

**‘Your vocation is marriage’’: Systematic Colonisation, The Marriage Plot and Finding Home in Catherine Helen Spence’s *Clara Morison* (1854)**

When Catherine Helen Spence’s eponymous heroine ponders her uncertain position as an unmarried and unemployed woman in early Adelaide, exclaiming ‘Carlyle says:–“Find your work, and do it,”...I wish I could find out what is my proper work’<sup>1</sup>, she places her own dilemma as a single female emigrant within a larger ongoing discussion about the role of women in the development of Britain’s settler colonies. ‘A colony that is not attractive to women, is an unattractive colony’<sup>2</sup> Edward Gibbon Wakefield had commented in his book *A View of the Art of Colonisation* in 1849, adding to a growing chorus of mid-nineteenth century voices who cast migrant women as an essential component in the formation of Britain’s burgeoning settler colonies. Wakefield, like many of his peers, saw the growth of white settler colonies in Australasia, North America and South Africa as an opportunity to engineer social demographics both at home and abroad. Parallel concerns about the overrepresentation of young men in settler populations, and, what Marie Ruiz terms, ‘the female overpopulation question’ at home, made the potential emigration of ‘surplus’ women appear to be an ideal solution to Britain’s gender demographic problems<sup>3</sup>. British colonies like those in Australia appeared to offer a promised land where, in Wakefield’s terms, Britain’s ‘numerous’ ‘grown-up unmarried women’ could experience ‘the joys of marriage and maternity’ denied them at home, whilst helping to expand and civilise Britain’s overseas possessions.<sup>4</sup>

The 1854 novel *Clara Morison*, by Scottish-Australian author Catherine Helen Spence, engages with this context by following the emigration narrative of a young Scottish woman in Adelaide. Fiona Giles has argued that the eponymous Clara embodies the ideal Wakefieldian colonist: ‘Clara is the “good” free settler whose values are based on the ideals of the first South Australian colonists. These exemplified the aims of the Wakefield system for colonial development’.<sup>5</sup> However, whilst Clara can be interpreted as an exemplar of many of Wakefield’s ideals, Giles’ characterisation does not register the ways in which Spence’s novel modifies his perspective on women’s role in the colonies. Clara’s search for her ‘proper work’ in the Wakefieldian colony of South Australia serves to complicate and challenge the promises of colonial marriage and maternity set forth by Wakefield but also presents the colony as a space where new roles and new homes might be available to young women.

*Clara Morison* is a landmark work within the history of Australian women’s literature and has often been identified as ‘the first work of fiction about Australia to have been written by a

woman'<sup>6</sup>. At the time of her death in Adelaide in 1910, the Scottish-Australian writer, politician, and reformer, Catherine Helen Spence was a household name in the newly federated nation, known affectionately as the 'Grand Old Woman of Australia'<sup>7</sup>. Spence emigrated to South Australia with her family at the age of 14 in 1839 following the failure of her father's financial speculations in Melrose in the Scottish Borders. The family arrived just five years after the passing of the South Australia Act which brought the colony into being, and Spence was to have a significant and active role in its development throughout her life. She was a pioneering social reformer, preacher, public speaker, journalist and novelist in the young colony of South Australia. She helped to establish a number of key social welfare institutions, was prominent in the campaign for women's suffrage in the state, and was Australia's first female political candidate.

Despite this importance, both the text and its author had, until recently, been largely eclipsed in Australian literary history, and they remain almost unknown in Spence's birthplace. Janet C Myers has highlighted that following its publication in London in 1854<sup>8</sup> *Clara Morison* fell out of print and 'was not reprinted until 1971' when Australian academic presses started to reclaim and reissue nineteenth-century Australian women's writing.<sup>9</sup> Since this rediscovery the novel has been considered as a 'governess novel'<sup>10</sup>, a 'domestic romance'<sup>11</sup>, and a 'national tale'.<sup>12</sup> In particular modern critics have taken interest in the way in which Spence's novel combines the personal with the political: Tanya Dalziell identifies the novel as the first in a line of late-nineteenth century Australian romance fictions which 'dramatise, negotiate and expose the entangling of white female desire with colonial and nationalist concerns'<sup>13</sup>.

This article engages with this aspect of *Clara Morison* by considering the novel's prominent marriage plot in relation to South Australia's Wakefieldian programme of 'systematic colonisation'. In doing so, it moves away from a tendency to characterise the novel through more modern social and political theory, interpreting it in relation to ideas of 'hybridity'<sup>14</sup> or Foucauldian 'heterotopia'<sup>15</sup>, and instead looks at Spence's portrait of the colony in relation to the terms of the colony's own self-definition. South Australia was the first and only Australian colony to be founded in accordance with the principles of Edward Gibbon Wakefield's 'systematic colonisation': a system which emphasised the importance of gender balance within the colonies and assigned a specific, overwhelmingly domestic role for female migrants. Although, like Edward Gibbon Wakefield, Catherine Helen Spence casts the woman's role in the colonisation of South Australia as an essential one, her first Australian novel offers both a practical critique of the opportunities and protections available to young female emigrants, and a wider consideration of the cultural

contribution which women can make to the emerging colony, which complicates and challenges Wakefield's focus on wives and mothers.

