

## Chapter Three

### THE IMPRISONED SPIRIT - 'Chains of his own forging'

'Captivity' was a word which resounded throughout Dark's fiction as she presented human beings 'bound, stupid, accepting', and, through their own machinations, frighteningly enmeshed in the 'vast, intricate system that had evolved.' (*SaS*, pp. 128 and 151) Like John Galsworthy, she acknowledged with memorable compassion the awful plight and massive suffering of individuals imprisoned in roles predetermined by accumulated historical and social processes. There, shackled by thoughtless conformity to social ideals which they had spiritually outgrown, they were deprived of the freedom necessary for true development of their potential. Her protagonists rebelled, not against order, but against compulsion and the idea that rigid mechanistic determination should dominate them:

It was an old, old, ultimatum. All through the world's history ... one could hear those four words beating like a tom-tom at the back of every great idea, and every noble creed. In primitive tribal rites, in organised religions, in political theories and in social convention, the same words offered the same old choice. Even in science and the arts adventurous spirits had been forced to confront it. Conform or get out. And searching for progress in those past centuries, one found it always in points of departure; in the minds and actions of the people who - got out. (*TLC*, p. 310)

In the historical trilogy the novelist made her readers all too well aware of the subservient role allotted to women when she emphasised their previously overlooked contribution to the welfare of the First Settlement. Elizabeth Macarthur's management of family business affairs in her husband's absence had been documented, but not so well known were the trials of other free women, prisoners of their circumstances, who were obliged to accompany their husbands to the new land. Childbirth, often aboard ship, posed a great danger. Debilitated by the sea journey, the fictional Harriet Mannion died giving birth to her son, Miles, and the historical character, Mrs. Johnson, wife of the clergyman, was shown weeping for her stillborn child, 'smothering her head beneath the bedclothes that she might not disturb her husband.' (*TTL*, p. 196) Establishing a home, which 'poor as it was, had a

certain cosiness' (*TTL*, p. 171), that same lady was made to illustrate the way in which those women helped the colony by carrying on with its everyday life and providing domestic stability in a difficult milieu.<sup>1</sup>

Contemporary accounts had ensured that the reputation of the female convicts came down through the years as an extremely unsavoury one.<sup>2</sup> Dark had her representative convict woman, Ellen, engage in the much publicised 'orgy of emotional release' (*TTL*, p. 99) on the stormy night following the women's landing.<sup>3</sup> Yet, amoral though Ellen was shown to be, the novelist presented her, also, as a caring mother. When Mannion took her as his mistress Ellen saw, as one of the position's many advantages, a means of keeping her family together, because, to her, 'he represented security.' (*ST*, p. 51)

The novelist protested in many places at the moral wrong of sexism - based as it was on 'the artificial ascription of roles, behaviour and even personalities to people on the basis of their sex *alone*'.<sup>4</sup> In discussing the position of women in society Dowell O'Reilly, Dark's father, expressed this contemporary opinion in *Tears and Triumph* <sup>5</sup> :

We decline to make any allowance for the limitations of a brain crippled by ages of maternal self-sacrifice. But we do emphatically assert that her brain is crippled - and proceed to brow-beat and insult the cripple because of her ungainly movements.

His daughter spurned such a deterministic evaluation of women as intellectually inferior by a paternalistic society which must benefit from their subjection. She remonstrated that 'the everlasting tyranny of ... sex' (*PC*, p.

<sup>1</sup> Cp. E. Champion, *A Place in the City*, Ringwood, 1994, p. 167: 'You need the eye of distance to see that around these women an enduring society grew from roots well planted in local soil.'

<sup>2</sup> See A. Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police, The Colonization of Women in Australia* (1975), Ringwood, 1985, p. 276: 'The stigma of the stereotype shackled the female convicts as firmly as any legirons.'

<sup>3</sup> Yet see M. Aveling, 'Gender in Early New South Wales Society', in A. Atkinson (ed.), *The Push From the Bush*, No. 24, 1987, pp. 30-40, in which Aveling challenged the received account of the orgy: 'There is only one witness to the orgy, and he is hardly even that. The surgeon on the *Lady Penrhyn*, Arthur Bowes Smyth, described in his journal the landing of the women from that vessel on 6 February ... . But a closer reading suggests ... that he wasn't there. He remained on board the *Lady Penrhyn*, together with the sailors.'

<sup>4</sup> L. Bebbington, 'The Mexico International Women's Year Conference', in J. Lee, P. Mead and G. Murnane (eds.), *The Temperament of Generations, Fifty years of writing in Meanjin*, Melbourne, 1990, p. 237.

<sup>5</sup> D. O'Reilly, *Tears and Triumph*, Sydney 1913, p. 60.

14) forced upon women subordinate roles which must distort their natural characteristics and erode their spiritual energy and creativity:

The relegation of women to a purely domestic function is the surest way of dulling, and finally killing, her intellect. It imprisons her within a vicious circle for, surround it as you will with an aura of angelic and Madonna-like devotion, the fact remains that domestic work unrelieved by any intellectual interest or activity is a brain-destroying drudgery.<sup>6</sup>

The fiction illustrated this with the over-worked Sally Dodds, who exhibited all the 'pitiable helplessness' of women in her position, with her mind, 'hemmed in by the four walls of her domestic environment, undergoing a slow atrophy.' (*TLC*, p. 252) Marty, a writer with a 'lively preoccupation with topical events' (*TLC*, p. 91), was concerned about this 'habit of fatalistic acceptance' (*TLC*, p. 253) which afflicted women like Sally who were so immersed in family problems that they saw them only as 'mysterious personal manifestations.' (*TLC*, p. 252) Through Marty Dark insisted that these attitudes must change, with each woman realising the social significance of her problems in that her life was dominated by political forces which continually hindered her growth:

Behind her, governing her every action, hampering her every effort, frustrating her every achievement, was the social organisation of her community. ... Down to its most trivial detail this woman's little life appeared as dominated by remote political forces in which, irritably and impatiently, she proclaimed herself not a bit interested. (*TLC*, p. 252)

Lesley,<sup>7</sup> the spirited, unmarried young woman in *Waterway*, had been taught by her enlightened father, Professor Channon, to challenge social mores, and so could 'no more accept without question than she could breathe without air.' (*W*, p. 191) Yet she had to acknowledge 'the power of a long-established convention to affect even rational people' (*W*, p. 90) when she was forced to endure the restricting 'parental enslavement' (*W*, p. 91) which her father unthinkingly inflicted upon her. For he assumed that, being female, she was 'essentially a housekeeper' (*TLC*, p. 22) in their shared

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<sup>6</sup> Dark, 'Women and Fascism', *op. cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>7</sup> See H. O'Reilly, *op. cit.*, p. 45. Helen O'Reilly is a relative of Eleanor Dark, and it is interesting to read in this article, 'To me, the character Lesley Channon, in *Waterway*, best exemplifies the thoughts and emotions of a youthful Eleanor Dark.'

home, and in order to attend to his material comfort he expected her to sacrifice part of the freedom which she needed to develop her own potentialities.

The novelist challenged the other forces which hindered Lesley's determination to exercise her right 'to a career not necessarily domestic.' (*W*, p. 90) In the Depression years a scarcity of employment meant that women were unwelcome in the work-force, and, as a way of discouraging them, the authorities instigated a campaign which aimed to defuse emerging feminism by sentimentalising women's place in the home.<sup>8</sup> This was in line with the Fascist endorsement of sexual oppression, and the seemingly opposite Nazi cult of woman as idealised wife-mother in a Germany concerned about its falling birthrate. In Sydney the isolationist Australia First group developed Fascist sympathies, and demonstrated them in the anti-feminist stance of their monthly journal, *Publicist*, produced by W. J. Miles with P. R. Stephensen as assistant. In its sesqui-centenary issue Miles wrote:

Gone are the robust pioneer days, gone forever, Australia's females are now become vessels, not so much of maternity, as of modernity; and the rot has set in - ... the drift from domesticity, the drift to decadence, to office jobs, to 'equality' with men! <sup>9</sup>

A change of thought in the mid-nineteenth century had caused the doctrine of determinism, previously concerned with theology or philosophy, to be applied to biology,<sup>10</sup> and, as a result, there had emerged the ideal of women as child bearers and nurturers of the family. Toward the end of that century, however, there developed 'psychical changes in women's consciousness',<sup>11</sup> and they began to question the taboos of a sexual code which approved the right of males to a personal liberty which was denied females. Then, as the Great War took women out of the home and revealed other areas of potential fulfilment, they turned their attention to the whole issue of sexual morality, determined that, as H. G. Wells put it, 'The human

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<sup>8</sup> See Reid, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-01.

<sup>9</sup> C. Munro, 'Australia First - Women Last: Pro-Fascism and Anti-Feminism in the 1930s', *Hecate*, No. 9, pp. 25-33. The quotation is from *Publicist*, January, 1938, pp. 22-3.

<sup>10</sup> See R. Williams, *Keywords, A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Glasgow, 1981, p. 89.

<sup>11</sup> M. Mackay, 'Almost dancing: Thea Proctor and the modern woman', in Dever, *Wallflowers and Witches*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

being is going to carry it against the sexual being'.<sup>12</sup> The influence of eugenicists and psychologists was beginning to focus scientific rather than moral attention on sexual matters, while the popular press and the cinema circulated Freudian theories suggesting that sexual activity could be a means of individual satisfaction for women as well as the means of procreation. As Katie Holmes wrote,

For the first time, in the 1920s and 1930s, women were offered an acknowledgement of their sexual desire, and the possibility of [stress-free] sexual engagement with the knowledge of birth control.<sup>13</sup>

'When the social organism becomes bent on civilization', Bernard Shaw pronounced, 'it has to force marriage and family life on the individual'.<sup>14</sup> The society which Dark was criticising was the one in which she was participating, a society in which women were brought up to see marriage as an ideal, a destiny toward which continual maternal conditioning and the urging of romantic novels, popular magazines and the cinema had steered them.<sup>15</sup> Although she would seem to agree with Caroline Chisholm in 'seeing in the united family the nucleus, the essential life-cell of progress',<sup>16</sup> through the circumstances of many of her characters she issued an Ibsenesque challenge to the convention that every woman found completion in marriage and motherhood. Instead, she implied that family life provided a most effective means of trapping women in 'spiritual captivity.' (*TLC*, p. 60) So the novelist urged the need for reform, considering possible ways of progress as she examined the complexities, the consolations, the risks to self-esteem and the delights which marriage and parenthood afforded both men and women.

Many other Australian novelists were writing of women's experience, both personal and social, questioning preconceived ideas, and engaging with tensions generated within the social and psychological aspects of female sexuality. Ada Cambridge had written realistically - and somewhat ironically - of family life in *A Marked Man* (1890), *Materfamilias* (1898) and

<sup>12</sup> W. Wagar (ed.), *H. G. Wells, Journalism and Prophecy, 1893-1946*, London, 1964, p. 83.

<sup>13</sup> K. Holmes, '“Diamonds in the Dustheap”? Women's diary writing between the wars', in Dever, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>14</sup> B. Shaw, 'False Ideals Exposed', in R. Ellman and C. Feidelson, Jr. (eds.), *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature*, New York, 1965, p. 238.

<sup>15</sup> See J. Rigg (ed.), *In Her Own Right - Women of Australia*, Sydney, 1969, p. 42.

<sup>16</sup> Dark, 'Caroline Chisholm and her Times', *op. cit.*, p. 59.

*The Eternal Feminine* (1907); later, M. Barnard Eldershaw's *A House is Built* (1929) and *Green Memory* (1931) voiced a forceful protest at the constraints imposed on unmarried women; and Katharine Susannah Prichard explored the disillusionment of a disintegrating marriage in *Intimate Strangers* (1937). In presenting female sexuality as a normal and powerful force in her first novel, *Slow Dawning*, Dark might well have been influenced by H. G. Wells, who, for the first time in fiction, claimed that women's sexual desire was natural and acceptable when, in *Ann Veronica: A Modern Love Story*,<sup>17</sup> his emancipated heroine asserted her sexual rights and defied convention by living with a married man.

Dark's character, Valerie, was one of the rebellious, economically independent 'new women' who first appeared in the 1890s, and who were battling for equality and personal freedom in a male-dominated society. An enlightened thinker who was 'not afraid of conventions' (*SD*, p. 178), she took great exception to the one which limited women's potential for growth by suppressing their intellectual and spiritual capacities. Any woman with professional expertise, she insisted, should have the right to use that skill in spite of marriage and motherhood, both for her own benefit and that of society.<sup>18</sup> Valerie was a doctor - one of that comparatively rare breed of the time, a woman with a tertiary education - and she duly became a victim of discrimination. The malicious spinster, Miss Wilton, was convinced that 'the practice of medicine must be death to the natural bashfulness and modesty of womanhood' (*SD*, p. 113); Valerie's colleague, Dr. Owen Heriot, entered the novel firm in 'his mental condemnation of the professional and business woman' (*SD*, p. 163); while the town's chemist declaimed, 'There's a good bit of feeling, still, you know, about lady doctors. There's those that don't believe in it.' (*SD*, pp. 181-82)

Valerie was also a practical idealist. Idealistically she visualised an 'army of women' (*SD*, p. 93) fighting their way toward 'a goal of perfect womanhood' (*SD*, p. 89),

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<sup>17</sup> H. G. Wells, *Ann Veronica: A Modern Love Story*, London, 1909.

<sup>18</sup> See manuscript by unnamed writer, 'The Eleanor and Eric Dark Seminar' (held in Katoomba Library on November 29, 1987), The Blue Mountains Historical Library, Springwood, p. 4: Referring to Phyllis in *The Little Company*, this writer claimed that 'Eleanor Dark is hard on the women who accept their lot, the bearers of the worst form of social conservatism, self satisfied and mean spirited martyrs.'

... a height where they would perform not only the artistic and intellectual work to which their natures inclined, but the normal functions of wifehood and motherhood as well. (*SD*, p. 90)<sup>19</sup>

Dark made her well aware, however, of what Susan Sheridan called 'woman's inhumanity to woman',<sup>20</sup> and had her display practical good sense when she admitted that 'thousands of women would be the most bitter enemies of their own sex' (*SD*, p. 90), continually putting obstacles in the way of their own liberation. She found many of these in Kawarra when female gossips attacked both her professional and personal integrity.<sup>21</sup>

The fictional Lesley objected to a situation in which, given the moral climate of the times, a woman must 'either deny herself her sexual fulfilment, or accept, along with it, the extra burden of domestic cares.' (*W*, p. 91) In *Slow Dawning*, however, Dark introduced the 'shocking' proposition that women who did not marry must not be denied the right to exercise their sexuality as men were accustomed to do.<sup>22</sup> The thoughtful Heriot recognised 'the intolerable and unnatural restraints which conventions thrust upon [Valerie] merely because she was not a man' (*SD*, p. 209), while she claimed that the 'warping and starving and torturing' (*SD*, p. 278) which women suffered through sexual repression frequently had destructive effects even within marriage, giving rise to 'sex-antagonism, jealousy, fear, prudery

<sup>19</sup> Cp. J. Devanny, *The Butcher Shop* (1926), London, 1982, p. 206: The socialist, Ian Longstair, foresaw that women's liberation would be achieved by '[a] race of emancipated women, free in body and mind, economically independent, choosing their own mates, marching onward to that goal which the finite mind of man cannot even now perceive.'

<sup>20</sup> S. Sheridan, 'Women Writers', in Hergenhan (ed.), *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, *op. cit.*, p. 323. This division was seen throughout Dark's work. See, for instance, the enmity of Mrs. Hendon and Kay toward Linda in *Prelude to Christopher*, Lorna's malicious attitude toward Win and Lesley in *Waterway*, and Marty's aversion to both Phyllis and Elsa in *The Little Company*.

<sup>21</sup> See P. Buckridge, 'Gossip and History in the novels of Brian Penton and Thomas Keneally', *Australian Literary Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 4, October, 1990, pp. 436-49. Discussing an unpublished manuscript of Penton's, the writer claimed that the narrative 'demonstrates both the destructive and the utopian functions of gossip'. With these differences accepted, it can be seen that the gossip in Dark's *Slow Dawning* was destructive in its ability 'to wreck lives, careers, relationships and saving illusions', while that in the later novel, *Lantana Lane*, was 'utopian in its adumbration of a true community, intimately bound together by people's interest in one another's lives.'

<sup>22</sup> Cp. A. Huxley, *Antic Hay*, London, 1923. This novel was also sensationally explicit regarding sexual matters.

See P. O'Rane (Dark's pseudonym), 'Benevolence', *The Triad*, 1/7/1926, p. 4. In this short story Dark wrote, '... to give oneself to a man without marriage was to "fall". ... For some strange reason which she never thought of questioning, men did not "fall" '.

or licentiousness.’ (*SD*, p. 278) Valerie went on to insist that, as women developed their intellect, they became even more resentful of the sexual repression which society imposed upon them:

That brain and that deformed and tormented sex are not easy to reconcile. A woman *needs* a brain, and a good one, to be an efficient wife or mother. (*SD*, p. 278)

Despite Valerie’s provocative attitudes, she was not promiscuous, and thus the novel implied that loveless sex did not play much importance in women’s quest for personal fulfilment. True to herself, ‘her moral code was her own, but it was rigid’ (*SD*, p. 185), and, much as she advocated sexual liberation for women as a desirable ideal, Valerie did not betray her code by having sexual relations with either the married Jim or the philandering Hughes. Women struggling for the right to self-definition were not yet able to break free in those years, and, although Dark placed Valerie and Heriot in the ranks of the idealistic ‘new thinkers’, she showed them to be still trapped in conventional morality. After their trial-marriage together, they took a practical view of their situation as doctors in a small town and agreed that, before they returned to Kawarra, ‘the first thing [they] must do [was] to go and get married.’ (*SD*, p. 288)

Unlike Lorna, the socialite to whom a wedding was nothing more than ‘a show, a kind of elaborate charade’ (*W*, p. 183), the self-reliant Lesley regarded it, with its ‘bondage of responsibility’ (*W*, p. 240), as a potential agent of restriction, for, as she said, once married, ‘your marriage *is* your life.’ (*W*, p. 199) The upholders of contemporary social conventions added to the vulnerability of married women by inhibiting their right to earn money so that, in ‘their parasitic dependence upon their menfolk’,<sup>23</sup> wives were seen ‘as

<sup>23</sup> See A. Wright, ‘The Australian Women’s Weekly, Depression and the War Years, Romance and Reality’, *Refractory Girl*, No. 3, 1973, p. 9. This parasitism was no doubt related to the fact that ‘by the end of the 1930s the figure of the emancipated woman is no longer to be found among the magazine’s pages. Instead, psychologically coercive forces were marshalled against the new woman of the early 1930s: we shall see that fear of maladjusted children, an increasing divorce rate, a decreasing birth rate, and the suspicion that a working wife hindered a husband’s career, all combined to make women feel guilty about a search for new values.’ Cp. Devanny, *The Butcher Shop*, *op. cit.*, p. 203: ‘Woman, by virtue of her sex, since the inception of private property, has been a chattel.’

See also L. Stevenson, *The English Novel, A Panorama* (1960), London, 1961, p. 445. Stevenson wrote that for John Galsworthy, ‘the whole moral and emotional impasse between the sexes ... centred in the legal and social axiom that women were chattels under the absolute control of their husbands’, and he ‘was determined to make his readers face the full enormity of this domestic tyranny.’

possessions in every sense of the word.' (W, p. 66) This traditional possessiveness determined Arthur Sellman's arrogant attitude when he raped his wife, Lesley's sister, Win: 'What were men *made* stronger than women for if not for a bit of cave-man stuff once in a while?' (W, p. 18) Arthur asked.<sup>24</sup>

Dark made Win a sacrifice to the ideal of marriage. With no income of her own and a blind daughter, she was a spiritual and physical captive in a loveless partnership of 'no unity' (W, p. 351), incapable of growth because her husband's existence not only 'stultified her own and Brenda's' (W, p. 379), but also plunged her into 'an obstructing despair.' (W, p. 167)<sup>25</sup> The bureaucratic powers-that-be further compounded her dilemma by ruling that, if she and Ian, whom she loved, engaged in sexual intercourse while she was still married, the law would give Arthur custody of Brenda, a threat which he used to curtail Win's freedom. As she mused, 'Life gets you bound.' (W, p. 26) It was this kind of situation which cried out for what Bernard Shaw called 'freedom from marital constraint through economic independence', and for laws which made it impossible for marriage 'to be used as a punishment as it is at present.'<sup>26</sup> