systems) “strengthens the meritocratic justification of inequality with all the force of institutional objectivity.” 39 In other words the use of a language form suited to the layman in relation to a field of knowledge does not open a channel between the public and the profession but rather reinforces the elite power and position of the profession. “Knowledge,” Larson says, “must appear to be
accessible to all who are willing to learn and capable of learning”, but in actuality this universal availability is illusory and areas of knowledge are fiercely guarded by boundaries defined by the professionals involved.40

Using this thesis the “How to” books by Margaret Thomas and those by others like her, while written in a spirit of goodwill, actually served to reinforce the distance between the public and the professions despite their overt intentions to do otherwise. So, like the philanthropic services that Margaret Thomas’ middle class foremothers offered to the poor, the votives that she proffers in the name of a democratic distribution of cultural manna do not serve to break down cultural barriers but in fact serve to support them.

But questions arise. Why, as a woman artist, does she argue for the retention of a conservative art establishment when it had not allowed women sufficient representation? And why, then, does her own account of the history of sculpture and painting make so little attempt to question the absence of women artists, despite the fact that she was aware of many contemporary women who were practising concurrently with her? Is it enough to say that these questions were beyond her time?

From her experience the academies had finally opened their portals to women, while the Modernist alternative offered them little opportunity. It is possible that her allegiance to the academies was based on her own positive experience within them. It is arguable that, given the crumbling status of the academies’ authority, she was in her own way trying to support them as one area where women were at last being acknowledged. While she never openly admits to the possibility of ‘great’ women artists within the canon of art history, one of the implications of her stance could be their possible future inclusion. In this respect the academies could even be accounted as being more ‘progressive’ than the newly developing Modern and still masculine art world. In its Futurist form the model offered by Marinetti, for example, was so violent and misogynistic as to be completely unacceptable to the majority of women artists, who generally came from the refinement of a middle class background.

It could be said that, as an early female explorer of the realm of theoretical artistic debate Margaret Thomas was responding to the limitations of Romanticism. By drawing on the notion of intuition she attempted to formulate a link between artists, the general public and herself as a woman that is capable of bypassing the patriarchal authority of the male critic. Caught in the trap of having to depend on
reason but not wanting to glorify it she made the following paradoxical statement:

*The rebellion of the French against a corrupt monarchy led to the imbecile worship of the goddess of reason, yet France has settled down to a reasonable republic.*

As one of the first women in sculpture she had few artistic foremothers to turn to. She also made no allusions to women as role models in this field. Therefore, because of her insecure position within the western artworld, she is dependent on a sense of structure to strengthen her position. The organisational elements involved in categorising artists and placing them in hierarchically arranged schools becomes an attractive solution. Just as the ancients and the medievals felt safe within 'creation' if they constructed an elaborate system accommodating all ranks and orders, so members of the artistic establishment felt safe within the numinous quality called 'creativity' if they knew their place. Knowing who the gods and saints were, what their achievements consisted of and what relationship they bore to each other had a confirming effect on the efforts of mortals much lower down on the hierarchical ladder. It ensured that their efforts, though never perfect like that of the gods, were at least accommodated as appropriate to a certain level of existence.

Within the artworld, if similar religious terminology is applied and artists are accorded a position within a hierarchy, then lesser mortals (those artists who form the mass of unknowns) can at least feel they have a stable and necessary position. However, built into the construct of the artist is an assumption that the artist desires to break from the status of the unknown. But if artists, Icarus-like, don't know their place and strive too high, then there is some danger involved. Hence Margaret Thomas' warning to students not to emulate Michelangelo. The artistic hierarchy thus becomes a mobile structure in which artists are forever seeking to move up the scale to become recognised as at least one of the saints, if not one of the gods.

It could be said that Margaret Thomas endorsed this artistic hierarchy because she herself had advanced from complete obscurity to some small measure of notoriety within the establishment of her time. By labelling sculpture as "the divine art", that is, superior to painting in a hierarchy of art forms, she could create for herself a place, though a very meagre one, on this step ladder to greatness. In the hierarchy of artists women at this stage were at the very bottom, the untouchables in the caste system of the arts. Her step within the Academy, though small, was a very important advancement, leading her potentially out of this bottom rank.
In her writing, however, she could situate herself rather differently. In her theoretical knowledge of art she was situated midway between the public (either ignorant or educated) and the critics and academicians. Educating the public to become interested in the arts as amateurs thus helped to create a class system within the concept of art appreciation, effectively a “class system of the intellect”\(^{43}\). Consequently, she could become part of a ‘middle class’ which would feed an interpretation of the theories of art formed by intellectuals to the new legions of amateurs. Like the middle class in the social sense she saw it as her right and privilege to be at once both accepting and critical of the standards set by the elite, but justified in her belief that her interpretation of those standards would be the same as that desired by the underclass.

Margaret Thomas’ intention was to utilise art in the services of social harmony and development. By concentrating on the broad social issue of education for the masses she demonstrates little concern for the question of gender and the place of women within the social structure. Instead she incorporates the advancement of women in an overall elevation of the society rather than attending to it as a separate issue. She argues that the gifts of art and an awareness of history can help to improve present conditions.

It could be said that the maintenance of her own class position was more important to her than the desire to broach questions of gender. Seemingly comfortable in her position and enjoying the new found freedoms of a single educated middle class woman and some measure of notoriety she tends to support the status quo rather than work for its destruction. Rather than break from the past in the manner of the moderns she insists that the artist learn from the lessons of history. Revolutionary behaviour, she says, is extremist:

\[...\text{as in all revolutions, these eccentric artists, in their excitement of their contest against the Past, have pushed their efforts to excess, and the calm necessary to right judgement can be attained by them only after the fiery struggle is over.}^{44}\]

She sees the artist in the role of ambassador for peace and is horrified when artists like Marinetti insist on war as the ultimate solution. She focuses on history but in the light of its cultural achievements rather than as a narrative of war and revolution. In her approval of the artist working quietly and steadily in the studio rather than making ostentatious radical outbursts she is not only responding with a conservative attitude but is also reflecting her training as a sculptor. The sculptor’s
spontaneous passions are modified by the process of production. The pleasure derived from the process involves an appreciation of the end product as a summation of incremental steps, carried out generally over a period of time.

In trying to inform the public of this process she is in part attempting to deal with the growing expectation of the modern public for instant gratification. Sculpture, unlike painting she says, rarely gratifies instantly, and if the public could learn to appreciate an artform that takes more effort to enjoy, then it would also be developing a sensibility that would help to counteract one of the destructive elements involved in the hectic pace of modern living.

Her emphasis on the quietly persistent artist as opposed to the iconoclast would also account for the position of women artists, in much the same way as her idealisation of Charles Summers did. Most women artists of her time worked precisely in this way, hidden from public view, and without the fanfare that artists like Marinetti craved. But the relationship between the place of women artists and her argument is oblique and clearly not her primary concern.

Superficially Margaret Thomas' treatises on painting and sculpture do not alter the prevailing status quo in relation to the arts. But her preoccupation with a public understanding of art, while perhaps not achieving her stated aims, does in many ways question the dominant authorial voice that existed to describe the visual arts. Her preoccupation with the public as an 'excluded' party in relation to a body of knowledge resonates with her sense of exclusion as a woman from the dominant discourses of her time. While she is, perhaps, unable to ask the appropriate questions or express the causes of her discontent she senses an omission which she attributes to a societal split between the public and the professions. Her aim in these treatises is not to try and come to terms with the causes of this omission, but rather to transmit a body of knowledge. Consequently she does not uncover the causes. However, her writing could be interpreted as a predecessor to feminist criticism of the visual arts which has questioned the dominant discourse and its exclusions more directly.