### **Marriage and Nineteenth-Century National Identity**

At the heart of *Clara Morison* is a romantic storyline which brings together the wealthy squatter, Charles Reginald, and the novel's heroine, Clara. Reginald and Clara first meet one another in a boarding house in Adelaide and their connection is predicated on shared literary tastes and interests. On their second meeting, the lovers discuss the relative merits of Byron and Scott. Unlike the philistine boarders who are 'all rabid for Byron', both Clara and Reginald are equivocal in their regard<sup>16</sup>. Instead of the libertine poet, both turn to the novels of Scott: "'How much more healthy is your Walter Scott,'" continued Reginald, "though I do not consider his genius so great;".<sup>17</sup> This preference for the 'healthy' Scott is in keeping with the moral scheme of the novel which builds towards a conventional national marriage plot where a Scot and an Englishman form a united and virtuous colonial home.

From the eighteenth century the 'national marriage plot' was prominent in the literature of the British Isles; featuring heavily in the national tales and historical novels of the period. The national tale emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and dealt primarily with the problems of British identity in the wake of the Unions with Scotland and Ireland. The majority of these texts shared certain plot characteristics:

an English character...travels to a British periphery, expected to be devoid of culture. Instead, under the tutelage of an aristocratic friend, he or she learns to appreciate its cultural plentitude and decides to settle there permanently. Each national tale ends with the traveler's marriage to his or her native guide, in a wedding that allegorically unites Britain's "national characters"<sup>18</sup>.

Walter Scott utilised many of the national tale's plot features and political concerns in his genre-defining historical novels, resituating the marriage plot in a historical, although often not remote, period. In these texts marriage plots operated as allegories for the harmonious union of nations in national contexts where actual political unions remained fresh and contested. The nation is brought together through the creation of a single cohesive domestic unit which functions as a metaphor for society at large.

This devise was employed by the writers of Britain's emerging settler colonies during the nineteenth century, as these colonies sought literary self-definition. Catherine Helen Spence has

been identified as just one of the ‘writers in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa’ who ‘produced their own versions of the “national tale”’<sup>19</sup>. Spence’s novel focuses on the romance between the freshly landed Scottish migrant Clara and the established English colonist Charles Reginald. The couple’s ‘cheery, pretty’ marital home in the Bush, at the conclusion of the novel, can operate as an image of the allegorical union of South Australia’s new inhabitants who will settle and civilise the region<sup>20</sup>. However, within the context of South Australian colonialism this marriage plot also engages with the practical values of the emerging settler colony. Placing Spence’s colonial romance in the context of South Australia’s Wakefieldian programme of settler colonisation reveals that the novel’s central concern with marriage and the marital home is not just allegorical but also engages with the colony’s commitment to marriage as a practical tool in the establishment of a new political state.

### **Situating the Marriage Plot in South Australia**

Although the outback has come to dominate contemporary ideas of nineteenth-century Australia, at the time Spence published *Clara Morison* the Australian domestic novel was also a prominent genre. The mid-nineteenth century saw the publication of a number of now largely forgotten Australian novels and stories in Britain which engaged with domestic life in the new colonies. Edward Bulwer Lytton’s *The Caxtons: A Family Picture* was published in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* in 1848-1849 and George Sargent’s *Frank Lanyon: An Australian Story* appeared in *Leisure Hour* in 1854. Further publications followed in the 1860s and 70s, including two stories by Anthony Trollope: *Harry Heathcote of Glangoil* (1874) and *John Caldigate* (1879). Several of these Australian domestic texts achieved wide circulations, in particular Jude Piesse notes that *The Caxtons* ‘was the most popular novel about Victorian emigration ever published’.<sup>21</sup> In her discussion of these texts Piesse characterises them as domestic bildungsroman ‘which tell the stories of their male protagonists’ early development, progress and subsequent emigrations within the parameters of a largely domesticated framework that is concerned in equal measure with the home left behind and with the new colonial settlement to be achieved’<sup>22</sup>. Leaving a homeland where the home they have known is lost or threatened, the heroes of novels like *The Caxtons* struggle to return to, or recreate, home. As Bruce Knox has highlighted, in *The Caxtons* Bulwer Lytton connects ‘emigration and colonisation with the well-being and virtues of home and family’ and this connection was to remain important in nineteenth-century representations of Australian settlement.<sup>23</sup>

