"KINDRED SOULS": CATHERINE HELEN SPENCE AND GEORGE ELIOT

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In 1876, Scottish-Australian writer, Catherine Spence, described the effect of genius as a process in which "ideas, aspirations, conclusions, which we were before unconscious of, or very dimly conscious of, leap into light before the awakening touch of a higher, yet a kindred soul" ("George Eliot" 146). Spence was pointing out the immense gap that existed between a "master of fiction" such as George Eliot and the "countless swarm of writers" who may try to take his or her place. But she was also revealing the connectedness between herself and Eliot that went beyond that of a reader-writer relationship, as well as the influence that Eliot had on her thinking. Although her own novels were never as complex or cerebral as George Eliot's, a great deal of her non-fiction writing is intelligent, thoughtful and morally profound, reflecting her desire to offer to her own readers something of what Eliot had given her. The similarities between their lives and the themes pursued in their writing suggest that, although they only met once, they were indeed "kindred souls." This article uses an exploration of the relationship between the two writers to argue that Spence's intellectual development was a result of both her bond with the British imperial centre and her colonial experience, a fusion that was representative of the development of Australian intellectual life during the nineteenth century.

Both Spence and Eliot managed to overcome the perception, widespread in the nineteenth century, that women's minds were somehow inferior to men's. Indeed, Eliot was recognised as a woman who possessed one of the great minds of the nineteenth century, with Marian Evans being revealed as the author of *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede* after publication of the latter in 1859. Her adoption of a male pseudonym for her fiction reveals something of the problems faced by women who aspired to an intellectual life, although she had very particular concerns, too, in wanting her writing to "be judged quite apart from its authorship" (Letter from G.E. to John Blackwood, 1 December 1858, Haight 2: 505).[1] Spence, too, was anonymous in her first two novels, signing herself only as "The Author" in the letter

[1] George Eliot's reasons for writing under a male pseudonym are discussed in a number of texts including Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot Her Letters and Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994); Kathryn Hughes, *George Eliot: The Last Victorian*; Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston, *The Journals of George Eliot*; and Gillian Beer, *George Eliot* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986).

to publishers, Smith, Elder and Company, that accompanied the manuscript of *Clara Morison* to England. In her journalism, she adopted a number of gender-neutral pseudonyms until finally signing her full name to an essay on George Eliot in the *Melbourne Review* in 1876 when she was fifty-one years old. She, too, was eventually judged to be a woman of great intellectual capacity, with Rose Scott writing in an obituary of her sadness "that that heart, so full of human sympathy, had ceased to beat, and that that brain, so active, so comprehensive and broad-minded, has ceased to act" (5b).

Eliot and Spence exhibited an interest in intellectual work early in their lives but were forced to leave school before they wanted to. Eliot, who had been the "cleverest girl in [. . .] school" (Hughes 37), was called home at sixteen to nurse her mother, but managed to obtain access to the library at Arbury Hall, the estate where her father was employed, enabling her to continue her learning. As she grew older, she set herself a schedule of rigorous study although she was still conscious of her lack of formal education. This, along with the effects of household responsibilities, is revealed in one of her typical metaphors in a letter to Maria Lewis of September 1839, in which she compares her mind to a collection of fragments of nature:

> My mind presents just such an assemblage of disjointed specimens of history, ancient and modern, scraps of poetry picked up from Shakspeare [sic], Cowper, Wordsworth and Milton, newspaper topics, morsels of Addison and Bacon, Latin verbs, geometry entomology and chemistry, reviews and metaphysics, all arrested and petrified and smothered by the fast thickening every day accession of actual events, relative anxieties, and household cares and vexations. (Haight 1: 29)

Eliot maintained her strenuous efforts to cultivate her mind for most of her life. Her desire for knowledge is evidenced in her journal entries during trips with George Lewes to places such as Ilfracombe in which she records her "enthusiastic participation in GHL's extension of his scientific knowledge [. . .] and her pleasure in acquiring a whole new vocabulary [. . .]" (Harris and Johnston 260), while her exhaustive research into Renaissance Florence for *Romola* is legendary. Her interest in education extended to support for the efforts of Barbara Bodichon and Emily Davies to establish a women's college at Cambridge, donating £50 to the cause. However, her commitment to improved education for women more generally seems ambivalent. She could write in a letter to Emily Davies in 1868 that the best response to the fears of men about women's education is "to point out that complete union and sympathy can only come by women having opened to them the same store of acquired truth or beliefs as men have" but also note that there was "just that kernel of truth in the vulgar alarm of men lest women should be 'unsexed' [by education]" (Haight 4: 468).

