

Thomas Woolner's "Bad Times for Sculpture": Framing Victorian Sculpture in Vocabularies of Neglect

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In 1890, one of the Victorian era's most successful sculptors, Thomas Woolner, bemoaned what he perceived to be the declining cultural value of his profession, writing that "people do not care for sculpture very much" (Letter to Henry Parkes 8 December 1890). Perhaps little has changed.¹ As Jason Edwards recently observed, "In spite of the sustained re-investigation of Victorian culture in recent decades nineteenth century British sculpture continues to be neglected" (201). This article will revisit this history of neglect, considering the second half of the nineteenth century as a key era for sculpture; a time of fluctuating cultural, aesthetic and economic value for the art. Drawing on the case study of Pre-Raphaelite sculptor, Thomas Woolner, I will show how he pragmatically cast and recast his profession as both high art and a popular art form in order to defend the dignity and technical complexity of sculpture whilst maintaining a living by it. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, capitalising on cultural developments as varied as British imperialism, growing opportunities for travel and the phenomenon of celebrity became increasingly imperative to a sculptor's success. By necessity, Woolner's generation of sculptors had to modify their methods to remain competitive in a mass market rapidly crowded by replicas, statuettes and the ephemera which were invading everyday life and becoming characteristic of modernity. Woolner's rhetorical moulding of sculpture as an art appealing both to the elite and to the popular markets makes a useful case study in the plasticity of Victorian sculptors themselves as they responded to the changes in the aesthetic and economic value of their art, adapting their methods and adopting new approaches in ways which would reframe the cultural value of the profession by the end of the nineteenth century.

Woolner as a Window to Victorian Sculpture Past, Present and Future

In 1859, the *Athenaeum* published a vignette describing a cultivated gathering in an Australian cottage. The reader is invited to:

imagine the pretty little one-storied cottage, with its trellis of vine, the palm trees and bananas on the lawn, and look in at the inmates:—

There are about a dozen ladies and gentlemen gathered round a table in a well-stocked library, on the walls of which are a few paintings by good English masters, a bronze by Woolner, and a new print or two. The table is covered with recent productions of English literature, the most attractive books when I left being "Aurora Leigh," George Macdonald's and Coventry Patmore's Poems, "Friends of Bohemia," and Livingstone's "Africa." All the English magazines are on the table, from the profound "Quarterly" to the readable "Dublin University." The gentleman at the head of the group is reading "Aurora Leigh" aloud. . . . Book the first of the epic ended, the guests adjourn to the cool verandah without, where the gentlemen smoke, the ladies sing, or both join in a quadrille on the lawn. This is no fancy sketch. I have seen it, just pleasantly varied, scores of times at various houses. (543)

In this description we are invited from the outside in, from the representative to the particular, from the other to the familiar. We are presented with a catalogue of culture—of literature, of reviews, of paintings, of prints, of song, of dance, and of sculpture. A statue by Pre-Raphaelite sculptor, Thomas Woolner, takes pride of place in the house, evidencing the extent to which Woolner's sculpture had become a signifier of British culture in the Australian domestic space. It also points, perhaps, to his association with Australia, having visited the colony from 1852–54 to prospect for gold. As Barringer and Flynn (1998) have established, imperialism is always materially mediated, and Woolner's sculpture partakes in this colonising impulse which, in this *Athenaeum* piece, sees a home in Australia invaded by British literature, art and etiquette. But, for the purposes of this article, I demonstrate the extent to which Woolner's work was identified in the mid-nineteenth century as partaking in the project of both fostering and evidencing aesthetic culture in such far away places as Australia. Its inclusion in a catalogue of mid-nineteenth-century cultivation intended for readers at the imperial centre demonstrates the successful spread not only of colonisation in general but of sculpture in particular.

The recent Tate exhibition, "Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant Garde," reinstated Pre-Raphaelite sculpture as an important part of the movement, with works by sculptors such as Thomas Woolner and Alexander Munro exhibited to great effect.² With Michael Hatt, Jason Edwards and Martina Droth's promising *Sculpture Victorious* exhibition taking place in 2014 and 2015,³ and recent innovative interdisciplinary studies emerging,⁴ the future of Victorian sculpture seems bright.⁵ This recent interest in sculpture makes great sense in the context of the material turn in Victorian studies,⁶ particularly in the context of Pre-Raphaelitism with its emphasis on materiality. The back cover of the catalogue for *Sculpture Victorious* (Droth *et al*) acknowledges this scholarly shift, recognising that the Victorian era experienced "an efflorescence of sculpture on an unprecedented scale," but also that this crowded marketplace was subject to entirely "new markets, new forms of patronage, and new sites for display."⁷ Changes to the field of sculpture studies have recently seen scholars expanding our definition of sculpture to embrace replicas, statuettes, medallions, collectable ephemera and decorative arts; this expansion also answers the need for what Edwards has called scholarship which "usefully contest[s] the current scholarly focus on imaginative, ideal works intended for elite country houses ... in favour of a broader conception of sculpture in an expanded, regional, material cultural field" (Edwards 202). Woolner is an ideal candidate for such scholarship, with his production of collectable celebrity medallions and his many regional and colonial commissions. However, this interest in Pre-Raphaelite sculpture is a relatively recent development particularly aided by the scholarship of Benedict Read, Joanna Barnes, Leonée Ormond, Juliette Peers, and Paul Barlow,⁸ despite the importance and success of the only sculptor of the original brethren.⁹

Woolner inhabits the margins both of Pre-Raphaelitism and the history of sculpture, with minimal scholarship devoted to him or his extremely productive life subsequent to the Pre-Raphaelites. Although Woolner's poem "My Beautiful Lady" opened the first issue of *The Germ* in 1850, he is best known as the only sculptor of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Woolner's career makes a useful case study in the history of nineteenth-century sculpture, particularly due to his liminality, and his own ability to adjust to shifting cultural climes. He lived both in England and in Australia, and actively sought commissions throughout Britain, Australia, Asia and India over the

course of his career, pragmatically positioning himself both within and outside of the British Art establishment. Furthermore, Woolner's career spanned much of the Victorian era, from his apprenticeship in 1836 at age eleven to the Behn brothers until his death, aged 67, in 1892. Woolner was therefore instrumental in the development of Pre-Raphaelite or realist sculpture, which he taught in the Royal Academy schools even if he never delivered his lectures there as Professor of Sculpture. Woolner then weathered and resisted what he saw as the travesty of Symbolist sculpture and the shock of New Sculpture, which he termed "Leighton's mongrel mixed kind of sculpture" (Woolner, Letter to Henry Parkes 14 August 1892). Despite Woolner's fame, in a letter of 1885—at the height of his career—he still considered this era "bad times for sculpture" (Letter to Henry Parkes 5 August 1885). The first section of this article considers some of the factors that provoked this description, and how an elderly Woolner had carefully carved out his place as the defender of high Victorian sculpture, before I build and test the theory that popular celebrity and sculpture as material culture were central to the ways in which sculptors like Woolner cleverly responded to these "bad times" by actively attempting to recast sculpture's cultural value.

The Shifting Value of Victorian Sculpture in the International Marketplace

If in the late nineteenth century Woolner was marginalised, by the early twentieth century he had been well and truly sidelined. A 1926 article in *The Bookman* ostensibly devoted to Woolner's work begins with this spectacular sentence that epitomises the historical treatment of Woolner both in the history of Pre-Raphaelitism and of sculpture: "As Rossetti was painter and poet, highly distinguished in one art as in the other, so Woolner, another member of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, was sculptor and poet, on a lower but still high level of achievement in both arts" (Clyne 202). This impressively circuitous sentence is extremely revealing of the comparisons suffered not only by Woolner with regards to his Pre-Raphaelite painter brethren but of the kinds of reductive conceptions of sculpture in comparison with painting that were by this time so implicitly ingrained in aesthetic discourse.