These texts were heavily invested in the vision of conventional domesticity which informed the white settler colonies of Australia; invoking 'visions of ideal class relations, "Wives Wanted in the Bush", and anti-urban dreams of the "real pastoral settler's life"'<sup>24</sup>. In drawing upon these tropes, authors responded to the shifting tone of discussion around Britain's colonies in Australia. As Botany Bay receded in public memory, new ideas about the possible ways in which a new society might be formed in Britain's young Australian colonies began to emerge. During the 1830s and 1840s authors as diverse as Samuel Sidney, Alexander Harris, and Caroline Chisholm published emigration handbooks, and accounts of life in Australia, which offered positivistic visions of the future of Australia as a 'Greater Britain' formed of British settlers.<sup>25</sup>

One such vision was that proposed by Edward Gibbon Wakefield who first described a scheme of planned settlement known as 'systematic colonisation' in the *Spectator* in 1830. In an article titled 'Cure and prevention of pauperism, by means of systematic colonisation', he suggested that poverty and overcrowding in Britain might be alleviated through a programme of planned colonisation. By employing a planned system of land sales and assisted emigration Wakefield 'believed that he had identified...how to transplant civilisation into the wilderness'<sup>26</sup>. Wakefield's books proposed the sale of delineated plots of land to prospective settlers and the use of money made through the sale of land by colonial authorities to subsidise passages for desirable migrants of lower socioeconomic status. This system Wakefield believed would recreate the class structure in Britain, creating a stratified colonial society which mirrored life at home. He continued to expand on these ideas in books published throughout the 1830s and 1840s before taking a more active role in the planning of colonies in South Australia and New Zealand.

Gender imbalances within Australian settler populations were common, with more men than women emigrating from Britain throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup> In his writings Wakefield emphasised the need to encourage a balanced gender demographic amongst emigrants: his writings 'focus on the migration of family groups and the need to ensure an equal ratio of male and female settlers'<sup>28</sup>. In his book *A View of the Art of Colonisation* (1849) Wakefield states that 'in colonisation, Women have a part so important that all depends on their participation in the work'<sup>29</sup>. This essential role was largely domestic and couched in terms of both economic benefit and social morality. Wakefield argues that the household labour of women (preferably wives) frees men to contribute economically:

If the object were to procure at the least cost the greatest amount of labour for immediate employment in the colonies, it would appear at first sight that the

emigrants ought to be, all of them, in the prime of life. But it is only at first sight that this can appear; because on reflection it is seen, that two men having to perform, each for himself, all the offices that women of the labouring class usually perform for men—to cook their own victuals, to mend their own clothes, to make their own beds, to play the woman's part at home as well as the man's part in the field or workshop—to divide their labour between household cares and the work of production—would produce less than one man giving the whole of his time to the work of production. This is a case which illustrates the advantages of combination of labour for division of employments...We need not stop to look at the moral evils of an excess of males. In an economical view only, it seems plain that poor emigrants taken to a colony by the purchase-money of waste land, ought to be men and women in equal numbers; and, if married, so much the better.<sup>30</sup>

In this passage the economic benefit of women's domestic labour is emphasised but Wakefield also returns to the theme of the 'moral evils of an excess of men' throughout the text. He argues that the influence of women is not just economically important but is also essential to the development of a virtuous new society, he comments: 'as respects morals and manners, it is of little importance what colonial fathers are, in comparison with what the mothers are'<sup>31</sup>. Wakefield casts women as essential components of a system of colonialism which aims, not just to occupy, but to 'civilise' Britain's possessions through the reproduction of an idealised British domesticity, Hammerton summarises the roles Wakefield identified for female emigrants: 'as wives and mothers of respectable colonists they would refine and cultivate the New World'<sup>32</sup>. The white settler colonies of Australasia were thus, in Wakefield's opinion, to be made up of virtuous and hard-working traditional family units who would, in time, further populate them with their children, and these units relied on the emigration of what Wakefield termed 'the better order of women'<sup>33</sup>

Wakefield's ideas had particular prominence in early South Australia. The Colony of South Australia was founded in 1834 through an act of the British parliament known as the South Australia Act. Unlike prior Australian colonies which had been formed through a combination of convict transportation and free settlement, South Australia was to be formed entirely from free settlers along Wakefieldian lines. Land in the new British province would be sold by colonial commissioners appointed by the British state and the proceeds would 'constitute an "Emigration Fund"' to 'be employed in conveying poor emigrants from Great Britain or Ireland'.<sup>34</sup> A strong

focus on the formation of fruitful settler families was clearly signposted in the rules around emigration to the colony: 'family-based immigration provided the cornerstone of South Australia's European settlement. Because South Australia's founders intended to keep families intact when they emigrated, the South Australian Act specified that no married man or woman could obtain a passage without being accompanied by wife or husband, and children if they had them'<sup>35</sup>. In spite of this policy South Australia continued to struggle with gender imbalance within its population, in 1861 the colony hosted 65,049 males to just 61,782 females.<sup>36</sup> The domestic colony remained an ideal rather than a reality, but the importance of marriage and family life was written into the very founding documents of the growing province. In South Australia a woman's vocation was to be marriage.

### **'Some Nice Scotch Family in Adelaide': Clara in the Colonial Cottage**

Catherine Helen Spence's novel engages extensively with this definition of South Australian womanhood. The domestic environment is a dominant image within *Clara Morison* and Spence's novel is almost entirely, often claustrophobically, localised within domestic environments. As Susan Magarey has noted, Clara's 'direct experience of colonial life is mostly enclosed by the walls within which she resides'<sup>37</sup>. Her sequestered existence onboard ship, in the constant, stifling company of her bunk mate Miss Waterstone, is followed by a brief sojourn in a 'respectable boarding house', two periods of domestic servitude, a period living with her cousins and a final move to a new marital home<sup>38</sup>. Where the majority of other Australian domestic novels are interspersed with scenes set in the bush, where heroes must triumph over its dangers, Clara's only experiences of the colony beyond the numerous households she exists within are through conversations and correspondence. This focalisation of the narrative through Clara's limited perspective allows the novel to look closely and almost exclusively at households. The conventional symbols of Australia in nineteenth-century writing, journeys through hot, inhospitable bushland, and confrontations with indigenous peoples and unfamiliar wildlife, are not present, instead, Clara experiences the colony as a series of cottages.

The novel opens with the break-up of Clara's middle-class Scottish home. Following the death of their father, Clara's uncle informs the recently bereaved young woman and her sister, Susan, that he cannot support them both, and suggests that, whilst there may be a role for the accomplished Susan in his household, Clara should emigrate.<sup>39</sup> Following this announcement, Clara's aunt justifies this decision to the young women by painting South Australia as a utopia for

the unwanted single women of Scotland, where they will have a plethora of choices in both employment and marriage:

‘What a treasure you will be in any Australian family; you are so obliging and so fond of children. Your domestic virtues are undervalued in this country: every one looks to show and flourish here; but I believe that a truer taste pervades the communities of the colonies. I expect to hear of your being domiciled in some nice Scotch family in Adelaide, or near it.... Governesses of every kind are so much wanted, that I have heard of people going in quest of them on board every newly-arrived ship, and engaging them before they put a foot on shore.... We hear of servants and distressed needle-women making brilliant marriages in Australia. So, Clara, who knows how long you may continue teaching?’<sup>40</sup>

In Mrs Morison’s imagined colony, Clara need only arrive to find her place either as a treasured governess or brilliantly married wife. The colony is dotted with possible happy homes for the orphaned and ineligible Clara.

However, on her arrival in Adelaide Clara struggles to find her place within the colony, and her search for a ‘position’ means that she comes into contact with a wide variety of households. Clara’s privileged perspective on a range of different domestic arrangements as either visitor, servant or companion gives the reader a different image of South Australia’s happy homes to that which her aunt had presented. In depicting Clara’s time visiting, living, and working in different homes in Adelaide and the surrounding countryside, Spence is able to draw a series of sharp and often highly critical pen portraits of life in the colony. The households which Clara visits are presented as archetypes of unsuitable or dysfunctional unions. In the homes of her employers and potential employers, she witnesses households which do not, and cannot, function. Far from allegories for, and building blocks of, a healthy new society these are homes where unequal and disrespectful unions are begetting a troublesome next generation of South Australians. Clara’s liminal position in relation to these spaces as an unmarried young woman also becomes apparent in these interactions, as her search for a ‘position’ reveals her vulnerability and displacement.

### **Mistaken Vocation: The Perils of the Unsuitable Union**

Clara’s earlier quoted reflections on her role in the colony are provoked by her experiences as an unemployed governess and as a maid of all work, and they prompt a wider conversation with her single cousin Margaret about women’s work:



‘Carlyle says: - “Find your work, and do it,”’ remarked Clara. ‘I wish I could find out what is my proper work; for though I have some good theoretical ideas on education, I do not think I should make a good teacher; and I never felt that the work I did at Mrs Bantam’s, was the work I was sent into the world to do.’

‘Your vocation is marriage,’ said Margaret. ‘you’re formed to make some good man very happy, and I hope ere long to see you do it. All your little talents are pleasure giving; you have feeling, and taste, and tact, and I can fancy your husband finding new charms in you every day.’

‘Many people mistake their vocation when they marry,’ said Clara; ‘and if I were to meet with the one man in a thousand that I should like for husband, how many chances there are that he would not like me for a wife. I suppose the poor girl we have just seen fancied she should be happy when she entered into her new state; and yet it has brought her into a depth of misery, which I hope, even at service, to escape. Is there a prejudice here against old maids? For it is a very mischievous one?’

‘Of course, old maids are laughed at here as elsewhere,’ Margaret answered, smiling herself, ‘and though all our married friends advise us never to marry as we are so much happier single, I fancy but when I get gray and wrinkled, they will change their tone.’<sup>41</sup>

Visiting Miss Ker, another young woman, who also arrived in the colony as a governess but has fallen into destitution, makes Clara consider her own experiences and the opportunities which are open to her in South Australia. Each of the four roles she identifies, servant, governess, wife and old maid, presents drawbacks and problems. To ‘find your work, and do it’ appears to be remarkably difficult for an educated young woman in the new colony.

The possibility of marriage is repeatedly presented to Clara by other characters as the best of these options. On Clara’s arrival in the colony, Mr Campbell, a family friend, characterises marriage as a potential ‘promotion’ for the young woman:

Miss Morison, you must form no extravagant idea of the remuneration of governesses here...The only point in which their situation is better than in Scotland is, that the term of service is not generally so long. There is more chance of promotion; but girls should be cautious in that matter, too; for I have seen some

governesses make wretched marriages, from not knowing the man's character, and having no one to find out what he was for them.<sup>42</sup>

Far from a utopia of domestic opportunity, Adelaide, Mr Campbell suggests, is as competitive and inhospitable to single women as Scotland. The only advantage for these women is that colonial society offers a far higher possibility of a convenient marriage. The novel, however, offers multiple examples of the ways in which women might 'mistake their vocation' by forming an unsuitable marriage.

The domestic situations Clara finds herself in often feature dysfunctional and unsuitable unions, but the dangers of marriages of convenience are most starkly illustrated through the story arc of Miss Ker, a minor character whose tragic death is represented as the direct result of a bad marriage. Like Clara, Miss Ker has been sent to Adelaide from Scotland because she does not have a home at Home. Orphaned and unmarried, Miss Ker is unwelcome in her stepfather's Scottish home and has been sent to South Australia only to find herself once again displaced in the Colony. After falling victim to a bigamist marriage, Miss Ker, now the mother of a new born child, is rendered homeless in Adelaide and forced to rely on charity before falling into the decline which kills her. Her fate operates as a dark mirror held up to Clara's own progress in South Australia; both women are sent out to the colony in similar circumstances and with matching letters of recommendation intended to secure them domestic positions, but experience wildly different fates.

Miss Ker's fall is presented as a counter image to the apparent 'fall' in class status which Clara must experience. Unable to find work as a governess, Clara eventually finds employment as a maid of all work. This section of the novel is a sort of Cinderella story where Clara uses her Scottish accent and a plain dress to undertake a type of class masquerade. She is not promoted through marriage, as her aunt had hoped, but experiences an apparent demotion to servant. However, as Miss Ker's fate is revealed, it becomes apparent that Clara's decision to accept the demotion of servitude rather than seek the promotion of a marriage of convenience has actually saved her from a far greater danger:" Better go to service than meet with such a dreadful fate as that of poor Mis Ker," said Clara'.<sup>43</sup>

### **Novel-reading and the Union of Minds**

Although marriage in the new colony is represented as fraught with danger in *Clara Morison*, the novel concludes with the formation of several new marital households which are presented as exemplary domestic unions, including the prominent love match between the novel's

heroine and Charles Reginald. On agreeing to this marriage, Clara explicitly considers the temptations she faced as a destitute and displaced young woman:

‘I quite grudge my uncle of my happiness,’ said she; ‘for he will think it is all owing to his excellent management. Now, there were ten thousand chances to one against my making either a comfortable or happy marriage; and I do believe that if I had not found my cousins, I should have married anyone only for a home. I tried hard to steel myself against it; but time would have worn away all my resolutions. And yet my uncle will congratulate himself on his admirable foresight in his views for Clara’<sup>44</sup>

The transactional marriage of convenience which Clara considers in this passage is in marked contrast to the union of heart and mind which she is able to form with Reginald. The novel focuses heavily on the courtship of these two characters who cement their bond through an intellectual dialogue which eventually surmounts all material obstacles.

The burgeoning relationship between the two lovers is signposted in moments where the two connect over their shared love of literature. Freshly landed in Adelaide and marooned in a loud boarding house parlour of ‘familiar and presuming’<sup>45</sup> young men, Clara is suddenly put at ease by a reference which Reginald makes to Dickens’ *Martin Chuzzlewit*; ‘“Does this put you in mind of Todgers”, Miss Morison?’ said he...How refreshing to poor Clara was this little allusion to a book!’<sup>46</sup>. This instant connection over shared literary interests is the beginning of a romantic plot which will end with the two book lovers married and settled on the speaker, Charles Reginald’s, colonial sheep station. Clara’s knowledge of British literature is her glass slipper in this Cinderella story alerting Reginald to their shared cultural values. From their first exchange the two are repeatedly brought together through mutual literary tastes and reference points. This first moment where Clara is made to feel at home through a conversation about literature will eventually lead to the creation of an actual home in the Australian bush.

The importance of literary taste to the central marriage plot in *Clara Morison* indicates a vision of colonial marriage which places greater onus on the importance of intellectual connection, and a vision of colonial identity which prioritises cultural as well as economic development. Although Spence’s heroine’s vocation is, as Margaret Elliot suggested, marriage, that marriage is a partnership based not just on domestic economy and reproductive potential but on mutual interests and shared cultural reference points. In placing literature at the very heart of her novel’s

national marriage plot Spence gives women an essential role in the formation of Australian national culture.<sup>47</sup>

### **Alternative Households, Alternative Nations.**

In addition to the union of the intellectually and culturally compatible Clara and Reginald, Spence also offers glimpses of homes which do not rely on the presence of a husband and wife couple, and these spaces offer some of the most positive images of domesticity in the novel. Most prominently, the home of the Elliots, Clara's self-sufficient cousins, is a refuge to Clara after her backbreaking work as a maid-of-all work: 'The Carpet was faded and piano old, but the hearts in that little cottage were warm, and the minds unwarped by prejudice or ostentation'<sup>48</sup>. The cousins live together as a group of five siblings, sharing the household tasks between them, and they are popular and respected within their community. When Margaret Elliott defines what makes her family good citizens of South Australia her analysis focuses on the ability to contribute public service rather than reproductive potential:

'I have always thought that such a family as ours forms a valuable element in colonial society; we came here not to make our fortunes and leave the colony forthwith but to grow up and settle in it; we have all rather more than average abilities; we have had good principles instilled in us from early youth; we have all a deep feeling of our accountability to God for both our private and public conduct; we have all, I think, a love of the country of our adoption, and wish to serve it; and we are not eager about money'<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps what is most interesting about Margaret's analysis of the Elliot's place within the colony is that she does not divide the group of brothers and sisters by gender. They have all 'more than average abilities', 'good principles', 'a deep feeling of accountability to God' and 'a love of the country'. Although Clara's experiences clearly signpost that the opportunities open to the brothers and sisters in the colony are different, their abilities and values, according to Margaret, are the same.

In the fledgling South Australia, the family are able to assume a social position which it would be impossible for them to hold in Britain. Charles Reginald comments of the household:

I suppose that, if they were in similar circumstances in England, in these days of absurd pretensions, one, or perhaps two, of these girls would go out as governesses, in order that the third might be able to keep her brothers' house, with a servant and a few showy

luxuries. How much more independent and happy they are living all together; able to help one another, and to show substantial kindness to those who need it!<sup>50</sup>.

The capability of the Elliot girls is indicated during the chapters where their brothers, along with many of the men of Adelaide, join the gold rush in Victoria. The Elliot girls' abilities and attitudes allow them to live successfully in the city of women, even offering help and comfort to many of their female neighbours who are less able to cope alone. Through Spence's depiction of the Elliot household, South Australia is cast as a space of social possibility where alternative domestic groups can emerge and where women might assume useful roles beyond those of wife and mother.

This almost utopian domestic group is broken up by the marriages of all but two of the siblings. However, the alternative household survives in another form. In the chapter 'Brother and Sister' Margaret and Gilbert agree to form an alternative household where the siblings can work together to build Gilbert's career as a lawyer; 'We must have a small cottage to ourselves and our books. Oh! Gilbert, how happy you make me! I have nothing now to wish for.'<sup>51</sup> The novel closes with a description, not of the home of Reginald and Clara, or those of the married Elliot siblings, but with that of Margaret and Gilbert: 'so after spending some weeks with those happy married people,... Margaret settled herself down with her brother in their cottage, and studied with all the energy of her active nature; without ever fancying that such a home was in store for herself, or that she ever could be anything but an independent old maid.'<sup>52</sup> In the final sentences of the novel Spence explicitly casts this domestic arrangement as a patriotic one 'to her and her brother Gilbert, it is the country they are happy to live and work in'.<sup>53</sup> Margaret and Gilbert's decision to live and work together as siblings, rather than marry, suggests a different type of domestic arrangement which can also make a significant contribution to the community they live within. The last household the reader glimpses at the conclusion of the novel contains neither a Wakefieldian wife nor mother but instead models an alternative type of familial arrangement where a woman is both a domestic and intellectual helpmate.

### **Beyond the Cottage**

When discussing her first novel in her autobiography Spence indicated that she identified with Margaret Elliott far more than the titular heroine Clara: 'I myself was not identified with my heroine Clara Morison. I was Margaret Elliott, the girl who was studying law with her brother Gilbert.'<sup>54</sup> Margaret and Gilbert's alternative household was to be mirrored in Spence's own domestic arrangements. She also chose not to marry and instead formed a series of alternative

households throughout her life: living with, and often supporting, her mother and members of her extended family.

However, where Margaret's opportunities to contribute to the development of South Australia in 1854 were limited to supporting her brother in his attempts to reach prominence within the colony, Spence was to become a direct participant in colonial politics in the later years of the nineteenth century as a journalist, campaigner, and eventually as Australia's first female political candidate. As Susan Magarey has suggested: 'she expressed, by example as much as by precept, her opinion that women could take a place in the world beyond their households, and accept responsibility in the public affairs of the community.'<sup>55</sup>.

Perhaps most significantly, in writing her account of early South Australia, Spence engages directly in an enduring form of nation building, staking out a space for women as arbiters of South Australian identity. Fiona Giles has argued for the importance of Spence's debut novel in the formation of a distinctively Australian literature: 'it could be argued that the first voice in Australian fiction to express a distinctive Antipodean loyalty was that of a romantic heroine [Clara]. While confined, at least in *Clara Morison*, to loyalty to South Australia (as opposed to Federated nationhood), the novel defends the colony as culturally distinctive, independent and progressive.'<sup>56</sup> The importance of books and literary culture to the central marriage plot in the novel, and the role of learning and books in Margaret and Gilbert's alternative patriotic home, signal the way in which Spence figures literature's power to build community and identity. As this article has suggested, Spence's novel itself is overtly concerned with identity building, repeatedly engaging with the colony's own definition of self. In writing her own novel of Australian life, Spence not only extends her influence beyond the cottage but subtly redraws Wakefield's colony along her own lines. Women's intended role in the Australian colonies may have been figured by Wakefield in terms of 'marriage and maternity' but as the century progressed, and federation loomed, women like Catherine Helen Spence were taking an active role in the birth of their nation. Although in *Clara Morison* the marriage plot and domestic labour define women's contributions to the growth of South Australia, by 1910 Catherine Helen Spence had made an indelible mark on her adopted home that extended far beyond the cottage door.

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Helen Spence, *Clara Morison: A Tale of South Australia During the Gold Fever*, Vol 2, (Netley, SA: Wakefield Press, 1854, Repr.1986), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Gibbon Wakefield, *A View of the Art of Colonisation*, (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 1849; repr. 2001), p.49.

<sup>3</sup> Marie Ruiz, *British Female Emigration Societies and the New World, 1860-1914*, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), p.2.

<sup>4</sup> Wakefield, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> Fiona Giles, *Too Far Everywhere: The Romantic Heroine in Nineteenth-Century Australia*, (St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 1998), p.31.

<sup>6</sup> Susan Magarey, Barbara Wall, Mary Lyons and Maryan Beams, 'Introduction', Catherine Helen Spence, *Ever Yours, C.H. Spence: Catherine Helen Spence's 'An Autobiography (1825-1910), Diary (1894) and Some Correspondence (1894-1910)*, Ed. Susan Magarey, Barbara Wall, Mary Lyons and Maryan Beams, (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2005), p.p. 1-15, (p.12). Whilst Mary Grimstone's *Woman's Love* (1832) was the first Australian novel written by a woman it is largely set in and focused on Europe (see E. Morris Miller, *Australia's First Two Novels*, (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1957).

<sup>7</sup> Susan Magarey, *Unbridling the Tongues of Women: A Biography of Catherine Helen Spence*, (Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press, 2010), p. v.

<sup>8</sup> Graham Tulloch, 'Scots and Scottish Literature in Literary Adelaide', *Adelaide: A Literary City*. Ed. Phillip Butterss, (Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press, 2013), p.p. 57-76, (p. 71).

<sup>9</sup> Janet C. Myers, 'Verily the Antipodes of Home: The Domestic Novel in the Australian Bush', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*. 35:1 (Autumn 2001), p.p. 46-68, (p. 47).

<sup>10</sup> Myers, p.46.

<sup>11</sup> Tanya Dalziell, 'No Place for a Book? Australian Fiction to 1890'. *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*, Ed. Peter Pierce. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.p. 93-117, (p.111).

<sup>12</sup> Carmen Casaliggi and Porscha Fermanis, *Romanticism: A Literary and Cultural History*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 197.

<sup>13</sup> Dalziell, p.111.

<sup>14</sup> Miranda Walker, "'No one loses caste if they work': The Writing of Catherine Helen Spence and Changing Notions of Femininity in British Middle-class Women Migrants to the Australian and New Zealand Colonies, 1840 – 90', *Exploring the British World: Identity, Cultural Production, Institutions*, Ed. Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw, Kiera Lindsey and Stuart McIntyre. (Melbourne, Vic.: RMIT Publishing, 2004), p.p. 765-786.

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- <sup>15</sup> Rosalind Smith, 'Clara Morison: The Politics of Feminine Heterotopia', *Southerly*, 61.3 (Autumn 2001), p.p. 40-51.
- <sup>16</sup> Catherine Helen Spence, *Clara Morison: A Tale of South Australia During the Gold Fever*, Vol 1, (Netley, SA: Wakefield Press, 1854, Repr. 1986), p.42.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p.141.
- <sup>19</sup> Casaliggi and Fermanis, p.197.
- <sup>20</sup> Catherine Helen Spence, *Clara Morison*, Vol 2, p. 271.
- <sup>21</sup> Jude Piesse, *British Settler Emigration in Print 1832-1877*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 83.
- <sup>22</sup> Piesse, p.86.
- <sup>23</sup> Bruce Knox, 'Colonies and Colonisation in Bulwer Lytton's *The Caxtons*, *A Strange Story* and *The Coming Race*', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 44:6 (2016), p.p.857-880.
- <sup>24</sup> Piesse, p. 87.
- <sup>25</sup> Ruiz, p. 186
- <sup>26</sup> Erik Olssen, 'Mr Wakefield and New Zealand as an Experiment in Post-Enlightenment Experimental Practice', *The New Zealand Journal of History*, 31:2 (October 1997), pp. 197-218. (p.201).
- <sup>27</sup> Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine, *Migration and Empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.213.
- <sup>28</sup> Penelope Edmonds and Jane Carey, 'Australian settler colonialism over the long nineteenth century', *The Routledge Handbook of the History of Settler Colonialism*, Ed. Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini, (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p.p. 371-390, (p.380).
- <sup>29</sup> Wakefield, (p. 49).
- <sup>30</sup> Wakefield, (p. 115).
- <sup>31</sup> Wakefield, (p. 49).
- <sup>32</sup> A. James Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration, 1830-1914*, (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 1979), p.45.
- <sup>33</sup> Wakefield, (p. 52).
- <sup>34</sup> Transcript of South Australia Act 1834, National Archives of Australia, [http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/sa1\\_doc\\_1834.pdf](http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/sa1_doc_1834.pdf), (p.3).
- <sup>35</sup> Helen Jones, *In Her Own Name: Women in South Australian History*, (Netley, SA: Wakefield Press, 1994) p. 29.
- <sup>36</sup> Jones, (p. 212).
- <sup>37</sup> Magarey 2010, (p. 49).



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<sup>38</sup> Spence, *Clara Morison*, Vol 1, (p.29).

<sup>39</sup>Spence, *Clara Morison*, Vol 1, (p. 3).

<sup>40</sup>. Spence, *Clara Morison*, Vol 1, (p. 6).

<sup>41</sup> Spence, *Clara Morison*, Vol 2, (p.17).

<sup>42</sup> Spence, *Clara Morison*, Vol 2, (p. 29).

<sup>43</sup> Spence, *Clara Morison*, Vol 2, (p. 241).

<sup>44</sup> Spence, *Clara Morison*, Vol 2, (p. 267).

<sup>45</sup> Spence, *Clara Morison*, Vol 1, (p. 41).

<sup>46</sup> Spence, *Clara Morison*, Vol 2, (p. 33).

<sup>47</sup> It is important to note here that in this novel Spence is largely interested in the role which middle-class white women can take in colonial development. Aboriginal and working-class women are portrayed less sympathetically. Spence's representation of the aboriginal servant 'Black Mary' is discussed in more depth in Susan Magarey, 'Catherine Helen Spence – Novelist' in Philip Butterss (ed.), *Southwords: Essays on South Australian Writing* (Kent Town: Wakefield Press 1995) p.p. 27-45.

<sup>48</sup> Spence, *Clara Morison*, Vol 2, (p. 1).

<sup>49</sup>Spence, *Clara Morison*, Vol 2, (p. 255).

<sup>50</sup>Spence, *Clara Morison*, Vol 2, (p. 65).

<sup>51</sup> Spence, *Clara Morison*, Vol 2, (p. 260).

<sup>52</sup>Spence, *Clara Morison*, Vol 2, (p. 271-272).

<sup>53</sup>Spence, *Clara Morison*, Vol 2, (p. 272).

<sup>54</sup> Catherine Helen Spence, *Ever Yours, C.H. Spence: Catherine Helen Spence's 'An Autobiography (1825-1910), Diary (1894) and Some Correspondence (1894-1910)*, Ed. Susan Magarey, Barbara Wall, Mary Lyons and Maryan Beams, (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2005), p.59.

<sup>55</sup> Magarey, 2010, (p. 20).

<sup>56</sup> Giles, (p. 34).