Her predicament, that she desires to be part of a profession with which she does not feel completely comfortable, creates a tension which manifests itself in a variety of ways. One of these is through her poetry, and an analysis of this tension will be the subject of the next chapter. E.J. Hobsbawm described the "identity crisis through which bourgeois society passed" from the 1870s to 1914 as exemplified in the history of the arts over this period. He says, "it was an era when both the
creative arts and the public for them lost their bearings." Margaret Thomas' treatises were intended to assist the public to find their bearings through the arts. Her feeling that the emerging modernist tendencies were too anarchic for the present needs of the public prompted her to attempt to restore an attitude to the past that seemed to be more reliable and could satisfy more needs than could the emerging avant garde tendencies.

What is perhaps more important is that she was also attempting to find her own bearings through these handbooks, though perhaps not consciously. The disappointing result is that despite the struggles of her entire career to define herself as a professional artist she makes so little reference to the work of women artists or even to their exclusion. It seems that her internalisation of the dominant discourse was so complete that in the final event she effaced herself (and other women besides) so that women didn't even figure in a story of the visual arts. Perhaps this was more honest. Perhaps she was subconsciously aware that under the conditions of the prevailing discourse it was not women's story anyway.

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1 Margaret Thomas, How to Judge Pictures (London: Anthony Treherne & Co, 1902).
3 Thomas, How to Understand Sculpture vii.
4 Thomas, How to Judge Pictures 12.
5 Morris Miller, Australian Literature 1795-1938 Vol 1 440.
7 Thomas, How to Understand Sculpture 62.
9 Thomas, How to Understand Sculpture 167.
11 Levine 177.
12 See A Hero of the Workshop for a detailed account of the speech at this presentation.
15 Thomas, How to Understand Sculpture 2.
16 Thomas, How to Understand Sculpture 3.
20 Deidre David, "The Old Right and the New Jerusalem: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Intellectual Practice" in Intellectuals/Aesthetics/Politics/Academics edited by Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) 211.
22 Thomas, *How to Understand Sculpture* 162.
23 Thomas, *How to Understand Sculpture* 170.
27 Thomas, *How to Understand Sculpture* 165.
29 Thomas, *How to Understand Sculpture* 166.
32 In her discussion of the Greeks, however, Margaret Thomas waxes lyrical. See *How to Understand Sculpture* 57, 58.
34 Thomas, *How to Understand Sculpture* 24, 81.
36 Thomas, *How to Understand Sculpture* 82.
37 Thomas, *How to Understand Sculpture* 11.
38 Thomas, *How to Understand Sculpture* 80-82.
40 Larson 31.
41 Thomas, *How to Understand Sculpture* 165.
42 Thomas, *How to Understand Sculpture* 162.
44 Thomas, *How to Understand Sculpture* viii.
Throughout the various phases of her career Margaret Thomas wrote poetry and she published many of her poems in three volumes namely, Friendship in 1873, A Painter’s Pastime in 1908 and Friendship, Poems in Memoriam in 1927. Her poetry illustrates the dissonant aspects of her identity negotiation. It exposes the clashes between her gender and her desire for self-determination, between love, sexuality and independence, and between the desire to make art simply for personal gratification and the demands of art as profession. Her poetry involves an attempt to come to terms with the conflicting discourses impinging on women and delineates the sources and sites of her pain. This chapter will seek to demonstrate that her amateur interest in poetry was not simply constructed to fill the vacant hours left at the end of her ‘professional’ day, but was an intrinsic element in her identity negotiation, the means by which she worked through the discordant elements of a nineteenth century woman’s existence.

Margaret Thomas’ varied interests in the arts reflected a popular image of the well-rounded artistic woman which was influenced by the eighteenth century model of the aristocratic woman. According to Diana Scott, one of the most influential role models for upper class women was based on a novel by Madame de Stael called Corinne. “Corinne”, she says was “gifted in all the arts, but in poetry and music she [was] a supreme genius.” There is no record of Margaret Thomas cultivating a musical interest, but her poetry was an intrinsic part of her life which she practised until two years before her death. Her poetry, however, was not the work of genius.

Given the impressions that have formed of the character of Margaret Thomas based on her other writings and her other achievements, the first impression of Margaret Thomas’ poetry is that it could not possibly be written by the same person. The tough young woman who braved for so long the all-male establishment of sculpture, the society woman who established contacts with influential members of the elite, the intrepid woman who explored foreign lands ‘on a shoestring’ but found access to the most prohibited spaces of other cultures, the authoritative woman who developed an indepth knowledge of the art of Britain and the continent all convey an image of a woman of firm purpose, possessing a sedulity quite remarkable for her time. The extreme shifts that appear in her poetry, from
sentimental expressions of love and joy, to weepy, depressed and often agonised
expressions of emotional pain contribute to the formation of another impression,
one much more unstable, dissatisfied, disoriented and melancholic. Even the
persona who agrees to publish these poems is more thick-skinned and businesslike
than the fragile, sensitive soul who resides within the pages. The entire oeuvre of
Margaret Thomas’ writing contradicts what Delys Bird calls “the necessary fiction
of an integrated personality.”

There are possible explanations for the discontinuity in the tone of these writings.
Firstly, Margaret Thomas may have been so heavily dependent on the dictates of
genre that a distinct and individual voice fails to emerge. If she had followed
generic conventions too closely then the authoritative persona that would have
emerged from a treatise on the arts would not necessarily equate with the
adventurous persona of the travel writer or the self indulgent one of the romantic
poet.

In the colonial environment of her early years the source of her early poetic style
was a popular preoccupation with the sublime, a romanticism, as Elliott and
Mitchell point out, laid as a veneer over classicism. This style was practised by
many amateur poets and the amateurs far outnumbered the professionals, at least in
Australia at this time. Margaret Thomas’ assumption of a romantic voice in her
poetry, her preoccupation with states of rapture, grief and melancholy point to these
erly influences. However, the fact that she flitted from genre to genre, rather than
developing her style in a single genre, resulted in a failure to achieve a depth in her
subject and a consequent forfeiture of her ‘personality’ as an author. This line of
argument reinforces the traditional prejudice against dilettantism.

However, there is another line that could be followed and one which Ross Gibson
so eloquently pursues in his discussion of the convict artist Thomas Watling’s
Letters from an Exile at Botany Bay to His Aunt in Dumfries. Gibson argues that
in dealing with the disparate and discordant material of Watling’s Letters (he calls it
“deranged”) there is the temptation to dismiss it as “uninformed and
uninformative”. This temptation should be resisted, he says, in favour of a
response to their scattered form as an indication of “the pressures that prevailed
upon an alien subject attempting to methodize experience at the time of white
Australia’s inauguration.”

One hundred years later Margaret Thomas’ disparate literary output could be seen in
a similar light, not as indicating the pressures felt during the founding of white
Australia but the similar alienating pressures on women at a time when they were beginning to find their feet in the public as opposed to the private sphere. Fiona Giles reinforces this interpretation. She relates the female migrant's experience "at least metaphorically - to that of the convict." There are a number of similarities between the sense of confusion Margaret Thomas feels as a woman artist attempting to articulate her experience and Gibson's interpretation of Watling's confused sense of self in an alien terrain. For her, the realm of art as profession is also an alien terrain which she must map by constant reference back to the familiar notion of the woman as accomplished but amateur artist. As Watling struggles to extend his understanding through realist and poetic devices, so Margaret Thomas employs a variety of literary avenues to charter her own experience. The melancholy expressed in her poetry equates with Watling's as a craving for "referential certainties." In her case it is the craving of a woman artist who has no reference points in history through which to interpret her own experience.

Rather surprisingly, Margaret Thomas ties together both of these arguments when she justifies the publication of her poetry in A Painter's Pastime. In her introduction she makes a conscious admission of her dilettantism but relates this to her Australian experience. She states matter-of-factly what her motives are (and are not) for publishing her poetry. She says that it is not for fame and money because she is aware of the glut on the market already; she refers to the critics' description of poetry at this time as "a drug on the market." "What, then, is the reason for issuing another book, when our bookshelves are groaning beneath the weight of unread volumes?" she pragmatically and honestly remarks. Her rationale for publishing, she says, is that her Australian experience has influenced her poetry writing and for this reason the poems must necessarily have some importance, though they may be "crude utterances." She relies on the continuing interest by the British public in all forms of Australiana as her justification. But there is a sense, which she fails to fully articulate, that the colonial experience impinges deeply on her identity. She indicates that estrangement, alienation and pain have inscribed themselves onto her sense of self and that in some way this is a result of being in an uncultivated environment at a formative time in her development.

And so she publishes modestly (or foolishly) "without other hope than that of such temporary preservation as print can give them, [and] launches them on the ever-increasing tide of literature." There is a note of resignation in her voice but no conviction that her poems have artistic merit. Despite the fact that she probably once aspired to fame with her poetry, by 1908 she has realised her limitations. In fact twenty eight years earlier she had already expressed her disappointment in her
poetic abilities. In Sonnet XXV she had written:

\[ I \ loathe \ each \ rhyme \ I \ make, \ and \ shudd'ring \ turn \]
\[ From \ verses \ that \ I \ loved, \ for \ now \ I \ know \]
\[ How \ feebly \ in \ my \ breast \ the \ ashes \ burn \]
\[ That \ in \ the \ true-born \ Poet \ fiercely \ glow.^{15} \]

She makes no claim to be a ‘true-born’ poet, but this does not prevent her from continuing to write poetry. Poetry becomes her perpetual companion, shadowing her throughout her life, whether she wills it or not. In To Poetry she says:

\[ O \ thou \ pale \ shadow \ that \ with \ tireless \ feet \]
\[ Followest \ me \ trav'ling \ to \ the \ mystic \ grave, \]
\[ Whether \ joy's \ sunbeams \ on \ my \ temples \ beat, \]
\[ Or \ wailing \ wings \ of \ sorrow \ round \ me \ rave! \]

and concludes:

\[ Thy \ friendly \ hand \ still \ pours \ the \ draught I \ drain, \]
\[ Sweet'ning \ all \ joy, \ embittering \ ev'ry \ pain.^{16} \]

For Margaret Thomas poetry is elusive and frustrating but it allows her to invest her emotions with deeper meaning, to feel them more fully and express them with greater intensity. Much of her poetry, however, expresses what Gilbert and Gubar term “the germ of a dis-ease,...a disaffection, a disturbance, a distrust” that accompanies her throughout life.\(^{17}\) Her poetry expresses more clearly the tensions that are only hinted at in her other writings. They display the discomfort she feels while trying to function within the spaces of patriarchy, of trying to speak in the constrained forms of a patriarchal discourse. But to read her poems solely as the outpourings of a miserable woman is, as Diana Scott argues, to miss the point of the nineteenth century woman artist’s position.\(^{18}\) Clearly Margaret Thomas was not an altogether miserable woman, for her life was too full; and she expressed enjoyment of life in many and various ways. Neither is she really bitter, though she occasionally uses this adjective to describe her feelings. The deep sense of bitterness that the consistent struggle for recognition can produce (which Barbara Harris refers to in relation to the nineteenth century woman’s fight for places within the professions) does not seem to be part of Margaret Thomas’ character.\(^{19}\) Rather, she displays an ability to come to terms with disappointment by focussing on the other opportunities still available to her. But the remaining discomfort she feels is real and persistent.
Margaret Thomas thus accepts the limitations of her dilettantism, "the chord of but once heard lays", and in publishing exposes her acceptance of amateurism as an imperfect expression.\textsuperscript{20} As an amateur, a lover of poetry, she exposes a variety of human failings: she makes mistakes and is disappointed; she fails to grant poetry the space, time and talent it requires and consequently she is let down by her attempts. She fails to become 'expert' in her poetry or to show signs of 'genius' and despite the fact that she does publish the work, poetry is clearly not her main occupation or her 'profession'. Yet to measure poetry in terms of expertise in one sense is incongruous: poetry is a response to life and one need not respond to life 'expertly' or 'professionally'. The only degree of expertise that can be applied to poetry must reside, then, in the manipulation of language. Following this line of argument the only "true-born poets" become those who are born male. Margaret Thomas' acknowledgement of her poetic incompetence is an admission of her failure to come to terms with the challenge of finding an authentic language to interpret her own experience. In this sense she can only ever be an amateur, loving the act of writing poetry, while not fully being able to plumb its depths.

As a lover of poetry she deals with the theme of love and lovemaking in her work. "Making poetry through love, and love through poetry", as Deirdre David suggests, links the Victorian woman's art directly to her sexuality.\textsuperscript{21} Margaret Thomas' earliest poems, those written in her twenties, describe rapturous states of youthful love entwined with her first attempts at art. Disappointment in love also features as one of the major themes throughout her work.

Throughout all of her love poems Margaret Thomas takes great pains to avoid exposing the object or objects of her love. She seems to be protecting either herself or the other party from exposure and therefore hides her love behind poetic verse. She refers to "a secret she may utter never" and at various times appeals to her lover to forgive her if she ever unintentionally betrays this secret. In the poem "A Murmur" she says:

\begin{verbatim}
... nor let
One telltale murmur stain the quivering lip,
Let not one sigh be voice to my regret,
Tell not how bitter is the cup I sip.
Forgive my rhyme; my silent grief can find
No other channel; like white ocean waves
'Twill beat against my heart till undermined
It fall and pass to dark unfathomed caves.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{verbatim}
In many of the poems there is an ambiguity of treatment which disguises the gender of the lover. Often there are feminine connotations and at other times the descriptions could apply to either gender. Also some poems suggest platonic friendship while others portray a more sexual type of love. Sometimes her friendships seem to extend for many years, from her time in Australia to her middle years in England, and at other times friendships are introduced as having begun in a particular place such as Italy. Also, from the middle of her life there are poems which deal with the deaths of these lovers and friends and there are also suggestions of gossip and scandal. The seemingly deliberate use of ambiguity creates a sense of intrigue but she appears determined to keep the details of her private life to herself. In the poem “Farewell” she says:

\[
\text{The sorrow of my heart no soul shall share,} \\
\text{And none shall hear the story of my woe;} \\
\text{To mar thy peace no craven cry, no pray'r} \\
\text{Shall rise from the abyss to which I go.} \]^{23}
\]

A reading of these poems is therefore made all the more difficult because one is never sure whether the object of her love is a man or a woman, or even several men or women. Charles Summers, an older married man and her private tutor, is the obvious first choice. But Margaret Thomas dedicates one of her volumes to her close companion Henrietta Pilkington and on many occasions there are clear signals that her love is directed towards a woman. Again, whether this is a sexual love or simply a deep and intimate friendship is unknown. Marjorie Tipping describes Friendship, Poems in Memoriam as “a volume of rather erotic love poems" although their degree of eroticism is arguable.\(^24\) Poem IV in this volume, written in 1867, is probably the most ‘erotic’ her poems ever become and one in which the descriptive terms seem to apply to a woman:

\[
\begin{align*}
O \text{ thou whose gentle head is bent to rest} \\
Bowed with the weight of sleep upon my breast, \\
Whose soft, warm arms are twining over me \\
Like ivy creeping round a rugged tree, \\
Whose lips against my cheek are calmly laid \\
Like summer rosebuds sleeping in the shade, \\
Whose violet-tinted eyelids quench the light \\
Of eyes like moonbeams pure, like sunshine bright, - \\
Canst thou, all trusting as thou art, believe
\end{align*}
\]
I am so false, so vile as to deceive?

Ah! if I loved thee not, that trust should be
A pledge of more than perfect faith in me.
Could I bend down that gentle head with woe,
Bid but one tear from out those eyelids flow,
Leave but those white arms, empty, desolate,
Or close those lips in bitterness or hate,
I were a wretch whose very glance should be
Shunned by my race, but most of all by thee.  

A more likely interpretation for the 'eroticism' of these female-centred poems is provided by Janet Todd's argument that in female literary friendships, especially those based on an eighteenth century model, "rapture and rhetoric" were frequent bedfellows. When used to describe female companionship, they often protected women from fear of male aggression or neglect. "Sentimental friendship" she says "[provided] close emotional support in a patriarchal world, if heterosexual love has...proved violent and painful." "It may even threaten to replace this love," she adds.

Was the overriding sense of pain and suffering to have a deleterious effect on the concept of herself as an artist, or was it an inspirational one? According to the poems, there are moments in her life which appear to be significant turning points in which she realises the direction her life must take and these seem to be linked to her early love affair/s. The painful experience of lost love may have been a factor in turning her attention towards becoming self sufficient and independent, and the probability of spinsterhood could have been a prompt towards developing a career, but it would be dangerous to assume this.

Nevertheless, the departure of lovers influences her emotional equilibrium. In "The Vanished Hope", written in Melbourne in 1864, she describes a sad future after such a departure:

What remains? 'tis but endurance
Thro' a few more bitter years
In unswerving firm assurance
Death will wipe away all tears.

Her "few more bitter years" become a lifetime in which she experiences the pain of
lost love over and over again. As early as 1866 she prophetically contemplates her future as a single woman "alone on life’s barren shore" and the possibility that she may never return to Australia. On a holiday at Brunswick her meditations on the delightful summer scenery give way to more melancholy reflections:

Steal gently o’er me, tranquil summer hours,
Steal softly as the limpid waters flow,
Like zephyrs bearing perfume from the flowers
Or mururing ‘mid the leaflets soft and low.

Pass slowly, for this day I take from care,
And underneath God’s Heaven pure and free
Drink a full draught of strength the pain to bear
That thro’ my coming life is waiting me.

The water looks towards the distant sky
As friends may gaze into each other’s eyes,
Reflecting in its bosom faithfully
The clouds which on the surface sink and rise.

For me, my hope is past, my pleasure gone.
I stand alone upon life’s barren shore,
A hull dismantled by the savage storm,
Which years of labour shall rebuild no more.

Yet stay, ye summer hours! ere long once more
The din of busy life shall fill mine ear;
The scenes be gone which now I linger o’er,
The gentle tones be hushed which now I hear.

And who shall say if yet again
This voice, these scenes I e’er shall hear or see;
For in the world’s perpetual care and pain
The most I hope is change of misery.

If the lover was Charles Summers, then one could develop a very neat argument around the devoted young art student following her tutor across to Italy, swooning over his ‘genius’, being caught up in an illicit affair with him, and then sadly maintaining a respectable distance while relegating her secret to her poetry for the
rest of her life. This scenario would ideally suit the argument that says that the failure of many nineteenth century woman artists lay in their projection of their own creativity onto a love object. If the object were a male artist of genius then the woman’s talent was assumed to be completely dissolved in an act of hero worship. This is quite a feasible explanation for Margaret Thomas’ passions and would support the tone of *A Hero of the Workshop*. Even if she were then to turn to women for her emotional needs, for example to Henrietta Pilkington, her close companion and fellow artist, the ambiguous nature of the poems would be partially explained.

If, on the other hand, her love was entirely focussed on women, then her attitude towards the role of the artist would be significantly altered. If her world was separated into distinct spheres so that her emotional life was bound up with women and particularly women artists, whereas her vision of the artist as hero was a masculine one then the perpetual marginalisation of the woman artist would be likely to produce a sense of alienation, even if she was not consciously aware of its source. If she were attempting to prove herself as a professional artist, the psychological strain of upholding contradictory ideals would explain the distraught nature of much of her poetry. Here the pain of love rejected would mirror the pain of exclusion from the discourse of art she simultaneously supported. Her need for secrecy would also be justified if this were the case. As Dorothy Jones argues, in the early twentieth century “women who chose not to marry were increasingly regarded as unnatural, and by the nineteen twenties distinctions had been clearly drawn between an acceptable level of friendship and lesbianism, so that women have come to feel self-conscious and guilty about expressing physical affection for one another.”

In both of these contexts art and work becomes not a ‘striving for honour’ but a relief or a distraction from pain. This pain, coupled with the prevailing expectations for women in relation to marriage and family, combine to make Margaret Thomas, as a career woman, not a happy figure, despite the fact that she was obviously a determined one. As Diana Scott suggests, the tensions produced by this conflict for the woman artist produced a sense of loneliness that was not only a reflection of personal feelings but went deeper to reflect a schizm in the demands on Victorian middle class women as a whole. Loneliness permeates many a poem for Margaret Thomas. Her poem “Alone”, written in 1872, though not one of great literary merit, describes her personal interpretation of this loneliness.

*Now the weariness and pain,*
Now the bitterness and grief;
Eyes which answer not again,
Lips which murmur not relief;
Thoughts which die like flowers o'erblown-
This it is to be alone.

Now the labour and unrest,
Tears which will not be denied;
Sighs which cannot be represt,
Doubts and sorrows magnified;
Ghosts of joys which sigh and moan-
This it is to be alone.31

Immersing herself in art and work does not overcome her sense of loneliness and at times her reflections on art seem to exaggerate her feelings of isolation. In the poem “To the Caryatid in the British Museum” she identifies with the fate of a Greek statue, torn from its homeland. The poem can be read as a metaphor for the predicament of the expatriate female artist.

Pale pris'ner ravished from thine own fair shore
Perchance to perish in our northern gloom,
Dost thou in silence mourn the heavy doom
That from thy sister Caryatids tore,
Leaving thee scarred and lonely evermore,
In thy mute beauty, thine eternal peace,
Witnessing to the “glory that was Greece”,
And genius of the hero race she bore?
In thy distress thou still art eloquent
Of arms, of art, of song: thy war-stained frame,
Thy time-worn marble are a monument,
Which cannot lie, to her immortal name;
Sad Caryatid, lone and worn and spent,
Point for us too the glorious path of fame.32

This poem reads as if she has some underlying sympathy with the fate of the Caryatid, as if she too were “a pale pris’ner ravished from her own fair shore”. It has references to the colonisation of cultures and of women. The Caryatids were female statues in long drapery used as columns supporting temples, and were derived from the poses enacted by the young maidens of Caryae in an annual
festival of Artemis held in Laconia. Artemis was a goddess of wildlife, childbirth and hunting and was associated with the moon and motherhood. She had links with the Asiatic fertility goddess. The Caryatids thus became the frozen celebrants of an ancient female ritual employed to uphold the temples of a masculine war-based culture. In this poem the ravished Caryatid becomes a symbol not only of the British appropriation of Greek culture, but also of the expatriation of the nineteenth century woman artist in the service of patriarchal culture and 'high art'.

Margaret Thomas' ultimate response to the pain and loneliness of her position becomes a desire for escape. Death forms a frequent motif throughout her poetry, ranging from a youthful longing for a romantic solution, to the grief associated with friends' deaths and finally to a contemplation of the inevitability of her own death. But she also tenaciously holds on to life, so that her poetic appeals argue not for literal annihilation but reflect a psychological state. Inner dissatisfaction and a sense of hopelessness become a product of the conflicting stresses on the nineteenth century woman striving to break from the private to the public sphere.

Her longing for death reaches the pitch of a desire which then weaves throughout her poetry in a repetitious form. In the Romantic tradition, woman’s sexuality is inscribed onto her creativity. Margaret Thomas' poetry become like a series of 'little deaths'. Because she is caught between pitting herself personally (armed with mallet and chisel as well as pen and brush) against the construct of the artist as singularly male, and upholding artistic excellence as a masculine ideal, she can never attain the peak for which she longs. In a twentieth century analogy, her desire for release becomes thwarted, and her efforts to appear satisfied, like feigned orgasms, resonate with disappointment. The following poems, amongst others which deal with grief, pain and death, illustrates this point:

Amid the corpses of my dead desires
Feeding on disappointment's ashy fruit,
Lone as the winds that fan the desert fires,
Worn with the grief which moans not but is mute
I kneel and lift sad hands to those far stars
Which tread, unmoved, their solitary way,
And pray that from these earthly prison bars
My soul may burst, and seek the love-warmed day,
Rending the fetters of this worldly love,
Wherein I wander, captive, double-bound,
Seeking that joy which none may ever prove,
Asking that faith which none has ever found.
Accept in peace, poor fool, the lot of man;
Know, in joy’s army, sorrow leads the van.34

Amongst all this grief and pain “Art”, she says, “is the concentrated cry of sorrowing, sad humanity.”35 In art, as in love, she reaps her share of disappointment. Among the hopes for her career, fame becomes one of the “corpses of her dead desires.” In her middle years she reflects on her past success. In “The Test”, she says “Fortune and youth and fame were mine”, and describes how each held promises for her future.36 But, as the years wear on, the “untamed ambition” that had “whirled [her] madly on” now seems empty.37 In “Seek not Again” she describes the rewards of youth which are no longer due to her.

Seek not again the love that crowned
Thy former years with joys sublime,
And with intoxication drowned
The passing griefs of bitter time.

Seek not again fame’s fickle smile;
She cast thee once a withered leaf;
Let it suffice that once erewhile
’Twas thine, tho’ like a star-fall, brief.

Seek not again the joys which laved,
Like ocean’s summer waves, thy soul,
And lulled thee into calm which braved
The roar of distant breakers’ roll.

For nevermore may these revive,
If thou their forms would galvanise;
It is but soulless ghosts that live
To chide thee with lack-lustre eyes.

No! let them all in peace depart!
The flowers of mem’ry left to thee,
Hide in the coffer of thine heart,
Pale shreds of past felicity.

For all thou hadst, thank God, and creep
In a further poem, "Say, is it Fame?" she also contemplates the rewards of fame and concludes:

*If this be fame,
Go, plough your fields and pass your days in mirth!
And when you die, sleep free from praise or blame
Beneath the soil you tilled, that gave you birth!*

Margaret Thomas had a taste of the fame that many young nineteenth century women craved, but her experience of it is as a passing, though pleasant, sensation, a driving force, but not a satisfying reward. She utilises ambition to reinforce her identity as a professional but the fame which comes her way is a "withered leaf...tho' like a star-fall brief." Having based her drive on the hope of receiving such fame, the resulting reward is dissatisfying. It appears from her poetry that she struggled with the notion of fame for many years. "The anguish of ambition foiled" litters the pages of her poetry in a number of different forms.

However, her struggle reflected that which the society had long battled with. The struggle between worldly fame and humility was a centuries' old one retrospectively allied to early contests between spirituality and material achievement. In the Christian religion the struggle was ongoing but referred to medieval doctrines. The Church had remained one of the major carriers of these former values. The aristocracy, too, carried aspects of this value system with aristocratic women, as 'servants' of their class, demonstrating their humility within a superfluity of wealth and privilege through their modest attainments in the arts. The aristocratic woman's amateurism, an admission that her skill was not so great that it would fill her with unwanted hubris (or threaten the skills of the artisans in the class below) served to reinforce her class's identification with the 'superior' moral values of a former, that is a medieval, era. During the Renaissance, when men began to avail themselves of the advantages of individuality with the rise of Humanism, women were expected to conceal their attainments behind the mask of anonymity, demonstrating their class's innate spirituality.

Bourgeois women were encouraged to share in this demonstration of humility in order to elevate their class, which was preoccupied with material gain, to a higher
spiritual plane. They were required to imitate the strategies of their social superiors, but this subjected them to conflicting value systems. In the field of art, art as commerce required the artist to become self-promoting, confident and ambitious, whereas art as an expression of spirituality involved attention towards a different set of values. As amateurs, bourgeois women could retain their relationship to the spiritual and moral values that were highly esteemed across the strata of society and reinforced by religion. The battle with hubris did not enter the equation if the woman was content to limit her skills and demonstrate her humility. If, however, she undertook to become professional, and therefore proclaim her association with art as a commercial venture, she also undertook the need for ambition and self-promotion. She was then torn between conflicting ideologies.

Margaret Thomas' insistence on herself as a 'mere artist', her frequent apologies for the crudity or triviality of her writing and her celebration of art that will never be seen, all point to a need to maintain her relationship with the spiritual and moral expectations of her middle class role. In effect, her continued association with the tenets of amateurism acted as a balance to the moral dangers associated with her venture into the professional sphere. Her maintenance of her writing practice, despite her own belief in its literary inferiority, helps to dampen her fear of being overtaken by dangerous pride.

The fact that she then publishes this writing is a demonstration of the complexity of her position and her identity. In publishing she publicly announces her dilettantism: she apologises for her writing in several introductions and conclusions as well as at various points throughout the texts. But she also proclaims her association with the commercial world and her middle class background. She does not, however, claim anonymity but is even proud of engaging with the public sphere to the extent of exposing what could be regarded as very private work (some of her love poetry, for example). The result is that the conflicting value systems, those of modesty and self-promotion, vie to produce contradictory messages within her published texts.

At times she appears to give up the struggle with ambition and consents to her failings as 'only human'. Sometimes she even appears to be at peace with her lot. In Poem XXV she states:

...O God, to Thee

We render back these gifts and murmur not;
Our joys, our love, our youth are Thine, and we
Resign them, bending to our human lot.
But then, adhering to her belief that there are certain individuals, those of genius, who are not bound by ordinary human conditions, she adds:

But why destroy Thy noblest work, the sons
Of genius, sent Thine earth to consecrate?
We mourn their loss, the great and gifted ones,
And struggle helpless with life's bitter fate;
Hush! tho' our joy, our love, our youth pass by,
The witnesses of God can never die.41

Her focus on genius, in the light of the struggle between fame and conscience, becomes a plausible solution to her predicament. A belief in genius deflects the struggle because it creates a select group of individuals whose achievements can never be matched. For women, trained culturally to nurture their humility, such a belief was useful. It meant that they could effectively transpose the conflict onto another's shoulders. Thus Harriett Hosmer could refer to her sculpture teacher, John Gibson, as "a god in his studio" and Margaret Thomas could speak of Charles Summers as "a hero of the workshop" and feel comforted that they as women would never need to be debilitated by too much pride in their own achievements.

While art and work provided a relief from emotional turmoil over love lost, in a reciprocal way, the anxieties of love provide a temporary solution to the conflicts associated with ambition. As Morton Bloomfield argues, "love actually unites conscience and fame because in 'fin amors' the outer becomes the inner and the inner the outer; the proud becomes humble, and the humble proud. The dialectic of fame and conscience receives in love one of its temporary resolutions."42 It is perfectly appropriate, then, that Margaret Thomas' poetry should celebrate the pain of love alongside the pain of ambition, as mutually dependent states of mind.

Ultimately, though, there is no permanent resolution for Margaret Thomas and the pain of her life's struggle persists. An image of an older, lonelier and sadder woman contemplating life over a cigarette emerges in the poem "To My Cigarette", published in By Creek and Gully in 1899.

Friends are changing, years are flying.
Hopes are failing, love is dying.
Thou alone art faithful yet,
Cigarette, O cigarette.
Life's deceiving, fame betraying,
Nothing stays that's worth the staying.
Come and teach me to forget,
Cigarette, O cigarette. 43

In her last published poem, written in 1927, two years before her death, she concentrates on the love of a close, though presumably deceased friend, asking forgiveness for any wrong she has done in the past:

Of hearts that always beat in unison,
One only throbs in misery and pain,
Alone while life shall last I stumble on,
And pray, O pure of heart, thou wilt again
Forgive. 44

The lingering sadness that forms a significant part of Margaret Thomas' poetry testifies to the degree of dissonance between her ambitions in love and art, and her experience. As the underside of her public writing her poetry deals with the pain she experiences when the ideals she supports prove unsuitable or inapplicable to female experience. Her poetry becomes an explication of her feelings in relation to her understanding of these ideals, but does not attempt to contest the validity of the ideals themselves.

1 Margaret Thomas, Friendship (London, 1873).
2 Diana Scott (editor), Bread and Roses: Women's Poetry of the 19th and 20th Centuries (London: Virago, 1982) 23.
5 Elliott and Mitchell xvi.
7 Gibson 21.
8 Gibson 21.
10 Gibson 21.
11 Thomas, A Painter's Pastime vii.
12 Thomas, A Painter's Pastime vii.
13 Thomas, A Painter's Pastime viii.
14 Thomas, A Painter's Pastime viii.
15 Margaret Thomas, Friendship, Poems in Memoriam Poem XXV (1880).
16 Thomas, A Painter's Pastime, Poem XXVI.
18 Scott 25.
19 Barbara Harris, Beyond Her Sphere: Women and the Professions in American History (Westpoint, Connecticut, 1978).
20 Thomas, Friendship, Poems in Memoriam Poem IV (1865).
21 David 151.
22 Thomas, Friendship, Poems in Memoriam Poem XVII (April 1873).
23 Thomas, A Painter's Pastime 148.
25 Thomas, Friendship, Poems in Memoriam Poem IV (1867).
27 Todd 3.
28 Thomas, Friendship, Poems in Memoriam Poem II (1864).
30 Scott 25.
31 Thomas, Friendship, Poems in Memoriam Poem XV (1872).
32 Thomas, A Painter's Pastime 21.
34 Thomas, A Painter's Pastime ix.
35 Thomas, A Painter's Pastime 116.
36 Thomas, A Painter's Pastime 93.
37 Thomas, A Painter's Pastime 38.
38 Thomas, A Painter's Pastime 117.
39 Thomas, A Painter's Pastime 115.
41 Thomas, A Painter's Pastime 50.
43 Fisher, By Creek and Gully 165.
44 Thomas, Friendship, Poems in Memoriam Poem XLVI (1927).
CONCLUSION

Until now Margaret Thomas’ writing has not been taken seriously. In terms of its literary qualities there is perhaps some justification for this. However, in terms of its contribution towards an understanding of the thought processes of a woman artist at a crucial stage in the historical development of women in art history, her writing is invaluable. Her writing contributes much to an interpretation of the position of the colonial woman artist, her fight for professional recognition and the internal struggles which take place as she negotiates her position in the art community and the wider world.

As the previous chapters have suggested, Margaret Thomas’ public identity is revealed as a composite of a number of dissonant voices. As these voices have been teased out into their component parts the ideological patterns supporting them have been exposed. The apparent fragmentation of her identity is partly a result of her practice in a number of genres and artforms. Her tendency to remain firmly within the confines of each genre, in itself produced a body of work that is disparate in form and reveals seemingly contradictory aspects of the artist author. Conversely, her tendency to practise in a number of artforms is, as I have demonstrated, the result of her historical relationship to the bourgeois woman’s role as amateur artist. But there are deeper reasons for the fragmentation of her public persona and these lie, as I have shown, in her internalisation of the myths engendered by patriarchy.

The external factors which influence her identity formation include her class, race and gender, her colonial experience and the historical shift from amateurism to professionalism in the wider intellectual sphere. The themes she incorporates into her writing such as the notion of the artist as hero, the idea of fame, a western patriarchal viewing position in relation to gender and race, and her interpretation of the role of the professional, conflict with her experience and needs as a woman artist. The resulting sense of tension and alienation mitigates against a coherent authorial voice. But conversely, the fractured identity revealed across these artforms and genres is given expression and, while her various voices resist cohesion as a unified whole, they are nevertheless given a concrete and identifiable form.
One of the most significant historical factors impinging on her development was, as I have demonstrated, a shift in public intellectual life from the amateur to the professional in conjunction with the emergence of women into the professions. Margaret Thomas’ career demonstrates a mixed artistic identity: she oscillates between the values of the amateur in terms of its relationship to the old order of the aristocracy and dilettantism, and the newly forming ‘modern’ values of the professional artist. For Margaret Thomas, the professional domain was unknown territory which she negotiated by periodically reverting to the safety and protection of her amateur interests.

Her milieu represents the extremes of both value systems and she draws on the advantages of both. While she diligently applied herself to her training to become fully professionalised in her field, she also held on to aspects of the amateur tradition which served to reinforce her sense of herself as a cultivated woman and a lover of the arts in the broad sense. Her professional aspirations, however, place her in a category apart from many other women of her class.

The act of spreading her energies across the arts and becoming flexible in a variety of media and literary genres allowed her to approach her subject matter from a number of perspectives. Such a lateral approach to the arts was fashionable in the early part of her career, but as specialisation became a phenomenon of the early twentieth century, Margaret Thomas’ dependence on this lateral approach was threatened. Consequently her writing tends to demonstrate conflicting views.

In her early poetry she records her frustration with the superficiality of her artistic training as it reflects the limitations of a young lady’s education. She yearns to know more and experience the intensity of a more professional training. In “The Story of a Photograph” she suggests that the woman who limits herself to such an amateur form of expression may not even survive, particularly in the harshness of the colonial environment. As she gets older and her professional position is consolidated she tries to maintain a personal distance from the concept of the amateur, but her sense that the public appears to be an excluded party in the discourse of high art resonates with her feelings of exclusion as a woman artist from the dominant discourses of her time.

In her art manuals she thus attempts to create bridges between the artist, the academic and the lay public, and frequently demonstrates her dislike of elitist views of art which exclude the amateur or art lover. She situates herself in clear contradistinction to the role of the avant garde artist, one of whose intentions
appeared to disrupt communication between the arist and the public. However, while she advocates a democratic approach to the arts her art manuals tend to reinforce rather than dissolve cultural barriers.

One of the motivating forces driving Margaret Thomas as a young woman into art as a career was her ambition, and more specifically, her desire for fame. As her writing suggests, the struggle with the idea of fame accompanied her throughout various phases of her life and took on various forms. As a middle class woman her cultural training reflected the value system of the old elite in which women’s behaviour was to reinforce the spiritual superiority of her class. The contest between modesty and self-promotion vies throughout much of Margaret Thomas’ writing making her alternately anxious for societal recognition of her worth and apologetic for her inadequacies. Only in her love poetry is the struggle resolved so that love forms a reciprocal relationship with ambition.

Linked with the idea of fame is her interpretation of the myth of the artist as hero. Her expression of this myth features in her biography of Charles Summers. As I have argued, Margaret Thomas is able to link some aspects of the myth, such as the ideal of the artist as worthy citizen, with the needs of women, but must abandon others, such as the hero’s humble birth, his contact with misfortune and villainy, and his conquest over concrete obstacles. Also, her representation of Charles Summers’ single-minded dedication to the pursuit of one goal, from his childhood through to his death, is foreign to female experience. The fact that she equates this myth with the idea of professionalism and links it with fame, creates continuing stress, producing anguish and pain. She conveys this pain through her poetry. Only when meditating on the lifestyle of the Italian peasants does she question the foundation of her beliefs and expose the precariousness of her position. However, while she asks “Is all a myth?”, she fails to recognise that the myths that have supported men as artists are never really applicable to her own needs as a woman.

It is her colonial experience that provides her with a source of personal renewal which can partially overcome her disadvantage as a woman artist. While estrangement, alienation and pain inscribed themselves onto her identity, as a result, she says, of being in an uncultivated environment at a formative time in her development, it also provided her with the strength to overcome her disadvantage. Her sixteen years in Australia provided her with material for the basis of her short story which, while insubstantial as a literary work, suggests the framing of an alternative mythical journey for the colonial woman artist. The woman artist’s
colonial experience then becomes empowering, but, as I have argued, does not fully engage her needs. The overall result is a sense of dissatisfaction and the implication that neither the new world of the colonies, nor the old world in which the foundations of western art were laid, has a place for the professional woman artist.

International travel becomes an extension of her colonial experience and is also empowering. However, the ideological perspective which reinforces her authority as artist/traveller is based on a western patriarchal viewing position which objectifies women. While she claims she wants to see the end of female oppression, her training as a visual artist is so heavily dominated by such a patriarchal view that she fails to identify her own objectification of oriental women.

In her travels her class also features as a defining mechanism and an empowering function. While she stresses that she travels as frugally as possible, imitating the experience of the poor she observes, she frequently relies on the advantages her class can offer her. In this respect, her race is also significant. Both her professional status and British identity allow her access to places that would be inaccessible to the ordinary tourist. But the constant reminder that her gender aligns her with the most disadvantaged group the world over, that is with women, problematises the authority of her privileged viewing position. She frequently indicates her discomfort while not necessarily investigating its cause. As a result, her travel writing suffers from a lack of conviction.

It is only in her poetry that she articulates some of the clashes between the ideologies she has absorbed through the process of enculturation combined with her artistic training, and a deeper sense of self which is located in her personal experience. Her poetry exposes the clashes between her gender and her desire for self-determination, between love, sexuality and independence and between her need to create art for personal gratification and her commitment to art as profession. Her poetry also acts as a foil to the other genres she works in, providing access to a different range of characteristics to those exposed by her as an author in her other texts.

How Margaret Thomas' public persona relates to the private Margaret Thomas is, and probably will remain, unknown and to confuse the narrative voices represented in these texts with the personal identity of the author would be dangerously simplistic. And yet the artistic identity which emerges in the writing
is representative of the experience of an artist at a significant point in the history of women in art. By merging aspects of amateurism and professionalism she was able to construct an identity matrix which allowed her to negotiate her career path. While she was not wholly satisfied with some aspects of her artistic life she at least created a path which satisfied her on a variety of levels. Her writing is thus meaningful and valuable as source material and helps to expose the strategies which an early professional woman has used and the barriers which prohibited her from feeling completely comfortable in her new found role.
APPENDIX 1

SOURCES

Primary and secondary sources which make reference to Margaret Thomas demonstrate a regular attention towards her throughout her lifetime and then a spate of references soon after her death in 1929. After this time her name was included in a variety of general biography texts and in general art history texts and histories of sculpture. She then became included in the ‘canon’ of Australian art history and in catalogues of women artists. The sources include the following (see the bibliography for full publishing details):

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<tr>
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APPENDIX 2

A MORPHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF
A HERO OF THE WORKSHOP

In *The Morphology of the Folktale* Vladimir Propp propounds a form of structural analysis based on his study of Russian folktales which ideally suits the examination of this text. Mircea Eliade describes Propp as “(seeing) in folktales the memory of totemic initiation rites”.1 Margaret Thomas is clearly talking about the ‘initiation’ of the artist and his progression to the status of culture hero. While Propp limits his analysis to his own area of expertise, the Russian folktale, he does point out the possibility of extending structural analysis to other genres.2

Propp concludes *The Morphology of the Folktale* with a quotation from Veselovskj which describes the value of a retrospective analysis of tales and the effect of time “that great simplifier” on the revelation of structure within a text.3 In the case of Margaret Thomas’s work the effect of style can have an equivalent simplifying effect. The twentieth century reader, no longer persuaded by the eulogy in its exaggerated form, can retain a dispassionate viewpoint (although perhaps respond with a condescending smile towards its quaintness and sentimentality). Also, because Charles Summers did not become a culture hero of the twentieth century, but remained specific to the needs of the Victorian era, there is added distance.

The following analysis is based on Propp’s system, specifically because of the remarkable similarities which occur between the structure of *The Hero of the Workshop* and Propp’s observations. The tabulated form of the analysis is based on his own design in Appendix 1, but is augmented with other comments he makes throughout the book.4
Temporal-spatial determination (in a certain kingdom).
App 1, Table 1, no. 1 & 2.
Composition of the family.

The future hero is named, and his rapid growth is described. He is often connected with the hearth or ashes, that is with humble birth. Misfortune or lack is made known.
Table 1, no. 10, 11, 12.

Villainy accompanies the struggle of the hero. p 30.
In Charles Summers' case it is his father's lack of responsibility.

The spiritual qualities of the hero are described.
Table 1, no. 13.

The hero proves himself by various onerous tasks and competitions. p 39.

Villainy (lack of responsibility of the father) is again stressed.

An interdiction is addressed to the hero. In this case the hero is admonished not to leave home.
Table II, no 25.

The interdiction is violated.
The motivation for the violation is identified.
Table II, no. 30-32.

The 'seeker hero' departs from home.
Table III, no. 67-68.

A new character enters the tale. Propp terms him the donor. The aspects of the donor are described, the dialogue between them, and the hospitality shown to the hero by the donor.
Table IV, no. 70-77.
In Charles Summers' case, the donor is an elderly sculptor by the name of M.L. Watson, who becomes his teacher. The relationship between them develops into a bond of friendship.

Charles Summers was born in the obscure village of Charlton, seven miles from Ilchester, in Somertshire, on the 27th July, 1877, and was the eldest in a family of eight children..p 1.

Thus it happened that his son Charles, instead of learning to read or write in his childhood, was sent as soon as he could walk, into the labour market, to earn a shilling a-week by scaring crows from the wheatfield....p 1.

...as the boy grew older, he was employed in the most arduous and difficult tasks, while his father consumed both time and money in the ale-house...p 2.

...the active, willing spirit of the brave lad and his unvarying energy and strength...p 2.
...the lad's industry and quickness never failing to make head under the most adverse circumstances...p 4.

At the ages of eight or nine years, many a time has he been compelled to make night journeys alone with a horse and cart to the pit to procure coals for the family consumption...p 2.

Strong and industrious by nature, his work soon surpassed that of the whole yard; and a wager as to whether he or a lad nearly double his size could best square and face a stone, was decided by the umpires, their fellow workmen, in favour of the former...p 5.

...and Charles Summers becomes the sole support of his mother and her family...p 7.
(Margaret Thomas's italics)

A young man doing so well for himself should not leave it for a place full of such dreadful wickedness and temptations as London...p 7.

...the anxiety of the future artist to go to London, and perhaps become a sculptor...p 7.

At the age of nineteen, then, our enterprising countryman found himself in the great metropolis of England...p 8.

...so eager was he indeed to perform his work that Watson often besought him to rest for a day and visit some exhibition, and bring him back his opinion of the works. This pleasing incident illustrates the cordial understanding that existed between master and servant...p 10.
The donor prepares the hero for the transmission of a magical agent or helper through a task or request. The task can involve rendering a service to a dead or dying person.

Table IV, no. 78 a,b.
The reaction of the hero is outlined.
Table IV, no 79 a,b.

As a consequence of this action the hero is given some provision.
Table IV, no. 80-81.

In the case of this story the magical quality of this moment is stressed.

The hero acquires the use of a magical agent. This magical agent has the character of a reward. p 43. In this case the reward is the admission to the Royal Academy.

Another magical agent is given to Summers in the form of medals. These are gained through a competition. This is accompanied by a further service to a dead person.

His success was complete, and in 1850 Charles Summers was admitted as a student of the Royal Academy...p 13.

Following up this success he at once placed his name in the list of competitors for the silver medal for modelling from the antique. This competition takes place in October; but at the commencement of that month he received a letter to hasten to Somersetshire, if he wished to see his mother before she died. The affectionate son lost no time in proceeding thither...He modelled her bust while she lay a corpse, and returned to London ten days after the other competitors had begun work for the medal...p 14.

(He wins) the silver medal for the best model from life and the gold medal... for the best group of historical sculpture (and) a bronze medal...p 14.

There was not a little surprise and a great deal of cheering in the hall of the Academy, when the unassuming student from the country received...the honours so quickly won and so well deserved...p 15.

He now became an exhibitor at the Royal Academy Exhibitions, and taking a studio in Warwick-street, Pimlico, received much praise for the busts and medallions he executed...p 15.

(As Margaret Thomas recounts, the year of 1851 saw all of these victories)... and to complete its record, he entered into a matrimonial engagement...p 15.
The Second Move begins. A new 'lack' is announced which takes the hero on a further adventure. As Propp suggests many tales begin with 'affliction or misfortune'.

Table VI.
The new affliction for Summers is ill health.
The new object of search is located in 'another' or 'different' kingdom. p 50. The hero travels on board a ship. p 51. The new object of search for Summers becomes gold, however, as the tale unfolds the goal of material wealth becomes transformed into that of cultural wealth.

The hero is unrecognised on his arrival.
Table VII, no. 28.
He pursues some menial work which conceals his identity. Table VII, no. 28.
He is recognised by a thing given to him. p 62.

New characters, 'the brothers', appear in the action. These act as 'false heroes', that is, they act as a foil to the hero and their actions by contrast stress the hero's spiritual superiority.
Table V, no. 110-113.

The brothers pose as capturers of the prize.
Table VII, no. 129-131.
The brothers are exposed as false heroes by virtue of their claiming a false prize, that is, material wealth, and their selfishness is exposed.
See also Margaret Thomas's short story Struck Gold for elaboration on this point.

Through the new task the hero is transfigured and given a new appearance. p 62.
From the anonymous role of migrant, among many who are attracted to the goldfields, Summers becomes recognised as a pioneer of the arts in Australia.

The hero ascends the throne. p 63.

But the career which seemed opening so brilliantly became speedily clouded. The strong and vigorous constitution he had brought with him from his native country gave way under his intense application...he was told that the only means of preserving his health was a sea voyage...p 15.
One of his brothers having previously settled in Australia, whence arrived these wonderful accounts of gold discoveries, which unsettled the minds of men at that time, he resolved to proceed thither...p 16.
After a pleasant voyage in the ship Hope, and during which his health was completely restored...p 17.

Mr Summers commenced to build a six-roomed brick house with his own hands, and actually completed it, even to the roof. There are many persons still living who saw the apparent untiring man work from daylight till dark, and needed confirmation of the medals to believe that he was an artist...p 17.

...leaving Mrs Summers (he) went to try his fortune at the diggings, where his brothers were already realizing much money. He laboured there for six months...p 17.
...but the old love of art had not died out. He saw an advertisement for modellers...The work required was for the Houses of Parliament, then in course of erection...p 18.

...but within a week of his departure from Poverty Creek, Tarnagulla, gold was found there in such abundance as to make the fortunes of all concerned. Mr Summers gained nothing thereby...p 18.

He then began to model the female figures and boys on the ceiling of the Council Chamber...he modelled at the same time many busts...becoming more generally known, received a commission to model a Faun for the Melbourne Public Library...p 18.

His services to art in Australia cannot be overestimated. He was the pioneer of art there...p 19.
(He became) the first President of the Victorian Academy of Fine Arts...p 19.

Accordingly he set sail in May, 1867, and made himself so popular during the voyage as to be presented with an address and purse of sovereigns by his fellow passengers...p 22.
The recognition of the hero is in the form of a feast.
Table VII, no. 141-146.
The position on the throne is emphasised.

The last of his works demonstrates his place as king among sculptors.

The townspeople vied with each other to do him the honour, a public dinner and address were given to him...p 22.
His studio was the finest in Rome and he employed latterly as many as 20 men...p 24.
(Margaret Thomas often stresses that Rome is the artist's true home.)
In 1876 Mr Summers received...a commission to execute four colossal statues in marble - the Queen, the Prince Consort, and the Prince and Princess of Wales...p 25.
Summers completes the work but dies before he could see them erected in Melbourne...p 26.

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3 Propp 16.
4 Propp 116.
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