

INTRODUCTION – Sowing the Seeds

The singer, Dorothy Helmrich, was born in 1889 and grew up on Sydney's lower North Shore. One of six children of John Hellmrich¹, an architect in the Lands Department, and Esther Isobel, she shared with her family an interest in music. Even so, the young Dorothy displayed a particular interest and was spellbound on attending her first musical at the age of eight. Initially, she did not entertain hopes for a professional career, but did play a few minor roles in Mosman Musical Society performances. After a few successful performances Helmrich tentatively approached the society's lead singer, William Beattie, concerning formal singing lessons. She subsequently undertook training first with Beattie and later under Madame Antonia Dolores.

Not long afterwards, an acquaintance arranged for her introduction to Mrs Gordon Veshey, who frequently hosted musical entertainments known as *musicales*. Veshey subsequently invited Helmrich to sing as guest artist at one such event. The singer received one guinea as payment. Other engagements soon followed, culminating in an invitation to sing at Government House. Fortunately for Helmrich, Lady Alice Cooper happened to attend the concert while on a brief visit to her homeland from England. Lady Cooper, wife of Sir William Cooper, first speaker of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales before their move to London, herself played the piano with skill.² Impressed by Helmrich's performance Lady Cooper decided that the young singer should go to England and receive professional training. She provided for Helmrich's preliminary training at the newly established New South Wales Conservatorium of Music, her fares to

¹ Dorothy later changed the spelling of her name to Helmrich. For further biographical information see Victor Carell and Beth Dean, *On Wings of Song: Dorothy Helmrich and the Arts Council*, (Sydney: Alternative Publishing Cooperative, 1982); and Jill Roe, 'Dorothy Helmrich', Heather Radi (ed.), *200 Australian Women a Redress anthology*, (Sydney: Women's Redress Press, no copyright date), pp.167-8.

² For details concerning Lady Alice Cooper, and their place in Sydney's historical and social development, see C.H. Bertie, 'Pioneer Families of Australia – No.34 – The Coopers', *The Home*, 1 Oct. 1932, pp.37, 57; and G. Nesta Griffiths, *Point Piper: Past and Present*, (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1940), p.31.

England, and all fees associated with her later studies at the Royal College of Music, and London School of Opera. Further, Cooper insisted that Helmrigh should live with her in London, so that she could effectively care for and watch over the young colonial woman. It was a plan likely to reassure Esther Hellmrigh, Dorothy's mother.

This is but the beginning of Helmrigh's story. Her career had barely begun, and yet four women had already directly assisted her unintentional journey to professional and international fame. Madame Dolores, on hearing a private recital, had recognised the gifts of the young amateur, and exclaimed 'My dear, you must continue with your music and voice training. You do have something to say'.³ She was able to give encouragement and the necessary training to begin the process of enhancing and refining a voice of great promise. Mrs Veshey was prepared to engage and pay a young novice, thus providing Helmrigh with an opportunity to become known for her talent among the women of Sydney's upper middle class; exposure that led eventually to her vice-regal engagement. Lady Cooper provided both the necessary financial means, and the practical organisation involved in arrangements to study abroad. Her role stands out for its generosity and readily falls within usual definitions of patronage. However, Esther Hellmrigh, too, provided valuable support for her daughter. The Hellmrigh family ties were strong, and the separation of mother from daughter would surely have proved difficult for both. Without her mother's approval, it is doubtful that Dorothy Helmrigh would have had the courage to follow through with the offer to undertake musical training abroad. This willing emotional support, along with the sacrifice made by Mrs Hellmrigh in giving up the company of the one daughter that still lived with her, might also be regarded as valuable in the crucial formative stages of the future diva's singing career.

³ Carell and Dean, *On Wings*, p.8.

Esther Hellmrich was not the only Australian woman of the first half of the twentieth century to offer a personal form of patronage, albeit modest, to her creatively talented or artistically interested son, daughter, sister, husband, father or friend. Nor was Madame Dolores the only female practitioner in the various arts to identify and nurture students with promise, or to collaborate with others in her field to the same end. Likewise the social and cultural endeavours of networks of upper middle class women consistently created opportunities for emerging talents and new movements throughout the period. Lady Cooper exemplifies a smaller group of women who possessed sufficient wealth and social influence directly and dramatically to contribute to the careers of students of exceptional creative ability.

In the virtual absence⁴ of further Cooper-style examples of benevolence in Sydney, the other types of patronage demonstrated by Hellmrich's well wishers, become important as indicators of female cultural agency. The possibility that Sydney women, in ways that they had grown to believe were acceptable and intrinsically feminine, contributed to the cultural life of the city forms the first thesis of this study. That their approach to the cultivation of the arts took a variety of directions each resulting from intersecting intellectual, political, and social responses to modernism forms the second thesis of this study. That a focus on what eventually became known as high cultural practice united them forms this study's final thesis.

Historical anxieties over the apparently elitist notion of high culture make contemporary studies on the subject problematic. For many years cultural historians assumed an economic basis to the process of cultural bifurcation that began in the mid-nineteenth century. The word 'culture' was associated in the early nineteenth century with

⁴ Another case, that of Fanny Bauer, has recently come to light through the work of Victoria Strobl. See Victoria M. Strobl, *Fanny Bauer: a life recovered*, BA Honours thesis, Macquarie University, 2000.

the 'cultivation (of the mind, faculties, or manners)'.⁵ By the third quarter of the century, Matthew Arnold, English author of *Culture and Anarchy* (1863) had written emotively of culture as the pursuit of perfection. By the turn of the century, his ideas had transmuted in liberal hands into a hierarchy of creative and intellectual practices. In the early 1930s the English literary critics, F. R. Leavis, Q. D. Leavis, and Denys Thompson, blaming the modern use of machinery, expressed dismay at the reading habits of the general public and urged the strict maintenance of literary standards. From the mid-twentieth century, led by two of Leavis' former students, Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, a body of work emerged that opposed the selectivity inherent in the concomitant notion of high culture. Applying the term, culture, to the customs and practices of any distinct group of people, the new field of cultural studies gave validity to the study of working class and popular culture, while Marxist theorists imputed the impact of economic (and consequently political and ideological) structures on cultural forms.⁶

Some modification of the essentialist nature of such positions has occurred over recent decades, but its key concerns are still evident in the work of Australian social and cultural historian Richard Waterhouse. His *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure: a history of Australian popular culture since 1788* talks of 1850-1914 as a period in which high cultural notions gained currency, and the interwar period as one of modernist challenge.

⁵ *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.447.

⁶ For key works see Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, (1976); also, Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, (1958); F. R. Leavis, *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture*, (1930); F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, *Culture and the Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness* (1934); and Q.D. Leavis, *Fiction and The Reading Public*, (1932). Information concerning key figures, examples of analysis imputing the class basis of cultural bifurcation in England and America, as well as the evolution of the field of cultural studies in Britain gleaned from R.P. Bilan, *The Literary Criticism of F.R. Leavis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow Lowbrow: the emergence of cultural hierarchy in America*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988), p.224; John Storey, *An Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993); and Graeme Turner, *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, (Boston: Unwin & Hyman, 1990), among others. Helpful introductions are also provided in Richard Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure: A History of Australian Popular Culture since 1788*, (Melbourne: Longman, 1995), and Susan Dermody, John Docker, and Drusilla Modjeska, *Nellie Melba, Ginger Meggs and Friends: Essays in Australian Cultural History*, (Melbourne: Kibble Books, 1982).

Interwar culture was conservative, the modernist challenge radical: it was a battle between cultural-political alignments. Consciousness of political bifurcation in this case denies the possibility that cultural bifurcation cut across class and political lines, and limits our understanding of the process itself. This thesis suggests that protagonists in the ongoing process of cultural bifurcation represented a sufficiently large range of class, political and ideological standpoints to diminish the singularity of the economic argument.

The contextual overlapping of questions of national identity, class, gender and culture, none of which remained static within themselves or in their relationships to each other, thus renders an experiential, as opposed to structuralist, approach appropriate to this study. Peter Goodall, author of *High Culture, Popular Culture: The Long Debate*, advocates the study of the 'history of the struggle to define culture'.⁷ His proposal implicitly accepts the existence, historically, of aesthetic distinctions, and is most closely aligned to the approach adopted in this thesis. The assumption of cultural distinctions and the casting of historical judgements of value are accepted as part of the experience of women acting as cultural agents during the period of study. It is their engagement with and struggle to assert dichotomous definitions, or arts founded on them, that is the concern here.

Women's experiences, women's actions, comprise the focus of this study. But women did not act in isolation. Therefore, before we settle into their story, it is necessary to cast an eye around at the other stories likely to intertwine with theirs. A great deal has been written, for example, about Australian nationalism and identity. Tied to the subject of national self-image are a series of questions concerning British and other Western influences, and their impact on Australian society and culture.

⁷ John Tulloch, 'Series Editor's Foreword', in Peter Goodall, *High Culture, Popular Culture: The Long Debate*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1995), p.vii.

A strong theme in Australian cultural historiography has been the search for evidence of new schools of thought and representation that contrast with British colonial cultural imperatives. It emerged in response to the tendency first attacked by P.R. Stephensen in *The Foundations of Australian Culture* (1935), and later labelled the 'cultural cringe' by A.A. Phillips, to vest cultural authority in England.⁸ Thus as early as the 1930s and 1940s, William Moore and Bernard Smith, in *The Story of Australian Art* (1934), and *Place, Taste and Tradition* (1945), respectively, were laying the foundations of a national art history, which, as their shared usage of the chapter title 'Genesis' suggests, identified the emergence of a distinctively Australian tradition. Likewise, Leslie Rees' *Towards an Australian Drama* (1953), was republished two decades later as *The Making of Australian Drama*, and Roger Covell published *Australia's Music: Themes of a New Society* in 1967. Cultural historians of the 1950s and 1970s in particular have made much of the radical nationalist tradition that from the late nineteenth century linked Australian identity with a chain of lower class rural male types. Australian intellectual culture also attracted attention in the 1970s with the publication of Geoffrey Serle's *From The Deserts The Prophets Come: The Creative Spirit in Australia 1788-1972*, and David Walker's *Dream and Disillusion: A Search For Australian Cultural Identity*.⁹

Although the founding of the Commonwealth of Australia may have given 'expression to a burgeoning national consciousness', the experience appears ambiguous and historical understandings of the new nationalism vary widely.¹⁰ Australians appear to have simultaneously identified with both nation and empire. However, Stephen Alomes

⁸ A.A. Phillips, *The Australian Tradition* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1958).

⁹ See Russell Ward, *The Australian Legend*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1958); Geoffrey Serle, *From the deserts the prophets come: the creative spirit in Australia 1788-1972*, (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1973); and David Walker, *Dream and Disillusion: A Search for Australian Cultural Identity*, (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1976). See John McCallum, 'Studying Australian Drama', in *Australasian Drama Studies*, no.12/13, 1988, p.152 concerning Australian drama.

¹⁰ Stuart Macintyre, *The Oxford History of Australia. volume 4, The Succeeding Age 1901-1942*, first pub. 1986. (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.122.

argues that deepening social and political divisions saw the imperial dimension of Australian nationalism expressed more distinctly at the approach of the First World War. He portrays a neatly antithetical relationship between nationalist and imperialist social and political groupings. John Williams and Richard White respectively suggest that following the First World War an Anglo-flavoured Australian culture was ‘quarantined’, or ‘inoculated’ against the excesses of modern Europe and later America.¹¹ A series of intersecting rivalries that collectively counter the dichotomous implications of both arguments will be discussed later. However, the very real social and cultural legacy of the imperial connection warrants further attention first.

Grounds exist to suggest a partial duplication of British social practices in Australia. John Hirst suggests that Australian society, almost completely devoid of a leisured class, instead attributed status to moneymakers (whether successful pastoralists or merchants) and professionals.¹² In questioning the idea of an egalitarian Australian society, Beverley Kingston puts forward the notion that the nation suffered from a weakness of tradition. That weakness, she asserted, was countered by the application of British standards by urban professional families: a ‘version of the “Season” prevailed’ during the winter months when pastoralists, in particular, were freer to leave their properties and attend to business in town.¹³ Penny Russell, in *A Wish of Distinction: Colonial Gentility and Femininity*, also identifies a flexible ‘cult of gentility’ that adapted the British concept of ‘Society’ to the different relationships, climate and history of

¹¹ See Stephen Alomes, *A Nation At Last? The changing character of Australian Nationalism 1880-1988*, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1988), pp.51, 56, 66; John Rickard, *The Present and the Past: Australia, A cultural history*, (New York: Longman, 1988), p.116; John F. Williams, *Quarantined Culture: Australian Reactions to Modernism 1913-1939*, (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.3-4; Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1981), pp.110-15, 129-44; and Macintyre, *The Succeeding Age*, pp.72, 122.

¹² See John Hirst, ‘Egalitarianism’, in S.L. Goldberg and F.B. Smith (ed.s), *Australian Cultural History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹³ Beverley Kingston, *The Oxford History of Australia, Volume 3: Glad, Confident Morning*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.181.

nineteenth century Victoria.¹⁴ Both drew their understanding of British Society from the groundbreaking work of Leonore Davidoff. Davidoff, in *The Best Circles: Society Etiquette and the Season*, describes the codification of social life begun in Britain in the 1820s through which 'the family and political and economic institutions' were linked. A flexible structure that amalgamated new wealth with the old, and responded to the demographic, industrial and political changes of the first half of the nineteenth century, Society nevertheless strictly monitored its boundaries - its chief weapon, etiquette, adeptly wielded by women of the upper and middle classes. Accompanying the strict behavioural rules was a sense of chauvinistic duty, amplified by a condescending view of the working class and a consciousness of Empire, to uphold those standards. Nevertheless, even British Society had begun to relax its standards by the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁵

The notion that such social concepts and characteristics were transmitted to Australia and evident in early to mid twentieth century Sydney society is of course plausible. Advances in transport and communication technology aided the process through which private schools, clubs, travellers, expatriate students, and families channelled ideas from the centre of the empire.¹⁶ A distinct lifestyle, practiced by a core group of families and bearing some of the hallmarks of British Society, may be discerned in interwar Sydney. Homes in Woollahra, among the private beaches and gardens of Sydney's affluent inner east, employed a higher number of domestic servants than elsewhere. In their relationship with their employers, domestic servants carefully observed rules of address and conversation and, during the Depression, they noted very little change in the

¹⁴ Penny Russell, *A Wish of Distinction: Colonial Gentility and Femininity*, (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1994), pp.6-7.

¹⁵ Leonore Davidoff, *The Best Circles: Society Etiquette and the Season*, (London: Croom Helm, 1973).

¹⁶ Alomes, *Nation at Last?*, pp.76-7.

lifestyle of their employers. Sydney's 'upper four hundred'¹⁷ continued to hold cocktail parties and elaborate dinners with multiple courses; they continued to dress well, play tennis and attend masked balls. Charity events were held, with contributions going to animal welfare, the Bush Nursing Association, or the Red Cross. Stuart Macintyre points to a slight economising in most households, but acknowledges that entertainment and social lives appeared relatively unaffected.¹⁸ Socially, it appears that an urban upper-middle-class existed in Sydney, that it possessed modest wealth and, more importantly, sufficiently evoked British Society to be seen and to be treated as a distinct group.

This partial duplication of British social patterns had a cultural dimension as well. Helen Meller's account of the leisure culture of late nineteenth century Bristol notes a masculine Arnold-inspired 'cultural renaissance' in the decade from 1865 to 1875. There were two sides to this development, one that viewed culture as a socially cohesive force, and another that saw culture in terms of personal fulfilment and development. In the period from 1875 to 1898, however, this approach appeared to lose its dual idealism, and culture increasingly became a measure of status. This attitude oversaw the symbolic reification of certain forms of music, art and literature.¹⁹ In practice, Australia followed a similar pattern. Just as they had appeared in the second and third quarters of the century in Britain,²⁰ musical organisations appeared in Australia from the 1830s, proliferating and becoming fixed cultural elements from the 1850s. The second half of the nineteenth

¹⁷ Susan Mary Waterford, 'Pen Portraits of Some Sydney Women', *Woman's World*, cutting in Robertson, Constance, Mrs William Kinneard, Papers, ML MSS 1105, vol.3, it.5, n.p.

¹⁸ Macintyre, *Succeeding Age*, p.283. Information on lifestyles in Woollahra collected from interviews with former domestic servants. See Drew Cottle, 'The Rich in the Depression: Domestic Service in Woollahra during the Depression Years, 1928-1934', *Bowyang*, vol.1, no.1 (no date given); and 'The Sydney Rich in the Great Depression', *Bowyang*, vol.1, no.2, Sept.-Oct., 1979. The theme is further developed by Cottle in *Life can be oh so sweet on the sunny side of the street: A Study Of The Rich Of Woollahra During the Great Depression, 1928-1934*, (London: Minerva Press, 1998).

¹⁹ H.E. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City: 1870-1914*, (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1976), pp.50-1, 64-5.

²⁰ See F.M.L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900*, (London: Fontana Press, 1988), pp.271, 304.

century also saw the appearance of Australian art galleries, museums, universities and libraries. This may in part represent an Australian adaptation of the masculine intellectual tradition of nineteenth century Britain noted by Meller. The boards of trustees of newly-founded Australian cultural institutions and charitable committees, for example, continued for many years to attach 'Esquire' to the names of its members. Like Bristol's newly wealthy and influential families, they created buildings dedicated to education and culture boasting grand Classic and Gothic stylistic flourishes quite foreign to the understated style of domestic colonial architecture. The emphasis appears to have fallen on cost and appearance; Australian interpretations 'refracted through a mirror of money' proved crude imitations in Beverley Kingston's view.²¹ Not unlike provincial British cities, Australian public culture may appear to have reduced original liberal cultural ideals to a series of symbols. As with the notion of 'Society', it appears that British cultural ideals reached Australia, but were applied variably and often symbolically.

Parochialism constitutes another story that intertwines with, and in part defines the parameters of, the story of Sydney women actively engaged in the cultural development of the city. Colonial or city rivalries were rampant prior to the First World War.²² Variations between cultural developments in Melbourne and Sydney in particular emerge in John Docker's *Australian Cultural Elites* and *The Sydney-Melbourne Book* edited by Jim Davidson. Contrasting the intellectual optimism of Melbourne with the pessimism of Sydney; idealism with a superficial provincialism; and personal endowments with state reliance, historians of regional cultural variance convey an overall impression of Sydney as a city lacking in confidence and vision. Clearly this appraisal is inadequate. Where Melbourne innovators and visionaries found disillusion, Sydney offered hope,

²¹ Kingston, *Glad, Confident Morning*, p.211.

²² F.K. Crowley, '1901-14', in F.K. Crowley (ed.), *A New History of Australia*, (Melbourne: Heinemann Educational Australia, 1974), p.261.

pragmatism, and a cosmopolitan enthusiasm for the new. The harbour-side home of the *Bulletin* and Angus and Robertson, from the 1890s attracted writers from rural areas and other cities, particularly Melbourne. Later, staff at Sydney University helped to generate a positive environment for Australian writers. Artistically, the Sydney establishment focussed on professional validation through market success. Its character was fashioned through the persuasive actions of artists that had relocated from Melbourne to Sydney mostly in the late 1880s and 1890s and mostly as a result of economic hardship.²³ Melbourne visions of an Australian dramatic tradition might have foundered early in the interwar period, but the actor manager Gregan McMahon relocated to Sydney, and established the semi-professional Sydney Repertory Theatre Society with the aid of the commercial theatre managers J. and N. Tait. During the 1920s and 30s a series of small theatres emerged and disappeared in Sydney, some, such as the Playbox Society with bohemian overtones, others such as the Community Playhouse founded by Carrie Tennant under the guidance of William Moore, formerly of Melbourne, with distinctively nationalist inclinations. The vigour of interwar bohemianism is clear from Peter Kirkpatrick's study, *The Sea Coast of Bohemia: Literary Life in Sydney's Roaring Twenties*.²⁴

Impressions of the bleakness of the situation in Sydney serve to obscure the city's cultural resourcefulness and its progressiveness. Although a Conservatorium and professional Symphony Orchestra emerged relatively late in Sydney, the city nevertheless possessed a collection of active amateur musical organisations born in the last half of the

²³ See John Docker, *Australian Cultural Elites: Intellectual traditions in Sydney and Melbourne*, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1974); and Vincent Buckley, 'Unequal Twins: A Discontinuous Analysis', and Bernard Smith, 'Two art systems', both in Jim Davidson (ed.), *The Sydney-Melbourne Book*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986). See also Lesley Heath, 'John Le Gay Brereton, The University, and Australian Literature', *Notes and Furphies*, no. 31, Oct. 1993, p.4; and Lesley Heath, 'Sydney literary societies of the nineteen twenties: cultural nationalism and the promotion of Australian literature', PhD Thesis, School of English, University of New South Wales, 1996.

²⁴ Katharine Brisbane, 'Amateur Theatre', in Philip Parsons (gen. ed.) with Victoria Chance,

previous century, including the Sydney Philharmonic Society, the Royal Sydney Liedertafel, and the Madrigal Society.²⁵ The Royal Sydney Liedertafel might have folded in 1939, and the choral tradition may have begun to atrophy by 1935, but many other groups survived. Most listed by the former Conservatorium director, Arundel Orchard, in his work *Music in Australia: More than 150 years of development* (1952) carried open-ended date ranges, and had successfully mutated to cope with changes in social and personal circumstances. Commitment to their survival as well as the innovations of the early 1930s – the role of the new ABC in the provision of the city's orchestral music, and the establishment of Music Week and the Eisteddfods – possibly emerged from anxieties over cultural forms that had an international currency.²⁶ Likewise, although the key art histories consistently portray the Sydney art establishment of the interwar years as reactionary and old-fashioned, it clearly cannot be seen as a solid anti-modernist block, and its actions cannot be attributed blindly to a rigid set of cultural-political dichotomies. The emergence of modern art coincided with broader societal changes, a modernisation of lifestyles and commerce, and the growing influence of international, non-British artistic and cultural developments. To see the persistence of nineteenth century British cultural practices purely in terms of parochial imitation with conservative imperialist overtones seems to deny the realistic possibility of a dynamic transplanted culture.

Running through these tales of national, imperial and regional identity, is the theme of modernism: a responsiveness to the modern. At its heart lay an ambiguity about modernity: in some it evoked fear and loathing, but to others it offered new possibilities.

Companion to Theatre in Australia, (Sydney: Currency Press, 1995), p.39.

²⁵ See Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 1, (London: Grove, 1980), p.709; W. Arundel Orchard, *Music in Australia: More than 150 years of Development*, (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1952), pp.34, 162; and Ron Wills, 'The First Sydney Symphony Orchestra', *The Australasian Sound Archive*, no. 16, Autumn 1994, p.16.

²⁶ John Rickard, 'Music and Cultural Hierarchy 1918-1939', in Michael Brown, Peter Campbell, Robyn Holmes, Peter Read and Larry Sitsky (ed.s), *One Hand on the Manuscript: Music in Australian*

The first expressed alienation; the latter was receptive to change and to its constructive use.²⁷ It was manifest in a multitude of political and social formations, cultural ideals, and aesthetic directions. In early to mid-twentieth century Australia, cultural liberalism and vitalism or progressivism constituted the second type of response to modernism. Cultural liberals, and progressives, as identified by Gregory Melleuish and Michael Roe respectively were educated, but not necessarily from middle-class backgrounds. They were altruistic, moralistic, and reformist; concerned with civic humanism, individual autonomy and national efficiency; and drifted anywhere between fascism and Fabianism in their European manifestations.²⁸ Both streams constituted versions of the new liberal thought current in Europe. Their influence was apparent in the work of Alfred Deakin, among others. Thus their appearance in Australia contributed to the creation of an anomalous modern federal state; the reforms of the new Commonwealth being at once responsive to current crises and out of step with the nation's delayed industrialisation.²⁹ Australian cultural responses to European modernism were equally complex and variable

Cultural History 1930-1960, (Canberra: The Humanities Research Centre, The Australian National University, 1995), pp.184, 187; and Orchard, *Music in Australia*, p.123.

²⁷ See Michael Levenson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999); Bernard Bergonzi, *The Myth of Modernism and Twentieth Century Literature*, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1986); and Julian Croft, 'Responses to Modernism, 1915-1965', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 13, no. 4, Oct. 1988.

²⁸ The key work on Progressivism (or vitalism) in Australia is by Michael Roe. His *Nine Australian Progressives: Vitalism in Bourgeois Social Thought 1890-1960*, (St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 1984) lists writers, artists, and politicians who displayed specifically vitalist inclinations. The list includes the writers Christopher Brennan, Christina Stead, Norman Lindsay, Bernard O'Dowd, Vance Palmer and Louis Esson, the composer Percy Grainger, the artists Tom Roberts and Arthur Streeton and later modernist, the philosopher Samuel Alexander, the clerics Charles Strong and Frederick Sinclair, and the socio-political figures B.R. Wise, C.C. Kingston, C.H. Pearson, and Alfred Deakin in its ranks. Gregory Melleuish, in writing *Cultural Liberalism in Australia: A Study in Intellectual and Cultural History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), also included Alfred Deakin. Both likewise cited the educational reformer Peter Board as an example of a progressive or cultural liberal personality respectively. The closeness of the two streams of thought is thus clear. Both detach the new movement from old liberalism.

²⁹ Jill Roe, 'Leading the World? 1901-1914', in Jill Roe (ed.), *Social Policy in Australia: Some Perspectives 1901-1975*, (Stanmore, NSW: Cassell Australia, 1976), p.5; and Anne O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison: the poor in New South Wales 1880-1918*, (Calton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1988), pp.4, 187. O'Brien reasons that state intervention in the period 1880-1918 reinforced the old liberal ideal of individual responsibility. Roe likewise demonstrates the perpetuation of the concept of self-help, and argues that the portrayal of Australia as a social laboratory was misleading.

in nature. Norman Lindsay, though classed a vitalist by Michael Roe, rejected modern life and its cultural forms. The apparent conservatism of the art establishment against which modern artists struggled for decades likewise expressed a responsiveness to modernism, albeit a negative one. The reactionaries were as modern in their gloomy response to urbanisation, mass production and mass culture, as the modernists were in their hopeful one. An overall unevenness thus appears to characterise the Australian response to modern society.

This is a story about women, and the women's movement of the nineteenth century itself constituted one among many responses to modernity. As Australian women adapted British models of femininity, this story, as well, is related to it. The separation of public and private life in the first half of the nineteenth century, in tandem with the English Evangelical push and the consolidation of the middle class is well known. The social, moral, and towards the end of the century, civil aspects of life were maintained intrinsically as a function of the feminine domestic sphere: 'the implementation of the ideology ... was primarily the work of womenfolk'.³⁰ Instead, the work of professional middle-class men took place in public or civic institutions whether in the marketplace, the field of battle, or the halls of church, government, law, education and science.

Historians have alternately suggested that the role attributed to middle class women in Victorian England was limiting and liberating. As volunteers and philanthropists they may have followed the commands of the clergy, politicians and professionals, but in hospitals in the 1850s, the 'Lady Bountiful' actively resisted the

³⁰ Thompson, *Respectable Society*, p.251. See also Lenore Coltheart, 'Being Civil and Social: The proper study of womankind', in Moira Gatens and Alison Mackinnon, *Gender and Institutions: Welfare, Work and Citizenship*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.138, 141. Coltheart argues that in turn of the century Britain, America and Australia, the civil, once almost synonymous for the civic, had become associated with the social.

interference of male medics in her supervision of nurses.³¹ Women worked together, creating their own hierarchies of power, throughout the nineteenth century. They joined together for a variety of reasons: political, reformist, feminist, philanthropic, trade and professional support, enlightenment, escape and companionship. To many English and American historians, the propensity to group action was empowering. Yet, while the emphasis on female moral guardianship in particular gave women some political leverage, it also reinforced the insular nature of domesticity.³² In circles of lesser intellectual or feminist vigour, the domestic canon lost some of its idealism and became, like cultural artefacts, a bourgeois symbol.

In the Australian context aspects of the cult of domesticity, from its moralism to its fluctuating capacity for feminine empowerment, were duplicated. Convict-conscious colonial adaptations of mid-Victorian domesticity appear superficial in their emphasis on respectability, and anachronistic in their duplication of domestic arrangements unsuited to both the large rural families and smaller modern urban families of late nineteenth century Australia.³³ Where women of Australia's burgeoning middle-class held feminist views, they, like 'their counterparts overseas' shared a 'vision of a maternalist welfare state', or

³¹ Thompson's view of women volunteers as the rank-and-file obeying masculine command contrasts with Anne Summers account of the empowered woman philanthropist who channelled volunteer nurses into the hospitals. See Thompson, *Respectable Society*, p.253; and Anne Summers, *Angels and Citizens: British Women as Military Nurses 1854-1914*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Ltd, 1988), p.4.