Nevertheless, Eliot's frustrations with the restrictions on women's lives caused by a lack of access to a rounded education are often expressed in her novels through her female heroes. In *Middlemarch*, for example, Dorothea Brooke describes her own experience as "girlish instruction comparable to the nibblings and judgments of a discursive mouse" (bk. 1, ch. 3), while her uncle echoes the Ruskinian sentiment that women should only be educated enough to allow them to be of service to the male, but then (unlike Ruskin) deprecates them for their uselessness.[2] Poor Maggie Tulliver suffers from her thirst for knowledge; rejected as a classmate for Tom by Mr Stelling in *Mill on the Floss* on the grounds that girls have "'a great deal of superficial cleverness: but they can't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow'" (220-21). Even when Eliot's heroines manage to acquire a satisfactory level of learning, however, they are condemned, like Romola, to a frustrating and insignificant life. She raised the issue earlier as well in one of her essays for the *Leader*, arguing that there was no rational basis for the notion that men appeared to subscribe to that "an instructed woman, capable of having opinions, is likely to prove an impracticable yoke-fellow, always pulling one way when her husband wants to go the other [. . .]"; she saw a lack of reason as more likely to result in the "most unmanageable of creatures" ("Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft" 183).

Catherine Spence's interest in the life of the mind was apparent at the age of thirteen, as she writes in her autobiography: "I was a very ambitious girl at 13 [who wanted] to be a teacher first, and a great writer afterwards" (12). In her twenties she vowed that "before yielding to a belief in the inferiority of women," she would discipline her mind "to manly virtues, to manly strength, and to manly studies, that I may learn to live without leaning on anyone" (qtd. Young 45). Her linking of manliness, strength of mind and independence was typical of mid-nineteenth-century attitudes toward intellectual endeavours, but it was a challenging declaration for a young woman to make. Spence's early education was a mixture of traditional womanly "accomplishments" such as needlework and French, and reading "history, biography, adventures, description, and story books" (*Autobiography* 12). Her French was good enough to appreciate and criticise the work of writers such as Honoré de Balzac and Alphonse Daudet in the original. Counting on continuing her education at an advanced school for girls in Edinburgh, she was disappointed when her father's financial losses meant this would not be possible. For the rest of her life, she educated herself in an immense range of subjects, promoting many improvements in the South Australian education system, including the reform of

[2] John Ruskin recommended in his essay, "Of Queens' Gardens," that Woman's mind should be filled "with all knowledge and thoughts which tend to confirm its natural instincts of justice, and refine its natural tact of love [. . .] All such knowledge should be given to her to understand, and even to aid, the work of men [. . .]" *Sesames and Lilies* (London: George Allen, 1894) 110.

middle-class education for girls and the establishment of an Advanced School for Girls.[3]

Spence's ambitions were partly driven by the need for an independent income, brought about by the family's difficult financial circumstances, her decision to remain single and the death of her father in 1846. She began working as a governess at the age of seventeen, opening her own school in 1846, but she gave up teaching in the 1850s. By then, with a little financial help from her Scottish aunts, she was ready to attempt writing novels as a means of earning a living. Novels were not the only route to an intellectual life for Spence, but, after some early journalistic attempts under her brother's name, they worked to gain her entry to the public sphere by being what she regarded as "the line of least resistance" (*Autobiography* 56). Eliot, too, was driven partly by a need and desire for an independent income. She realised the necessity of earning an independent income as a result of the relatively small bequest from her father, with whom she had had a difficult relationship, and her estrangement from her brother, Isaac. The death of Edward Clarke, her sister's husband, in 1852 left Chrissey with six children under fifteen and £100 a year to live on, causing Eliot deep concern, but she also knew that living with Chrissey was not the best way for either of them; in her letters to the Brays, she describes life in that "ugly small house" in that "hideous neighbourhood" as "moral asphyxia" (Haight 2: 97). This, combined with Isaac's reluctance to do more than he absolutely had to for Chrissey, gave Eliot even more motivation to work (Hughes 180) for she saw her money as "perhaps more acceptable than my labour and affection" in providing for Chrissey's welfare (Haight 2: 97).