The roots of such attitudes were firmly embedded in the Royal Academy, where theories of sculpture's inferiority had been formalised by its first president Sir Joshua Reynolds in his tenth discourse. One of Reynolds' students recalled his lecture on sculpture, in which:

He commenced by explaining his reasons for not having sooner noticed this particular branch of art, on the principle that Painting is much more extensive and complicated than Sculpture, and affords, therefore, a more ample field for criticism; and consequently as the greater includes the less, the leading principles of sculpture are comprized in those of painting. The former he considered as an art of much more *simplicity* and *uniformity* than the latter, as it cannot with propriety, or the best effect, be applied to many subjects. (Northcote 220)

This reductive analysis of sculpture as comprising merely part of an aesthetic whole encapsulated by the greater art of painting clearly had an effect on students' conceptions of the art, and their desire to practice it. Northcote's particular position is a fascinating lens through which to consider Reynold's lectures, as it enables us to inhabit the student's perspective. Northcote further noted Reynold's derision of the

“ineffectual attempts of sculptors, of the present day, to improve the art,” emphasising that Reynolds considered this failure as “arising partly from the costume of modern times not being so well suited to execution as that of the classic ages” (220).

The relative absence of critical attention to sculpture was unsurprisingly mirrored by the public as the nineteenth century progressed. In Britain, it was becoming increasingly difficult for sculptors to secure work. The traditional means of winning commissions via competitions was declining for, in Woolner’s words, “the simple reason that no first rate sculptor will ever enter competitions” (Letter to Henry Parkes 24 December 1876). In 1876, for example, a competition was held calling for designs for a national monument to Byron and the entries were so disastrous that they were rejected en masse.

Major public commissions were heavily influenced by the Prince of Wales on the advice of the President of the Royal Academy. For the last twenty years of the century, this was Lord Leighton, who became notorious for bestowing commissions only among his coterie. Sculptors at this time were increasingly dependent upon their ability to network and, for all his intellectual vigour and entertaining personality, Woolner had not succeeded on this front. “I have no one to work for me,” he wrote:

and thus get nothing. I have heaps of *social* friends, but no *real* friends:—the difference being that the first delight you by their society, and the latter aid the development of your individuality. They sometimes unite in the same person, when everything is as you would wish; but this is rare, and they are mostly separate; ... When a person has the huge leverage of Royalty, and the stupendous influence of loquacity against him there is but little chance for him, at least in the way of sculpture; for there is no public to fall back upon, as there is nowhere any appreciable knowledge of the subject. (Letter to Henry Parkes 10 November 1884; 8 July 1884)

Here Woolner made an important point; where painters could rely on a certain amount of public interest and patronage, this kind of support was declining when it came to sculpture. Additionally, the decline in critical interest in sculpture meant that public taste for sculpture and its aesthetic qualities was not being successfully cultivated, resulting in diminished interest in the art, fewer patrons, and—ultimately—fewer sculptors.

The Royal Academy itself frequently overlooked not only sculpture but sculptors. Circulars sent by the Royal Academy calling for works for potential exhibitions routinely only invited paintings, and enquiries from sculptors as to whether their art would be welcomed were often ignored. In a letter regarding a potential exhibition, Woolner bemoaned the Royal Academy’s usual disregard for his art:

I do not know if the Commissioners wish for sculpture, as the Circular letter sent to me from the Royal Academy mentions paintings only, and takes no note of sculpture: but whether this is merely accidental or an expression of the indifference usually shown towards the sterner art I cannot say. I wrote to the secretary some time back stating my intentions, but as yet have received no reply. (Letter to Henry Parkes 1 June 1879)

One of the reasons Woolner identified for the tendency to privilege painting over sculpture was that, thanks to sculpture's neglect by the Royal Academy, the public had forgotten how to read sculpture in the way that they were extremely literate in appreciating the aesthetics of painting. The culprit, he believed, was colour. Woolner referred to the "national indifference towards the human form, when regarded without the accompaniment of colour." He explained:

However inane a picture is in design; the conception false and coarse; action sprawling and devoid of meaning; arrangement anyhow; figures stuffed into corners to 'fill up'; and tho' the proportions are absurd, and there is not a single line of true drawing throughout the whole work; let the colour be but bold and harmonious, *it is* enough; and every objection is silenced by the ecstatic exclamation 'Ah, but what colour! What a fine juicy bit of colour!' (Woolner, Royal Academy Lectures. c. 1877)

At this moment, where sculpture's cultural value was being renegotiated, British sculptors, frustrated by the decline in sculpture's public popularity and private patronage, began to develop new approaches to attracting commissions. Two key strategies adopted by sculptors included, firstly, to turn to the increasingly international market for sculpture by seeking commissions from the colonies, and, secondly, to harness the escalating importance of celebrity culture to sculpture and its relationship to popular culture and collecting.

"Leisure and Wealth Enough to Encourage Art": New Colonial Markets for Sculpture

Paradoxically, the mid-nineteenth century decline in the popularity of sculpture coincided with the expansion of the marketplace well beyond Britain's borders. Australia, for example, and particularly New South Wales and Victoria, whose governments were especially committed to cultivating the arts, had "leisure and wealth enough to encourage Art," according to the *Athenaeum* in 1857 ("Fine Arts" 1213). Sculptors seeking to undertake large public works quickly took advantage of the growing international market by making bids for colonial commissions. Such commissions, however, were attended by their own set of challenges, most of which Woolner himself encountered during his forty-year history of Australasian commissions. British sculptors interested in colonial commissions had to carefully build and leverage their colonial networks to secure the opportunity to submit designs from a distance, after which they relied on finding trustworthy agents to conduct their financial transactions in the colony. Successfully obtaining a commission was hardly a guarantee that a work would be seen through to execution, with new governments frequently failing to honour commissions of the old—as Woolner himself painfully discovered in his battle to see out his 1874 commission for Sydney's *Cook*, and again in 1891 when New South Wales' new government of George Dibbs failed to honour a series of the previous government's commissions for busts of former Governors, as noted by Tipping.

Where a sculptor's subjects were colonial residents, sculptors were usually forced to work from a painted or photographic image of their subject or to endeavor to arrange a meeting in London. Furthermore, sculptures destined for the colonies were immediately dispatched upon completion, denying their creators the opportunity to exhibit their work locally and thereby secure additional commissions. "I almost

always have to send away my most important works before exhibiting them in London,” complained Woolner to his lifelong friend, Australian politician Sir Henry Parkes. Woolner’s sculpture of Sir Readimoney of Bombay, for example, was dispatched almost immediately upon completion to aid the imperial project in India. As Woolner explained “I was not allowed to exhibit it here [in London] as the Committee were anxious to have it in its place before the arrival of The Prince of Wales.” (Letter to Henry Parkes 22 August 1875)

The colonial display of sculpture completed in the imperial centre played an increasingly important role in asserting British nationalism, both in the colonies and through reports in the British press of unveiling ceremonies, for example. Yet the arrival of British sculptors and of their works on colonial shores was simultaneously taken to evidence the growing cultivation of the colony itself. Woolner’s departure from Australia upon his failure to secure the commission for the Wentworth sculpture at Sydney University, for example, sparked an outcry at his treatment. Melbourne newspaper *The Argus* even described Australia’s failure to retain Woolner as “a . . . blot on our national character” (‘Fine Arts’, 1854). Furthermore, commissions for statues of the colonies’ own statesmen contributed significantly to the development of an increasingly distinct colonial identity, not just through the statue itself but from the ceremony surrounding it. Unveiling ceremonies, for example, were reported widely in the colonial press and back in Britain, working to reinforce the imperial project just as they fostered a sense of colonial identity.

In later life, Woolner was greatly concerned that the era’s neglect of sculpture would affect British nationalism and the future of the colonies. Upon hearing that the organisers of the Sydney International Exhibition of 1879 had decided to exclude sculpture from their calls for the tender of artworks, Woolner wrote in frustration to Sir Henry Parkes “from the number of pictures bought the Sydney authorities seem inclined to encourage the fine Arts—they ought to encourage Sculpture likewise, as they will want to educate youth as sculptors of their future great men” (Letter to Henry Parkes 22 February 1880). As his Royal Academy lecture scripts would intimate in their repeated references to masculine valour, Woolner saw public sculpture’s value as being intrinsic to cultivating future great men and therefore to propagating British values in the colonies (Letter to Henry Parkes 22 February 1880).

Sculpting Celebrity: New Conceptions of Sculpture as Material Culture

Given the challenges in securing commissions in England, sculpture’s value at this time was also being renegotiated in the hierarchy of art. Just as the marketplace for sculpture had expanded through colonial commissions, the role of popular and mass-produced pieces was to increase dramatically. The script for Woolner’s Royal Academy lectures sees him self-consciously frame sculpture in terms of high art; he frequently refers to sculpture as “the sterner art” and draws extensively from Classical and Renaissance works. He analyses Ghiberti’s gates at Florence, Donatello’s bas-reliefs at the Church of St Anthony in Padua, and he returns again and again to minutely describe for his students the wonders of the Parthenon marbles; how they illustrate that “To model compositions in *relievo* is one of the most difficult tasks the student can undertake” (Introduction. Royal Academy Lectures). Yet in positioning sculpture purely as high art, Woolner conveniently rewrote his own rise to fame, which he achieved through his conscious pursuit of celebrities; his approaching colonial figures of fame in Australia and then again in England in order to secure his

own renown and gain public commissions. As such, it is useful to consider the value of Victorian celebrity culture to sculpture, and how enterprising sculptors could create new popular markets for collectable sculptural pieces both in Britain and in its colonies.

Despite his later life alignment of sculpture with high art, Thomas Woolner made his name on the back of celebrity. In 1852 Woolner had emigrated to Australia in search not only of gold but of commissions and fame. He soon befriended Charles La Trobe, the Governor of Victoria who was known for his commitment to promoting the visual and literary arts, and Woolner benefited from La Trobe's influence, patronage and introductions. He received twenty-four commissions for portrait medallions in Australia depicting such prominent citizens as Sir Charles Fitzroy, Sir Charles Nicholson, and William Charles Wentworth, and this work brought him fame both in Australia and in Britain. Upon his return to England, Woolner applied this strategy again, leveraging his connections in order to approach figures of fame. These medallions were reproduced in plaster and tin and quickly became popular collectibles. His name was made by producing busts and portrait medallions of contemporary celebrities including Browning, Carlyle, Dickens, Darwin, Tennyson and Wordsworth, and on the strength of these smaller works he finally achieved his ultimate aim of securing large public works including the Embankment's *John Stuart Mill*, his bust of *Cardinal Newman*, Sydney's *Captain Cook* and Singapore's *Sir Stamford Raffles*. These busts and medallions were copied and sold on the mass market as statuettes to adorn the fashionable drawing room.

Even after he had successfully secured many large public works, Woolner traded on the value of celebrity, especially in Australia. The selection of works he proposed to send to a Sydney exhibition in 1880 is telling; from his many works, he chose several small bronze busts of Tennyson and Dickens. In a private letter, his motivations are revealed: "As I put small prices on them I thought it likely I might sell them; and in any case I thought the accredited likenesses of two writers so renowned would be interesting to the Sydney public" (Letter to Henry Parkes 1 June 1879). For all his belief in sculpture's capacity for edification and value in fostering British nationalism, it is access to London's literary celebrities that he chose to offer Sydney—a pragmatic move, for his works sold almost immediately. Woolner's vocabulary reveals his careful enterprise; not only is the sculpture a likeness but it is *accredited* – its value lies in his authenticating touch as the celebrity sculptor renowned for befriending his sitters, a sculptor who acts as medium connecting the celebrity sitter and the fan viewer.

Woolner was aware he could successfully exploit the colonial fascination with celebrity, having for decades received requests from his colonial friends for autographs from his famous British sitters such as Carlyle, Darwin and Tennyson. Celebrity was a particularly strong force in the colonial context as it fostered a sense of synchronicity with Britain, as did the surprising number of visits by celebrities to colonial shores. This tactic was taken by other sculptors such as Bertram Mackennal, who befriended Sara Bernhardt upon her 1891 visit and had her sit for a series of works which were excitedly reported by the press as akin to being in her presence. Sculpture's evocation of the bodily presence of a celebrity was a particularly attractive aspect of the art; an attractiveness which was heightened by the tyranny of distance.

Woolner's later life conception of sculpture as purely high art also sits uncomfortably against the fact that much of his fame was achieved through the reproduction of collectable versions of his works. Aside from his portrait medallions, his earliest success, *Red Riding Hood*, had become so popular that the British firm Copeland began producing replicas in parian ware for the mass market in 1849.

In these ways, and given the challenges in securing commissions in England, celebrity and material culture were central to the renegotiation of sculpture's value in the hierarchy of art. Just as the marketplace for sculpture had expanded, the role of popular and mass-produced pieces was to increase dramatically. As his letters and unpublished lectures demonstrate, in his later life Woolner attempted self-consciously to frame sculpture in terms of high art. Yet in positioning sculpture purely as high art, Woolner conveniently rewrote his own rise to fame and conscious pursuit of celebrities; his approaching colonial figures of fame in Australia and then again in England in order to secure his own renown, gain public commissions and benefit from the production of inexpensive replicas. In this way, Woolner and other enterprising sculptors created new popular markets for collectable sculptural pieces both in Britain and its colonies; yet it was this pursuit and production of popular, collectable sculpture which Woolner would carefully forget as his success escalated.

“The Best Professor there Ever Was”: Woolner's Neglected Royal Academy Lectures

It was against this backdrop where sculpture's cultural value was being renegotiated that Woolner wrote his Royal Academy lectures. He had recently completed his enormous *Captain Cook* for Sydney's Hyde Park, the commission he had received in 1874, and which he commenced in good faith and then fought the New South Wales government to complete for four years; a battle which did little to convince Woolner of sculpture's current cultural value.

Woolner's association with the Royal Academy had been lifelong. Initially apprenticed to painter Charles Behnes, Woolner showed such promise that Behnes' renowned sculptor brother William took him on as a pupil. Woolner flourished during his six-year apprenticeship and, at Behnes' bidding, entered the Academy school a day before his seventeenth birthday in 1842 (Amy Woolner 2; “Thomas Woolner, R.A.”). The following year his group sculpture *Eleonora Sucking the Poison from the Wound of Prince Edward* (1842) was exhibited at the Academy exhibition to great reviews. Woolner's pictorial works soon followed, including the extremely popular *Puck* (1847) and *Red Riding Hood*, a replica of which was described in the Australian vignette explored earlier, and another of which Woolner would excitedly discover in the house of Edward La Trobe.¹⁰

In 1871, nearly thirty years after his admission as a student, Woolner became an Associate of the Royal Academy and a Royal Academician in 1874. His election was widely viewed by his contemporaries as significantly belated given his achievements, and signalled the beginning of Woolner's vexed relationship with the Academy. In 1877, Woolner accepted the Professorship of Sculpture at the Royal Academy that had been left vacant by the resignation of Henry Weekes.¹¹ He had been hesitant to accept the nomination, claiming that he had no talent for lecturing, despite his success teaching in the Academy Schools, where he proved popular with the students.