³² Mary Ryan, in analysing campaigns conducted by the American Female Moral Reform Society in the 1830s and 40s, argues that 'Victorian women were guided into domestic confinement by members of their own sex'. Likewise, Coltheart argued that the mid-Victorian feminine interest in social science, along with feminist action, transferred responsibility for the amelioration of 'the effects of industrialisation and urbanisation' from industrialists and legislators to women, and reinforced the separation of the home from the business of modern life. See Mary Ryan, 'The Power of Women's Networks', in Judith L. Newton, Mary P. Ryan, Judith R. Walkowitz (ed.s), *Sex and Class in Women's History*, (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1983), pp.182, 183; and Coltheart, 'Being Civil', p.141. See also Mary Stott, *Organization Woman: The Story of the National Union of Townswomen's Guilds*, (London: Heinemann, 1978), p.1.

³³ For further discussion on the 'ultradomesticity' of Australian families, see Miriam Dixson, 'Gender, Class and the Women's Movement in Australia 1890, 1980', in Norma Grieve and Ailsa Burns (ed.s), *Australian Women: New Feminist Perspectives*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp.18, 19. Beverley Kingston and Judith Godden alternately question the appropriateness of British family models and refined femininity in late nineteenth rural Australia. See Kingston, *Glad, Confident Morning*, p.145, and 'The Lady and the Australian Girl: Some Thoughts on Nationalism and Class', in Grieve and Burns,

“the National Motherhood of women” in Rose Scott’s words’.³⁴ As with their British and American sisters, maternalistic activism served to reinforce notions of domesticity. Early commonwealth reform thus focussed on the welfare of women and children, and designated the father as the sole provider for small nuclear families.³⁵ It enshrined the idea of an unpaid private or voluntary social role for women, a role where middle-class women, freed from the need to work, could take on the functions imputed to leisured women over half a century earlier in Britain. Maternal citizenship thus democratised feminine leisure.

During the interwar years, while the suburban middle-class expanded the professionalisation of health and welfare diminished the agency of transformed philanthropists and timesaving household devices undermined Victorian domesticity.³⁶ The British cultural historian, Alison Light, suggests that English middle-class women of the same period displayed a ‘conservative modernity’. As a powerful new conservative force, such women may have appeared to perpetuate feminine domesticity. But suburban women were also simultaneously attracted to the new and the modern, took on new roles as volunteers, and embraced new cultural ideas.³⁷ Although it has not been tested it is possible that anachronistic domesticity in suburban interwar Australia paradoxically opened itself to modernism and became a powerful force for change in the process. Recent studies on voluntarism by Melanie Oppenheimer suggest that under war conditions a

Australian Women, p.41; and Judith Godden, ‘A New Look at the Pioneer Women’, in *Hecate*, vol. V, no. 2, 1979, p.13.

³⁴ Marilyn Lake, *getting equal: The history of Australian feminism*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1999), pp.50-1.

³⁵ Jill Roe describes the chivalry of ‘the knights of labour’ as a force that worked against liberal feminism, and fostered a ‘second-rate’ rather than an active citizenship. See Jill Roe, ‘Chivalry and Social Policy in the Antipodes’, *Historical Studies*, vol. 22, no. 88, April 1987, p.401.

³⁶ For information on women and philanthropy in Australia, see Judith Godden, ‘Philanthropy and the Woman’s Sphere, Sydney, 1870-circa 1900’, PhD Thesis, School of History, Philosophy and Politics, Macquarie University, 1983; and Jan Kociumbas, ‘The spiritual child: child death and angelic motherhood in colonial women’s writing’, *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 85, part 2, p.90 regarding interwar motherhood.

³⁷ Alison Light, *Forever England: femininity, literature and conservatism between the wars*, (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.8-12.

broad mass of middle-class Australian women resurrected philanthropic impulses, which had been diverted into charity and church social activities, and engaged in a range of different activities.³⁸

There is by now a great deal of work on women as historical agents, but not so much on women as cultural agents. Studies on women and culture in Australia have placed emphasis on women as cultural producers, particularly writers. Dale Spender, Carole Ferrier, Susan Magarey, Susan Sheridan, Drusilla Modjeska, Kate Jennings and many others have thus worked to identify a separate female literary tradition.³⁹ The focus on literature is true of British and American feminist cultural histories as well. Even in the early 1990s, a rare study on English women, conservatism and culture, Alison Light's *Forever England*, still primarily represented an exercise in literary criticism. Women's cultural history on the fine and applied arts, the theatre and music usually set out to either recover unknown women cultural producers, outline policies of exclusion, or identify a feminine aesthetic. In the fine arts, Janine Burke, Caroline Ambrus, Jeanette Hoorn and Joan Kerr have led these efforts⁴⁰; in music history, Sally Macarthur and Monique Geitenbeek⁴¹; and from the late 1980s Pamela Heckenberg, Susan Pfisterer and Josie

³⁸ For further studies on women and voluntarism see Melanie Oppenheimer, *Volunteers in Action: Voluntary work in Australia 1939-1945*, PhD thesis, School of History, Philosophy and Politics, Macquarie University, 1997; and Melanie Oppenheimer, 'Vas: Australian Voluntary Aids during the Second World War', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, no. 18, April 1991, pp.28, 30.

³⁹ Dale Spender, *Writing a New World: Two Centuries of Australian Women Writers*, (London: Pandora, 1988), p.xiv. See also Elizabeth Webby, 'Gender, representation and national identity', in Barbara Caine (gen. ed.), *Australia Feminism: a companion*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.117. Others pointing to the importance of women's literature include; Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, 1975. (Ringwood, Vic: Penguin, 1994), p.82; and Gillian Whitlock and Chilla Bulbeck, "'A Small and Often Still Voice'?: Women Intellectuals in Australia', in Brian Head and James Walter (ed.s), *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.147.

⁴⁰ See Janine Burke, *Australian Women Artists, 1840-1940*, (Melbourne: Victoria, 1980); Caroline Ambrus, *First Fleet to 1945: History, Hearsay and Her Say*, (Canberra: Irrepressible Press, 1992); Caroline Ambrus, *The Ladies' Picture Show: Sources on a Century of Australian Women Artists*, (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1984); and Jeanette Hoorn (ed.), *Strange Women: Essays in Art and Gender*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994).

⁴¹ Sally Macarthur, 'music: art', in Caine, *Feminist companion*, pp.460-61. See also Therese Radic, 'Australian Women in Music', *Lip*, 1978/79, pp.97-110; Monique Geitenbeek, 'The Role of Women in the Australian Music Examinations Board from 1930 to 1950', in Brown, et al. *One Hand on the Manuscript*,

Fantasia (a pen name?) have written on women dramatists.⁴² As the result of these and numerous biographical studies, many more women artists, writers, actors, and musicians have come to light over the past two or three decades. Exclusionary theories have also proliferated. The idea of an existent but unrecognised women's culture, rendered invisible through the machinations of a distorting masculinist historicism has received some treatment in feminist discussions of the 'Legend of the Nineties'.⁴³ Studies of marginalised artistic practices colonised by women posit a different social space, or for Gillian Whitlock and Chilla Bulbeck, a 'twilight zone', in which women practitioners in the arts and intellectuals worked.⁴⁴

Only a few cultural histories explore in a positive sense the cultural endeavour of Australian women and subsequently their potential for public cultural influence. In introducing the collection of essays, *Wallflowers and Witches: Women and Culture in Australia 1910-1945*, Maryanne Dever advocates an analysis of 'the particular strategies available to women in different periods for negotiating their positions as cultural

pp.189-200. Macarthur in fact deals more consistently with contemporary musicology, and in doing so follows the lead of American feminists.

⁴² Pamela Payne Heckenberg, 'Women of the Australian theatre', *Australasian Drama Studies*, no.s 12/13, 1988, pp.125-145; Josie Fantasia, 'Considering gender in nineteenth-century Australian theatre history: the case of Maggie Moore', *Australasian Drama Studies*, no. 21, Oct. 1992, pp.155-168; Susan Pfisterer-Smith, 'Playing with the past: towards a feminist deconstruction of Australian theatre historiography', *Australasian Drama Studies*, no. 23, Oct. 1993; and Susan Pfisterer, 'Cultural anxiety and the new woman playwright: Mrs E.S. Haviland's *On Wheels*', *Australasian Drama Studies*, no 27, Oct. 1995, pp.143-49.

⁴³ A celebrated exchange of articles in *Historical Studies* introduced and contested the idea of a feminised culture. See Marilyn Lake, 'The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context', *Historical Studies*, vol. 22, no. 86, April 1986, p.116; Chris McConville, 'Rough women, respectable men and social reform: a response to Lake's "masculinism"', *Historical Studies*, vol. 22, no. 88, April 1987; and John Docker, 'The Feminist Legend: A new historicism?' in Susan Magarey, Sue Rowley, Susan Sheridan (ed.s), *Debutante Nation: Feminism Contests the 1890s*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993), pp.16-26. Docker objects that Lake's analysis is as essentialist as the historicism she criticises. Other writers contributing to *Debutante Nation* welcomed the injunction to centre their analysis on gender.

⁴⁴ Kathleen McCarthy, Helen Topliss and Susan Pfisterer all note an attraction to new aesthetics or subcultures: Kathleen McCarthy, *Women's Culture: American philanthropy and art. 1830-1930*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp.xi, xiv; Helen Topliss, *Modernism and Feminism: Australian Women Artists 1900-1940*, (Sydney: Craftsman House, 1996), p.10; and Susan Pfisterer-Smith, 'Playing with the past', p.19. See also Whitlock and Bulbeck, 'Women Intellectuals', pp.145, 148.

producers'.⁴⁵ Beverley Kingston, by suggesting that in the nineteenth century women as cultural consumers acted as conduits of conservative British values, implies a degree of cultural agency. Helen Topliss examines the impact of the women's movement on women artists, and consequently on their influence in the development of Australian art from 1900-1940. Writers such as Marjorie Barnard, Flora Eldershaw and Nettie Palmer are spoken of as authoritative voices in nationalist literary circles, and Monique Geitenbeek explores the role of women as examiners and arbiters of musical standards in the example of the Australian Musical Education Board.⁴⁶

Few Australian cultural histories look directly at women as patrons, who, due to wealth, or the social influence of a close male figure, entered fully into the 'public' world. It is unlikely that many existed. *Lyre-bird rising: Louise Hanson-Dyer of Oiseau-Lyre, 1884-1962* by J. H. Davidson offers a rare example, while Heather Johnson devotes a chapter to Eadith Walker in her survey of art patronage in Sydney.⁴⁷ On occasion, female musicians recorded the financial and moral support given by particular women in their memoirs. The soprano, Joan Hammond, for example, described the vital role that Lady Gowrie, wife of the State Governor at the time, played in a fund-raising campaign initiated to send her to Vienna for further voice training. Hammond noted Gowrie's ongoing concern for her well being during the early tentative years in London. Likewise the pianist and composer Miriam Hyde pointed to the active interest Gowrie took in her career.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Maryanne Dever, 'Introduction', in Maryanne Dever (ed.), *Wallflowers and Witches: Women and Culture in Australia 1910-1945*, (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1994), p.xi.

⁴⁶ Beverley Kingston, 'Women in Nineteenth Century Australian History', *Labour History*, no. 67, Nov. 1994, p.91; Topliss, *Modernism and Feminism*; and Geitenbeek, 'Women in the AMEB'. See also Drusilla Modjeska, *Exiles at Home: Australian Women Writers 1925-1945*, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1981) concerning key female literary figures.

⁴⁷ J. H. Davidson, *Lyre-bird rising: Louise Hanson-Dyer of Oiseau-Lyre, 1884-1962*, (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1994); Heather Johnson, *The Sydney Art Patronage System 1890-1940*, (Grays Point, NSW: Bungoona Technologies, 1997), part 4, ch. 1.

⁴⁸ Miriam Hyde, *Complete Accord*, (Sydney: Currency Press, 1991); and Joan Hammond, *A voice, a life: autobiography*, (London: Gollancz, 1970).

Kathleen McCarthy, in *Women's Culture: American philanthropy and art, 1830-1930*, addresses female cultural agency directly. Her analysis hinges on the relationship between women art patrons and the bureaucratically-inclined 'wealthy male donors and trustees [of] the late nineteenth and early twentieth century'. Consequently, she divides her study into the discussion of separatist, assimilationist and individualist endeavours. Female cultural agents thus appear as players hovering on the sideline. Though primarily concerned with institutional acceptance, McCarthy finds value in their detachment: 'far from assuming a custodial role, they were inveterate pioneers'.⁴⁹ The strategy of re-evaluating the basis of cultural agency is clearly an effective one.

I argue that in Sydney, women's patronage existed in the form of a feminine cultural agency. Femininity did not necessarily denote agency, and agency was not necessarily directed towards women, but female cultural agency did have a unique character that may be classed as feminine in an anachronistic late-Victorian sense, a character that distinguishes it from what we know of as patronage. The term, patronage, has a formal, authoritarian ring that suggests masculinity and power.⁵⁰ The patron buys paintings and empowers chosen individuals, causes, or organisations through the benevolent use of social influence and economic support. Admittedly such patronage was limited in Australia, and less often evident in Sydney than elsewhere. Heather Johnson lists only five private art patrons with substantial collections in Sydney between 1890 and 1940, and notes that by comparison with American standards they expended only modest amounts of money. Australians frequently considered approaching their respective federal and state governments for cultural support instead.⁵¹ The story of Sydney women and

⁴⁹ McCarthy, *Women's Culture*, p.xiv.

⁵⁰ *New Oxford Dictionary of English*, p.1360.

⁵¹ According to the 1920 pronouncement of a Western Australian editor, Alfred Langer, Australians had rarely, and then only on a limited scale, demonstrated such patronage. Indeed, the work of acknowledged art patrons in Sydney and Melbourne such as the Myers, the Darlings, the Fairfaxes, the

traditional patronage of the arts might thus seem a rather short one, with only Eadith Walker and a few Conservatorium scholarship donors falling into the category. But it is the transgression of gender-based cultural definitions that is the concern here. Historically patronage entailed not only financial aid, but also the development of networks of support and an atmosphere conducive to creativity or advancement. Both formal and informal types of supportive cultural activities might therefore be considered as patronage. It is thus proposed that Sydney women of the first half of the twentieth century used informal or alternate strategies to support culturally oriented individuals, organisations and movements. This was a form of patronage in which a broader mass of women could and did participate. It is proposed that through these strategies many women acquired cultural agency.

The first, informal type of cultural agency is nurturance. It may be argued that for many women patronage began at home. As mothers, wives, daughters and friends, they encouraged, empathised with, and sacrificed for the dear artist in their lives. Many nineteenth century women had shown a similar devotion, whether prompted by affection or duty, to the needs of the successful or powerful man to whom they were attached through birth or marriage. Capable and influential British political wives, as skilled hostesses, furthered the careers of their husbands. Spinsters cared for their fathers and brothers. Lady Jane Franklin dedicated herself to the interests and aspirations of her husband, Sir John Franklin, the lieutenant Governor of Van Dieman's Land from 1837 to 1843. Although patronage is not the most obvious interpretation of nurturance, the role of the political wives declined when patronage was superseded by party organisation,

Joneses, and the Murdochs, pale in comparison to American standards. See Professor Geoffrey Bolton AO, *The Muses in Quest of a Patron: The Callaway Lecture 1996*, no.11, (Perth: the University of Western Australia School of Music, 1996), pp. 3-4. See also Johnson, *Sydney Art Patronage*, p.126.

suggesting a relationship between the two.⁵² In addition, as in the case of Miles Franklin's relationship with her mother, the potential to provide empowerment inherent in the nurturing instinct is often obscured by the tension of personal relationships, the personality of the artist, or the more prominent actions of other patrons. Sometimes, when wealth or circumstances permitted, women took their advocacy into the public arena, sought to create opportunities and reputations, formed working partnerships or carried on the work undertaken by a loved one.

Cultural nurturance was not offered solely through mutual or one to one relationships, but also through female networks. Many of the female networks cited in this thesis were based on privileged family, neighbourhood and occupational ties and were augmented through charity committee work. Such networks, by drawing on common social experiences might appear to primarily reinforce class boundaries. As Leonore Davidoff observes, Society and charity were interlocked in late nineteenth century Britain, and social leaders regulated charity committee access.⁵³ Regarding Australian philanthropy Judith Godden likewise argues that social control was a crucial and acknowledged motive prior to the 1890s, that is during that period when the women's sphere appeared most powerful and confident in attending to health and welfare issues.⁵⁴ Certainly, from the earliest years of the twentieth century, female cultural networks frequently involved women regarded as members of Sydney Society, and overlapped charitable circles. Rose Scott introduced the young writer, Miles Franklin, to a large network of friends and acquaintances, while Mary Fairfax hunted for enthusiasts in the

⁵² Patricia Jalland details the role that British wives and spinsters played in late nineteenth century Britain. See Patricia Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), parts 3 and 4, regarding political wives and single daughters. See also Penny Russell, 'Paradise Lost: Sir John and Lady Jane Franklin', in Penny Russell (ed.), *For Richer, For Poorer: Early Colonial Marriages*, (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1994); and Kathleen Fitzpatrick, 'Franklin, Sir John', *ADB*, vol. 1, pp.412-15.

⁵³ Davidoff, *The Best Circles*, p.56.

⁵⁴ Godden, *Philanthropy*, p.viii.

eastern suburbs to act as patrons to the ailing Society of Arts and Crafts. The families of Ethel Kelly, Margaret Gordon and Ruth White holidayed together in Europe, Tasmania, or the Southern Highlands both before and after the First World War. In the philanthropic frenzy of the war, Kelly found Gordon an able 'lieutenant', while in the 1930s Gordon and White headed numerous fund-raising committees. Later, Lady Gordon and Lady (Belinda) Street, whose husbands, both judges, walked together from their homes in the eastern suburbs to the courts in the city, worked together in support of a variety of philanthropic and cultural causes. Gordon, Rene Gibson, and Beatrice Swinson, who had all married into the law profession, collaborated on an assortment of schemes reliant on charity methods and networks to advance the musical life of the city.

This networking tendency developed a formal and Society-conscious edge. It drew on the Sydney version of the British 'Season' and appealed directly to the middle class women of the city. It became formalised in the patterns and practices that had evolved in support of the Season, in its social structures, its direction of taste, and its prolific use of committees. Earlier in the century, men and women of wealth and influence had personally overseen the European education of a number of musical protégés. Lady Gowrie, in sending the soprano Joan Hammond to Vienna in 1936, initiated instead a fund-raising campaign. She did so in much the same manner as if it had been for the war, the RSPCA, or the Bush Nursing Association. With Lady Gordon at the helm, a committee of women arranged and promoted a series of public performances to raise funds in Hammond's name. Neither the first nor the last of such campaigns, it represents a particular type of charitable activity best described as cultural philanthropy that was most public and pervasive in its reach during the 1930s.

While the above female networks often engaged in activities identifiable by contemporaries as both feminine and middle class they were also instrumental in channelling nurturance, encouragement, information and opportunities in the direction of identified cultural needs. Furthermore, apparently conservative women like Ethel Kelly or Ethel Anderson demonstrated an intellectual or creative interest in their cultural mission rather than a narrowly social one, and Rose Scott introduced Miles Franklin to feminists and writers rather than Society figures and charity women. Networks of women writers, musicians and artists, in many cases from working class backgrounds or renowned for their radical predilections, likewise nurtured the spirits, talents and ambitions of their fellow practitioners. For nearly half a century the organist Lilian Frost provided performance opportunities for her contemporaries, Esther Kahn and Emily Marks. They in return solicited Frost's participation in their musical programs, or in Kahn's case composed music with Frost in mind. Their encouragement and interest in like manner radiated out to embrace many young or new musicians in Sydney. Mary Gilmore, Connie Stephens and a plethora of other women writers or journalists of the 1920s, through their correspondence and accidental or planned meetings shared their struggles, their ideas, and their mutual concerns for the welfare of each other. In the 1930s this awareness of the suffering and challenges faced by women manifested itself in a subdued feminism Drusilla Modjeska termed 'female humanism.' Their observed reliance on 'the old female virtues of commonsense and intuition' is indicative of the personal nature of the empathy and practical assistance offered through female literary networks.⁵⁵ Clearly nurturance and networks were not bound completely by class imperatives but in many cases demonstrated a mutuality of experience determined by cultural interest and gender.

55Modjeska, *Exiles at Home*, p.256.

A common thread is evident in this delineation of feminine strategies. It is also evident in the united advocacy by the women in this study of cultural forms that stood in opposition to mass-produced, commercially driven or popular cultural practices. To understand the unity inherent in their diverse cultural directions, we need to return to Matthew Arnold. Arnold spoke of culture as a process through which the 'raw person' was transformed, and hence acquired a form of authority.⁵⁶ Responsibility for the expansion of the influence of culture, Arnold reasoned, would fall to a select group, not an entire social class. By avoiding 'ready-made judgements', and by fostering the free development of ideas, the 'men of culture' would become 'the true apostles of equality'.⁵⁷

When Arnold visited America in 1883 and 1886, he expressed doubts about its intellectual and moral potential. Before him Alexis de Tocqueville and John Ruskin, in considering the example of democratic America, had expressed a political distrust of 'the mob', and dismay at its apparent cultural mediocrity.⁵⁸ Self-conscious Americans responded to such criticisms and to an associated concern over the absence of traditional cultural roots, with a 'crusade'. They regarded Arnold as 'the Apostle of Culture'.⁵⁹ In absorbing his views and combining them with the contemporary interest in phrenology, the crusaders created a series of 'adjectival categories': the term 'highbrow' first appeared in print in 1884.⁶⁰ The damning cultural judgements nevertheless remained intact in the early twentieth century, while the interwar technology-oriented entertainment industry led by America generated a new and influential British critique. As mentioned previously, the

⁵⁶ Matthew Arnold, in Samuel Lipman (ed.), *Culture and Anarchy by Matthew Arnold*, (Yale: Yale University Press, 1994), p.35. See also Gregory Melleuish, 'Civilisation, Culture and Police', *Arts*, vol. 20, 1998, pp.7-25.

⁵⁷ Arnold, in Lipman, p.48.

⁵⁸ White, *Inventing Australia*, p.53; and Richard White, "'Combating Cultural Aggression": Australian Opposition to Americanisation', *Meanjin*, vol. 39, no. 3, Oct. 1980, p.275.

⁵⁹ Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, pp.221, 223.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.221; and *The Oxford English Dictionary*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

early Leavisites feared a machine-led levelling-down of cultural standards.⁶¹ A new field of social enquiry concerned with the categories of high and popular culture subsequently emerged as the child of this process of cultural bifurcation.

Many Australian cultural activists, like their American counterparts, drew on a chronological mix of British cultural values. We already know of the pastoralists, merchants, business and professional men, most members of early colonial parliaments, who founded libraries, art galleries and conservatoriums in the last third of the nineteenth century. Some were influenced by Ruskin; others, like Helen Meller's men of the cultural renaissance, were inspired by Arnold. We also know that, by the interwar period, established cultural institutions with State government links, particularly in Sydney, had become rigid, isolationist and nostalgic in their outlook. Both imperialists and nationalists gave voice to anti-American sentiments.⁶² The cultural movements in which the women in this study participated distinguished between the highbrow and the lowbrow, the frivolous and the serious, and eventually, the emerging mass culture and what the Leavisites called high culture.

Gregory Melleuish has identified state-oriented prescriptiveness with the German derivative of culture, *kultur*. However, Melleuish has also suggested that the word, civilisation, with its democratic French origins, might be used where a variety of cultural traditions flourished and the outlook was open with internationally shared interests.⁶³ Melleuish argued that the two types of culture could co-exist and that both accompanied state development. The shared anti-Americanism of imperialist and nationalist movements

⁶¹ See White, 'Americanisation', p.276; and F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, 1934, *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962), ninth impression.

⁶² White, 'Americanisation', pp.277-8.

⁶³ See Gregory Melleuish, 'The case for civilisation: an Australian perspective', in *Thesis Eleven*, no. 34, 1993, 156-64. In a separate article, Melleuish outlines the link between culture and the notion of a civil state, as they appear in the writing of Arnold and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In his account the development of civilisation, culture and the state are intertwined. 'Police' constitutes another aspect in the development of

and the acceptance of high-low cultural dualities by individuals and groups open to American influences in the interwar period, imply an over-riding ongoing application of Arnoldian principles by interested Australians, and their participation in the western project of cultural bifurcation.

Melleuish's notion of an organic cultural pluralism suits this study, allowing scope for both a common cultural will and divergent directions. The many forms of cultural activism observed among Sydney women in the first half of the twentieth century came together in a local movement that merged with the broader western process described above. Considering the origins of the process its participants may appropriately be known by the nineteenth century British term, culturist (an 'advocate or devotee of culture'), and the movement as culturism (the 'systematic devotion to culture').⁶⁴ I thus refer to the women in this study as culturists rather than patrons. The origin of the word, culture, also renders the use of the related term, culturist, particularly apt. 'Culture' derived from the Latin *colere* meaning to tend, or cultivate, and evolved through Middle English usage to refer first to the cultivation of the land, and later to the cultivation of the mind. The image of women earnestly tending a plot of seedlings and anticipating the future harvest somehow seems appropriate.

Diversity, this thesis seeks to demonstrate, is evident in the multiple directions in which women culturists worked during the first half of the twentieth century. Susan Sheridan once expressed interest in 'the "difference within" the category of women'. She did not seek to 'create an alternate feminist Great Tradition'.⁶⁵ Nor do I. Though united by the yardstick of domesticity and a high cultural mission, Sydney women culturists varied

the state, and reflects the narrower at times manipulative use of culture that Melleuish has linked with the German *kultur*. See 'Civilisation, Culture and Police', *Arts*, vol. 20, 1998, pp.7-25.

⁶⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989). The word, culturist, first appeared in print in 1878, culturism in 1886.

⁶⁵ Susan Sheridan, *Along the Faultlines: Sex, race and nation in Australian Women's writing, 1880s-*

widely in their view of the modern. Some embraced it; some rejected it; some married technology or new techniques with uniquely nineteenth century cultural artefacts. Some wrestled with one or other of its many ideological offshoots, whether conservative, nationalistic, progressive, or radical. Many responded directly to feminism, or took feminist claims to education and professionalism to heart.

This diversity is immediately evident in the social columns of newspapers and magazines of the period. Partly for this reason, the emphasis in my research has been on public sources. Archives, record offices, art galleries and museums both in Australia and the United Kingdom, for example, have offered up small, but valuable, pieces of information. Newspapers, magazines and other periodicals, programs, committee papers, and scrapbooks of cuttings have supplied ample evidence of women culturists who had become publicly involved in cultural movements, and the trends in thought and expression in which reports of their activities were couched. In some cases the persistence of the public persona rendered the task of personalising individual women culturists a difficult one. A number of substantial manuscript collections, most housed in the Mitchell Library, have proved valuable in the supply of primary material for this study. Correspondence, particularly in the chapters on literary women, provided insight into the more private strategies of the women in this study, and oral histories have proved useful as a window on the personal and family life of Society women.

This thesis takes the form of a series of case studies. While presenting a variety of cultural moments that demonstrate the over-riding pervasiveness of the cultural mission, the case studies are also designed to capture all the richness and diversity of feminine culturism. Each chapter highlights the conflation of two or more key cultural and socio-political developments. In 'Mothers, Writers, Feminists and Strangers: Miles Franklin, the

Early Years', the combination of nationalism and feminism in responses to the signs of literary promise evident in Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career*, is examined. The second chapter, 'From Needlework to Woodcarving: the Fairfax Women and the Arts and Crafts Movement, 1899-1914', raises the arts and crafts movement as a discipline dominated by women in Australia prior to the First World War. In their involvement in the arts and crafts movement, we see notions of tradition and innovation, femininity and public empowerment, class and professionalism in conflict. The study of Ethel Kelly, former American actress reinvented as charity and Society woman, explores changes in definitions of Society, femininity and culture during the second decade of the twentieth century. The contribution of a network of writing women to the consolidation of literary circles, of Society women to the public awareness of modern art developments in Sydney in the 1920s, of women musicians to the democratisation of musical forms and practices in the late 1920s and early 1930s, of committeewomen to the growth of the little theatre movement and the institutionalisation of symphonic music in the mid to later 1930s, and radical or labour women to institutional acceptance of modern art in the late 1930s and early 1940s comprise the focus of the succeeding chapters. In each case, the consistent use of feminine strategies, whether nurturing, networking or fashion-setting, is seen to intersect with key cultural concerns, which in turn represent a variety of responses to modernity.

The survey ends with a glance at the increasing tendency in the 1940s for women culturists to 'call on the state', and seek the involvement of either state or federal governments in the further patronage of Australian culture. It is seen as a fitting place to finish. This in no way suggests the mid-twentieth century as the moment of culmination of the gestation of the public woman culturist, although women like Gertrude Johnson and Dorothy Helmrich became integral elements of the public arts bodies founded under the

auspices of the state at their instigation. Nor is it seen as the end of the feminisation of Australian culture, despite the apparent gender conservatism of the decades following the Second World War and the historical reassertion of the legend of the 1890s. Instead, the changing relationships between cultural institutions and Australian governments suggest that a new stage had begun in the custodianship of the high cultural life of the city of Sydney. It follows that the strategies, the aims, and the work of the women culturists also entered a new stage; the seedlings were established and no longer needed tending.