By 1851, Eliot was living in London and acting as editor of the *Westminster Review*, as well as writing articles, reviewing and proof-reading, although she received no recognition of her role and no salary for her editorial work. The move to London after growing up as Mary Anne Evans in the agricultural and industrial provincial world of Warwickshire brought her into contact with a number of significant figures in mid-Victorian artistic and intellectual life including Harriet and James Martineau, Herbert Spencer, James Froude, Thomas Carlyle, Francis Newman, Henry Crabb Robinson, Wilkie Collins, W.R. Greg and George Henry Lewes. Among her female friends were women's rights activists Barbara Bodichon and Bessie Rayner Parkes, while male friends included Charles Bray and Robert Brabant, men who admired Eliot's intelligence.

Adelaide might have been geographically remote from the intellectual activity of Victorian London, but living in the Antipodes did not mean that Spence was remote from intellectual life. Australia possessed a "fairly sophisticated migrant provincial culture" (Serle 31) that occasionally surprised visitors. Catherine Spence

[3] I am grateful to Susan Magarey for the immense amount of research she has undertaken in relation to Spence's life and work, particularly her biography of Spence, *Unbridling the Tongues of Women: A Biography of Catherine Helen Spence*.

tells of her sister, Mary's, snappy reply to a visitor from England who was "astonished [. . .] at [Mary's] having read Macaulay's History: 'Why, it was only just out when I left England,' said he. 'Well, it did not take longer to come out than you did'" (*Autobiography* 20). In Spence's case, her friendships with educated and well-off Adelaide citizens such as the Barr Smiths and Andrew Murray, described by Susan Magarey in her biography of Spence, provided access to books, journals and newspapers that she probably would not have been able to afford to buy herself. The South Australian Institute, the Mechanics' Institute and the Book Society were all part of Adelaide's cultural life in the mid-nineteenth century, assisting Spence with her ongoing education, as well as her later literary and public-speaking activities. Thus, in spite of Adelaide's smaller population and distance from the more established cities of Melbourne and Sydney, it was lively and progressive with an active intellectual, cultural and spiritual life of its own. It gave Spence opportunities that Eliot may not have had; as Bruce Bennett notes, "the small community in which Spence found herself and where she worked, gave her some powerful insights into human suffering and evolutionary reform" (157).

Like Eliot, Spence raised the issue of women's education in her novels, beginning with *Clara Morison* in 1854. The heroine, Clara's, unconventional schooling has resulted in not "one accomplishment of marketable value" according to her uncle, who is keen to offload the expense of keeping her:

> She neither played, nor sung, nor drew, but she read aloud with exquisite taste; her memory was stored with old ballads and new poems; she understood French, and was familiar with its literature, but could not speak the language; she could write short-hand, and construe Caesar's Commentaries; she played whist and backgammon remarkably well, but she hated crochet and despised worsted-work. (2)

As Frederick Sinnett observes in *The Fiction Fields of Australia* (1856), Clara "is not possessed of any considerable store of young lady's accomplishments, and the more sterling kinds of knowledge are in this age and generation, lamentably unsaleable when packed up in petticoats" (203). By contrast, her sister, Susan, is less attractive than Clara but "her voice was exquisitely musical, her manners graceful and refined, and every accomplishment which she had cultivated was thoroughly acquired; she was a skilful musician, she drew admirably, and she understood more than one foreign language" (1). Although *Clara Morison* was reviewed in the *Athenaeum* in 1854,[4] there is no evidence to indicate that Eliot read it, but perhaps she might have enjoyed reading about Clara's lack of traditional accomplishments in

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[4] Review of *Clara Morison*. *Athenaeum* (15 July 1854): 879.

light of her later depiction of Dorothea Brooke and Rosamund Vincy in *Middlemarch*.

Spence makes the point that equal education for women is insufficient to enable them to compete with men in the employment market while other inequalities exist in society. Like Clara, Jane Melville in Spence's third novel, *Mr Hogarth's Will* (1864), is an orphaned heroine who lacks many traditional accomplishments. Jane's radical and eccentric uncle believed that with the same training, girls were just as capable as boys, so Jane learns bookkeeping, Euclid (geometry and arithmetic), the classics, chemistry and mineralogy, and "know[s] as much of the classics as nine out of ten young men in [her] rank of life" (8). The absence of equality of opportunity, however, means that equality of education becomes less a path to freedom and independence than a source of frustration. What the uncle had not envisaged is that, despite being "educated in a more masculine manner than most boys" (20), the sisters would still find it difficult to support themselves.