Very little is remembered about Woolner's tenure of the Professorship, much less his lectures, as they were never delivered. Amy Woolner's 1917 memoir of her father is the sole source to suggest the existence of any lectures. She explained that:

He wrote out two or three lectures which were never delivered, but he could not give the time to finish the series and compose the required number. Of the lectures he did write, one is called 'Introduction,' one is on 'Conception' and one on 'Finishing'; they were technical lectures suitable for students, it is to be regretted they were never given. (306–7)

Despite his protests, Woolner did in fact prepare a series of lectures. They are held in the Royal Academy archives and have been entirely neglected. There are, in fact, six notebooks filled with lectures. In addition to those lectures mentioned by Amy Woolner there are a further two, titled "Composition" and "Style." Though the notebooks are not numbered, the series is well structured and Woolner's logical conception of the creation of sculpture renders it easy to interpret their intended sequence: "Introduction," "Conception," "Composition," "Style," and "Finishing."

Woolner's lectures are those of a poet as well as a sculptor, this cross-pollination of Woolner's talent recalling Coventry Patmore's description of his poems in *The Germ* as "sculpturesque."¹² The lectures are beautifully and sensitively written, in a spirit of earnest and gentle didacticism and infused with Woolner's renowned sense of humour. Despite their neglect, the lectures are extremely illuminating on several fronts. Read alongside Woolner's notes and his unpublished correspondence, the lectures reflect upon Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics with the benefit of thirty years' hindsight. They demonstrate Woolner's commitment to practical pedagogy. And, significantly, the lectures offer a critique of the vocabularies traditionally applied to sculpture versus painting, and in doing so also speak to the historical treatment of Woolner as the only Pre-Raphaelite sculptor. However, perhaps what is most interesting about these lectures is the way in which Woolner seems to have purposefully forgotten them.

Woolner himself contributed to the myth that he had never prepared lectures, writing to the Academy "I have spent a great deal of time making notes, but as I see no chance of having the necessary leisure to complete the lectures I prefer resigning the post to leaving the duties longer unfulfilled" (Letter to Mr [Frederick] Eaton 22 June 1878). Woolner's assertion that he had merely made "notes" rather than completed lectures was a case of purposeful forgetting; the lectures' careful layout and the existence of separate preliminary notes provide evidence to suggest that they were at an advanced state of preparation and that he had in fact intended to deliver them.

Woolner resigned from the Professorship after only two years, writing to the Academy "[I have] no lectures prepared, and now I regret to find I must give up the Professorship altogether." Though there are inconsistencies as to Woolner's exact tenure at the Royal Academy Archive, Academy Professorship, a letter held by the Royal Academy archive confirms that he held the position for only two years.¹³ Tellingly, Woolner's final letter to the Royal Academy consists of a single line explaining his decision: "Lecturing is entirely out of my line or I should have been glad to do my best in that direction" (Letter to the Secretary 17 November 1886).

Woolner was certainly, as he once described himself, “the best professor there ever was, for he only professed and never practiced” (Amy Woolner 306-7). This naturally leads us to question why Woolner neglected to deliver his lectures and why he chose to forget them.

Conclusions: “People do not care for Sculpture very much”

Of course, we can only speculate. As his lectures demonstrate, Woolner had certainly cultivated significant theoretical and practical teachings on aesthetics and the art of sculpture that he felt compelled to communicate.¹⁴ It seems possible that Woolner’s pessimism became overwhelming. His growing and, to some extent, justified resentment towards the Academy and the influence of its representatives to the detriment of the public’s understanding of sculpture had poisoned his inclination to participate in publically defending his art at all. This story is framed by Woolner himself in vocabularies of forgetting. Woolner’s purposeful forgetting of his lectures and withdrawal from the Royal Academy seem symptomatic of his gradual retreat from the role of caretaker of sculpture. As he aged, it was no longer just Woolner’s art that he framed in vocabularies of forgetting and neglect; “People do not care for Sculpture very much,” he complained, “but if this boycotting occurred in any other branch of life and against a single individual what a row there would be” (Letter to Henry Parkes 8 December 1890). Woolner’s participation in the debate as to the supremacy of painting over sculpture provides a lens through which to analyse not only Woolner’s views on sculpture but those of the Royal Academy and the effects of the Academy’s neglect—of its wilful forgetting—of the sculptural arts as the nineteenth century progressed. Woolner’s careful and strategic employment of vocabularies of neglect is emblematic of the state of Victorian sculpture as a whole, usefully reminding us of the constructed nature of all our histories and their vocabularies.

Notes

¹ As this article goes to press, the *Wall Street Journal* published a review of *Sculpture Victorious* (the first major exhibition of Victorian sculpture to be shown at the Yale Centre for British Art). Employing vocabularies of neglect, the review’s title alone evidences my point; “Forgotten Regal Beauties: Shunned by Art History, Rarely Seen Victorian Sculpture Comes Out of the Shadows.” (Dobrzynski).

² See exhibition catalogue Jason Rosenfeld and Alison Smith. *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde* (London: Tate, 2012).

³ The exhibition, curated by Martina Droth, Jason Edwards and Michael Hatt, was shown at The Yale Centre for British Art from 11 September to 30 November 2014, and will be at Tate Britain from 25 February to 25 May 2015.

⁴ See, for example, scholarship on sculpture and photography by Patrizia di Bello, including “Photography and Sculpture” and “Multiplying Statues by Machinery.”

⁵ There are further promising developments in the field with *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, for example, scheduling a special issue on Victorian Sculpture for 2016, which features not only leading scholars from literature and art history but also curators of recent exhibitions of Victorian sculpture.

⁶ See, for example, Lyn Pykett’s useful article “The Material Turn in Victorian Studies,” and also the Spring 2008 issue of *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* dedicated to “Victorian Fiction and the Material Imagination” edited by Victoria Mills.

⁷ At the time of this article’s publication, the catalogue has not yet been released, and therefore I have relied on the publisher’s website at “Sculpture Victorious.”

⁸ See, for example, Read and Barnes, eds, *Pre-Raphaelite Sculpture* which includes essays on Woolner by Read (“Thomas Woolner:”), Peers (“Beyond Captain Cook”), and Ormond (“Thomas Woolner

and the Image of Tennyson”). Also see Barlow, “Grotesque Obscenities” and Peers’ essay “Pre-Raphaelitism in Colonial Australia.”

⁹ Sculpture also has the unique ability to shed light not only on Pre-Raphaelite art but on other aspects of Pre-Raphaelitism’s afterlives; one Rossetti biographer, for example, described how Rossetti could “excite [the] practical kind of admiration which inspired women to decorate their houses with antimacassars and fire-grates featuring Rossetti’s singular circular initials” (Tirebuck 33).

¹⁰ On his first visit to the home of the Governor of Victoria, Edward La Trobe, in 1852, Woolner discovered a parian ware replica of *Red Riding Hood*; just one of many examples of sculpture circulating as cultural capital circulating between Britain and Australia which Woolner registered with surprise during his residence in Melbourne. Woolner wrote excitedly to his father ‘We have to dine with that great man to-day [Edward La Trobe]: he wants to know me because [Edward] Bateman found that my little figure of Red Riding Hood was one of his favorite ornaments & told him that I did it: he says I must not leave the Colony without doing something in the fine arts first’ (Amy Woolner 18).

¹¹ Henry Weekes RA (1807–77) had held the Professorship since 1868 and his son, John Ernest Weekes, posthumously published eighteen of his father’s lectures as *H. Weekes, Lectures on art*.

¹² Coventry Patmore quoted by Rossetti (*Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters* 222; *The Germ* 16). Rossetti further notes that his brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti explains that Patmore “means by this that each stanza stands too much alone, and has its own ideas too much to itself.”

¹³ Amy Woolner cites his resignation as having taking place in 1879; Timothy Stevens believes that he resigned “five years later.” See Amy Woolner (306) and Stevens’ entry on Woolner in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹⁴ Indeed, he eventually did so by reworking his introductory lecture for publication in *The Magazine of Art* shortly before his death. See Woolner, “Where to draw the line.”

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