Thus, Spence takes up the argument for increasing the range of occupations open to women. She did not subscribe to the notion of separate spheres for single women, seeing it as irrational and responsible for women being forced into bad marriages. The dire financial situation of the heroine, Jane Melville, gives Spence the opportunity to articulate the lack of logic used to justify shutting women out of so many areas of employment. Jane's feminist arguments for permitting women's access to non-traditional fields of employment do not prevent her from working as a housekeeper and governess, nor do they save her from a conventional romantic ending. Despite incurring the tongue-in-cheek criticism from one of the reviewers that "a heroine with views about rights [is not] likely to attract the novel-reading public" (*Saturday Review* 676), Spence valorises those women who are willing to fight for the right to work in non-traditional fields over those who would remain content with what they have been assigned by the patriarchal system. Alice, Jane Melville's sister in *Mr Hogarth's Will*, for example, is more artistically inclined than Jane, with fewer practical skills. Far from possessing the determination of Jane or Eliot's Princess Alcharisi or Mirah, she has very limited notions about what she can do to contribute to their income. The two sisters provide contrasting representations of women of the mid-Victorian period: the proto-feminist Jane, who desires independence and justice for women, and the "angel in the house," Alice, who is submissive and deferential to the male characters in the novel.

Both Spence and Eliot employ the quest for the right to meaningful education and work by characters such as Jane and Dorothea as the means of making them heroic, but they do so in ways that highlight their philosophical differences. Where Spence is explicit in highlighting the problems faced by women in search of satisfying occupations, George Eliot is more indirect and subtle, showing the social web that ensnares them. While Spence's heroines generally succeed in finding some path to independence and happy marriages, Eliot demonstrates the cost to women and society more generally of women leading narrow and restricted lives. It is not

only women such as Dorothea who suffer from such restrictions, as Spence observes of the provincial life depicted by Eliot in her novels: it is "a life the dulness [sic] of which would oppress our modern, and especially our colonial, young men and women with despair [. . .]" ("George Eliot" 150). Women suffer disproportionately, however, and it is clear that Spence sympathises with the problems faced by Dorothea, asking if those who argue that women are sheltered from the trials of active, public lives "ever calculate what women suffer from dulness, from vacuity, from the want of a worthy object in life?" ("George Eliot" 150). Thus, with Dorothea frustrated in her search for knowledge of "the truths of life," and begging to be delivered from "her girlish subjection to her own ignorance" (bk. 1, ch. 3), Spence sees it as unsurprising that she is so enthusiastic at the idea of marriage to Casaubon:

> Only if you plant a heart and soul like that of Dorothea Brooke in such a limited sphere, if with all the desire to work and to bless there seemed to be nothing she could do for her fellow creatures but to give alms and be curtseyed to, you cannot wonder that she seized the opportunity offered her of what she thought a worthy life as helpmate to a man who had the reputation of being a great scholar [. . .] ("George Eliot" 150)

George Eliot's deterministic philosophy, which emphasised the individual's formation partly by outside forces and partly by inherent gender differences, argued against the exercise of individualism, particularly by women; she believed, according to Matilda Blind, that women needed to "subordinate [their] personal happiness to the social good" (qtd. Flint 169). Spence, on the other hand, emphasised the power of individualism to improve the individual and society. She was more optimistic about the possibilities of change for women in nineteenth-century Australia, where people were less bound by the traditions and restrictions of the past. The conventionally romantic conclusions to Spence's novels confirm this, revealing her belief, as Helen Thomson observes, "that such happy endings were more likely in an egalitarian colonial setting where social mobility was the norm rather than the exception" (Introduction xi).

Like Eliot, Spence did not believe that female suffrage would solve the kind of problems that women faced. The delay in her involvement in the campaign for women's right to vote in South Australia was not caused by a lack of awareness of the issues, but by her belief that the implementation of proportional representation was more important; as she notes in her autobiography, "[I] was not eager for the doubling of electors in number, especially as the new voters would probably be more ignorant and more apathetic than the old" (40). She also felt that maintaining the appearance of impartiality on the matter of female suffrage would give her more credibility in relation to her campaign for proportional representation. This is

consistent with her concern for improving society for all, rather than for a particular group, and was not all that different from George Eliot's attitude to the extension of the franchise to women. Eliot felt that without women receiving the appropriate moral and social education, female suffrage would be "an extremely doubtful good" (Haight 4: 390). Spence's views changed sufficiently by the early 1890s for her to use her influence and voice to argue firmly and publicly for the vote for women, highlighting the anomaly in which men and women of only two states voted in the first federal election. She wrote that "the grand democratic basis of the Commonwealth constitution of 'one man one vote,' needs to be expanded into 'one adult one vote' [. . .]: "while half of the human race is shut out of public activities, no one can call the government really democratic" ("Woman's Place in the Commonwealth").

Despite such differences, Spence's reviews of works by and about Eliot often describe qualities in Eliot's work and character that Spence aspired to and occasionally exhibited herself. In her review of Eliot's *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879), for example, she writes that this work presents more than a biography could "the mental and emotional attitude of George Eliot, with the roots of affectionate gratitude clinging to the past, and yet full of sympathy with the present, and of desire in some way to benefit the future inhabitants of this world" (5). This could also be said of Spence, although she tended to look more toward the future than the past. She admired, too, Eliot's respect for those parts of life which she felt "ought to be sacred to respect, admiration and love" such as death and tragedy, but which were often invaded by comic writers to ill effect (5). Agreeing with Eliot's Theophrastus that there is much that is genuinely ridiculous in the world, she reveals the perspective from which she surveys the world herself: "there is absurdity and incongruity, shortsighted selfishness and social shams that may legitimately raise an invigorating laugh without turning Socrates into burlesque, travestying Hamlet, or making fun of Scripture narrative [. . .]." Eliot possessed both humour and wit, according to Spence, with the "descriptions of the harvest supper in *Adam Bede*, of the visit of the Tullivers to Aunt Pullet's, of the conversation between the rustics at the Rainbow in *Silas Marner* [. . .] unquestionably specimens of genuine English humour" (5). *Scenes of Clerical Life* showed "a writer, evidently a woman, with the keen eye for the trivial and the domestic comedy of human life, and with the dramatic accuracy of dialogue which distinguished Jane Austin [sic], along with deep religious convictions which Jane Austin had not" (Review of *George Eliot's Life* 7). Spence's novels indicate her own keen eye for the funnier details of Australian life, with several critics observing resemblances between Jane Austen's novels and Spence's.[5]

[5] See Miles Franklin, *Laughter, Not for a Cage* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1956) 59; Elizabeth Webby, "A Woman Who Did," *Overland* 109 (1987): 80; John Ramsland, "Catherine Helen Spence: Writer, Public Speaker and Social and Political Reformer, 1825-1910," *South Australiana* 12.1 (1983): 43.

For Spence, the great appeal of George Eliot lay in her overriding concern with articulating a set of moral values that people could live by, making her the epitome of writers. Aspiring to this quality herself, she expressed her admiration of and respect for "this keen-sighted woman of genius" and explicitly noted Eliot's influence on her own work: "no writer of fiction has called forth such wide sympathies, or has influenced my aims and my conduct as George Eliot has done" ("George Eliot" 146). In a review of an article by Frederic Myers on Eliot in *The Century*, Spence commends his praise of Eliot's work to readers, and notes "the greatness of [Eliot's] achievement in the expansion of the sense of human fellowship into an impulse strong enough to compel us to live for others, even though it be beneath the oncoming shadow of an endless night" ("The December Reviews" 5g).

The powerful morality exhibited in the work of both women had its foundation in their religious experiences and in their rationalism. Eliot and Spence rejected the forms of organised religions they had been brought up in; they rebelled against the notion of a life beyond the grave and the moral sanctions that such immortality was supposed to produce. They sought other ways of thinking about the basis of moral behaviour than were provided by the bible and religious dogma. Turning away from the powerful evangelicalism of her childhood and towards the German Higher Criticism to which she was introduced by her free-thinking Unitarian friends in Coventry, Eliot came to regard the system of doctrines upon which her father's religion was built as "most dishonourable to God and most pernicious in its influence on individual and social happiness" (Letter from GE to Robert Evans, c. 1841, Haight 1: 128). Conventional religions had to change to instill in people, as she wrote to Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1869, "a more deeply-awing sense of responsibility to man, springing from sympathy with [. . .] the difficulty of the human lot" (Haight 5: 31). Spence's experience of religious doubt was similar. She had been brought up in the Presbyterian church but its negative doctrine of original sin, its corollary of innate human depravity and the consequent futility of human beings' efforts to achieve salvation on their own caused her considerable grief, writing that this "gloomy religion [. . .] made me doubt of my own salvation and despair of the salvation of any but a very small proportion of people in the world" (*Autobiography* 11). Moral human behaviour stemmed from human beings themselves and its end lay not so much in "fulfilling the word of God" but in "the welfare of humanity," reflecting a humanism that co-existed with her belief in a God "who is immanent in all creation visible and invisible, [who] is especially immanent in the human soul" (Sermon – "Human Responsibility"). In some ways, Spence's combination of humanism and religion resembles that of George Eliot in her pantheistic phase, as Bernard Paris refers to that period when Eliot endowed "all existence with a divine presence and purpose [. . .]" (11). George Eliot ultimately rejected all religious forms such as the Anglicanism of her father, as well as Auguste Comte's religion of humanity. Spence, however, seemed largely satisfied with her choice of Unitarianism.

The moral sense within the work of both writers reflected the views of many Victorians about the purpose of literature. Literature should affect readers through "the cultivation of the sympathies and imagination, the quickening of the moral sensibilities, and the enlargement of the moral vision," as John Morley put it (qtd. Collini 79). But neither Eliot nor Spence appreciated didactic writing. Eliot castigates the "copy-book morality" of writers such as Geraldine Jewsbury and Charles Kingsley who cannot teach without resorting to heavy-handed exhortations to do one's duty or the scolding of "bad" characters. But, according to Edith Simcox, Eliot felt that "whatever one wrote about, the work would be 'informed' with one's fundamental views [on the moral relations of life]," giving writers a special responsibility as teachers (qtd. Haight 9: 214). The best teachers, such as Thomas Carlyle or Johann Goethe, do "not seek to make [their] pupils moral by enjoining particular courses of action, but by bringing into activity the feelings and sympathies that must issue in noble action [. . .]" ("Thomas Carlyle" 187). Balzac may have been "perhaps the most wonderful writer of fiction the world has ever seen" but he had gone too far: "He drags us by his magic force through scene after scene of unmitigated vice, till the effect of walking among this human carrion is a moral nausea" ("The Morality of *Wilhelm Meister*" 131).

Spence felt similarly about the responsibility of writers, arguing that "there should be little or no preaching or moralising in the body of the work which the author has in his own hands"; if, however, characters in novels possessed religious convictions, then "it would be quite inartistic and unrealistic if they were not made to express them" ("The Place of Religion in Fictitious Literature" 363). Using Eliot's novels as a kind of touchstone by which to judge all other literature, she argued that she had introduced a quality that was new to fiction: "a distinctly dominant ethical purpose, of permanent and universal application, quite different from the lessons drawn in religious novels of various theological schools" ("George Eliot's Life and Works" 221). Eliot's novels always reveal the consequences of immoral or base behaviour in a way that other writers should take note of, according to Spence. She disapproves of Balzac, who "delights to see his puppets act their contemptible part, and pursues them with neither poetical nor ethical justice" ("Honoré de Balzac" 350). Although he was a "kindly and generous" man, she felt that he wrote powerful and widely-read works that were too pessimistic in their view of human nature and simplistic in their explanation of human motives. She believed that it was justified for a reader to inquire into a writer's moral values in order to discover whether "a great teacher's life corresponds with his lessons, and whether his moral or personal character entitles him to their confidence" (Review of Froude's *Life of Carlyle* 1d).

For Spence, great works required outstanding personal and moral qualities in their creators. She argues that "to write a great or even a good novel is not the easy work of an ordinary person; it demands the very highest qualities of mind and heart" ("Fiction, Fair and Foul" 233c). Spence revered Eliot's work and regarded Eliot's

personal and moral integrity very highly, treating her apparent disdain for conventional morality in her personal life and her rejection of organised religion as positive characteristics. Indeed, she argues that the acceptance of religious dogma does not necessarily constitute a spiritual life; rather, "wherever a human being is led to [. . .] hold the rights of his fellow creatures as sacred as his own, spiritual life has begun" ("George Eliot's Life and Works" 244). Instead of condemning Eliot for her apparent immorality, Spence argues that her motives do not stem from "a selfish craving for personal gratification" and that Eliot's relationship with Lewes "should serve [. . .] as a plea for greater liberty of divorce than a weakening of any true marriage bond" (243).

Their rational natures drew the two women towards a realistic style in their fiction but, again, there are differences in their approaches. Eliot regarded it as the novelist's duty "to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind" (*Adam Bede* 147). Her desire for truth and fidelity to life, her acceptance that realism necessarily means "that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite, substantial reality" ("John Ruskin's *Modern Painters*" 248), meant rejecting the romantic and the utopian. Spence, however, imagines a world that is better than it has been. She deprecated on the grounds of its pessimism the type of literature that portrayed Australia as a land of

> the deadbeat, the remittance man, the gaunt shepherd with his starving flocks and herd, the free selector on an arid patch, the drink shanty where the rouseabouts and shearers knock down their cheques, the race meeting where high and low, rich and poor, are filled with the gambler's spirit and cursed with the gambler's ill-luck. ("The Australian in Literature" 492)

There was more to Australia than this kind of literature allowed, according to Spence. She wanted this pessimistic view to be modified by writers to take into account "the joyousness of Australian life" and the "beauty and brightness of the world we live in," so that people could "see Australia steadily and see it whole" (494).

If Eliot was not a utopian, she did seem to have a kind of utopian view of Australia, however. In suggesting that Chrissey and her family migrate to Australia to start afresh, she saw Australia, as Nancy Henry observes, "as a salvation from the physical hardships and the social disgrace of poverty into which Chrissey had fallen [. . .]" (15). She obviously had in mind the idea that was widespread in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century that Australia was, as Samuel Sidney described it, "an El Dorado and an Arcadia combined" (qtd. Clarke 135). Eliot did, in fact, send a copy of Sidney's book, *The Three Colonies of Australia* (1852), to Chrissey "to enlighten

her about matters there and accustom her mind to the subject" (Haight 2: 88). She even suggested to the Brays that she might go with the family to help settle them and then come home (11 April 1853, Haight 2: 97), but with Chrissey firmly refusing to go to Australia, Eliot never ventured to the Antipodes. At this stage, Eliot believed that "emigration would enhance the development of the English race" (Henry 17), but her views changed over time as a result of her involvement in the lives of George Henry Lewes' sons, according to Henry. She suggests that much of Eliot's emphasis in her fiction on ties to community and family stems from the unfortunate colonial experiences of Thornton (Thornie) and Herbert (Bertie) (50). Migration for them to South Africa did not result in happy or healthy lives, with Bertie dying there in 1875 at the age of twenty-nine, and twenty-five-year-old Thornie dying shortly after his return to England in 1869, broke and crippled by spinal injury. As Henry observes, their "psychological instabilities and physical deterioration" were "a feared consequence of severing social ties and abdicating responsibility to society and to the land" (50), a notion that Eliot explores through a number of characters including Harold Transome in *Felix Holt*, Princess Alcharisi in *Daniel Deronda* and Tito in *Romola*.

Spence's enthusiasm for the benefits of migration was less hedged around with uncertainties about the possible degeneration of the British race that Eliot observed in her stepsons, despite the less than auspicious start to the Spence family's new life in Australia. She believed that Australia had possibilities that were difficult to imagine in the old world, even if it would "take several generations before we can have a distinct national character of our own" ("An Australian's Impressions of England" 110). In *Mr Hogarth's Will*, Jane Melville's physical and emotional journey from Britain to Australia contrasts the restrictions caused by matters of class and gender in the old world with the possibilities for success in a young country for those who would work hard and contribute their skills and knowledge in both public and private arenas. Jane is able to establish a financial independence that she could only dream of in England. Similarly, working-class characters like Peggy Walker and her family, who also migrate to Australia, become happy and successful citizens, rather than being held back by lack of opportunities and narrow-minded notions of what the working class could achieve in Scotland. Nevertheless, Spence never let her imagination run away with her; as Helen Thomson notes, she was "scrupulously honest about the experience of migration. Australia was no El Dorado where fortunes could be guaranteed even for the most unsatisfactory of younger sons" (Thomson xii).

Spence's positive view of migration was based on settlement by a particular type of British citizen who could bring with them the best of their British heritage. She saw British influence as singularly important to colonies all over the world, and took great pride in the links between Britain and Australia, arguing in 1877 for a form of federation that involved union with Britain. The relationship she saw as most desirable was one in which the colonies and Britain "could co-operate for

common Imperial and international objects, and leave each other free for domestic and local legislation [. . .]" ("Australian Federation and Imperial Union" 526). Britain's cultural heritage was highly valued by Spence who wrote in the same article in *Fraser's Magazine* that

> the bonds of race and of language, the common traditions which we have inherited, the kindred institutions which we have developed, the glorious literature which we possess as a priceless birthright, and the best interests of both colonies and mother country, all give reason for close and kindly union, unaffected by difference of latitude and longitude [. . .]. (539)

Spence's ideas about Britain were central to her vision of a future Australia that contained what she saw as the best that the British Empire could offer, but she was not an unmitigated imperialist. Although she never questioned the dispossession of Australian Aborigines by the white colonisers, she does raise doubts in *Handfasted* about the rightness of colonial displacement of indigenous people. After describing the early battles between the settlers and the Indians, Marguerite writes in her diary that "Mr Abercrombie proposed exterminating them [the Indians] as the only course, but Victor [her son] and I had some misgivings as to whether we had done right in coming to this peaceful valley to take their land from them" (195-96). Coincidentally, Eliot also raises the question of British imperialism at around the same time that Spence wrote *Handfasted*. In *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, Eliot's narrator, Theophrastus, writes of the sea-wall as "a specially divine arrangement to make and keep us a nation of sea-kings [. . .] secure against invasion and able to invade other lands when we need them, though they may lie on the other side of the ocean" (141). Eliot, through the voice of Theophrastus, urges the English to "scrutinize and remake their national character by recognizing a history of colonization, aggressive greed, and complacent superiority" (Henry 129).

There are certainly echoes of Eliot's condemnation of these characteristics in Spence's sympathy for the Chinese whom she felt had been greedily exploited by the British. Eliot's Theophrastus expresses disapproval of Britain's actions in relation to the Opium War in China, seeing them as not worthy of a great nation (139). Spence goes even further. She describes the introduction of opium to China as an "imperious and unscrupulous knocking at the closed ports of China with a pernicious drug for the benefit of British and Anglo-Indian traders and cultivators" (Review of *The Conflicts of Capital and Labour* 7). Arguing for better understanding on both sides, she observes that:

> there has been good reason given for the suspiciousness of the Celestial Empire as to British commercial greed and aggressiveness, and also for complaint that when we had forced

> our way for our own purposes into China, we did not welcome Chinese who peacefully made their way for their own purposes into our settlements [. . .]. It will be well for both nationalities to become better acquainted with each other [. . .]. (41)

There are many similarities between Spence and Eliot in their lives, philosophies and writing, reflecting the closeness of ties between Britain and Australia in the nineteenth century. They reveal the powerful influence of the British imperial centre, represented in this case by George Eliot, on Australia's intellectual development. But the differences between the two writers highlight the complexity of the relationship, with the experiences of those who left Britain helping to create a unique intellectual life in the new world. The literary genres used by the two women suggest something of the impact those experiences had. Eliot's social realism, in which society improves only gradually and in an evolutionary fashion without disturbing the fragile network of established relationships within communities, is non-utopian, reflecting the "imperfect social state" of the present as she perceived it, as well as her meliorist views about human improvement. Far from "opting out into political, religious or feminist Utopias," Eliot uses her novels to "show people how they can deal with the pain of being a Victorian by remaining one" (Hughes 8). Using a combination of domestic and social realism as well as romance and utopian fiction, Spence expressed her optimism for the future. More utopian than meliorist, she allowed her heroes and heroines conclusions which were more hopeful and less open-ended than George Eliot's, showing an appreciation of both the old world and the new. Her intellectual development offers confirmation of what David Malouf has said about Australia's relationship with Europe:

> We speak of these places we belong to as new worlds, but what they really are is the old world translated: but *translated*, with all that implies of re-interpretation and change, not simply *transported*. Our ways of thinking and feeling and doing were developed and tested over many centuries before we brought them to this new place, and gave them a different turn of meaning, different associations, a different shape and weight and colour, on new ground. (26)

Spence speculated about what might have happened if George Eliot had gone to Australia "where there was no literary outlook or outlet." Commenting on the limitations on Eliot's early life and the possibilities that existed in colonial society – "formed of somewhat adventurous people from the three kingdoms" – she wrote that

> [Eliot's] large brain and warm heart might have turned to other things than literature. Everything is important in a young

> community – its industries, its politics, its moral atmosphere are mainly dependent on the calibre of the leading men and women in it. She might, in such circumstances, have taken a prominent part in public movements, from which she kept aloof because of her absorption in her own vocation, which she considered that of the aesthetic teacher. ("George Eliot's Life and Works" 220-21)

Being involved in "a young community" certainly made a difference to Spence. She was proud of Australia and was convinced that the possibility existed here for "the establishment of the very pleasantest society in the world" ("The Modern Spirit" 808). On her trip to Scotland in 1864, she delighted in seeing friends and relatives in Melrose again, and in revisiting the home of her childhood. Where they grieved, however, that she "had been banished from the romantic associations and the high civilization of Melrose to rough it in the wilds, my heart was full of thankfulness that I had moved to the wider spaces and more varied activities of a new and progressive colony" (*Autobiography* 34). She appears to have regarded herself as both British and Australian, supporting Andrew Hassam's contention about visitors to Britain from Australia in the nineteenth century that they experienced the "inclusivity of an identity that could [. . .] be Scottish, British and Australian" (28). The spirit which allowed her to embrace these several aspects of nationality can also be seen in how she, like George Eliot, created an identity that included both "manly" and "womanly" natures.

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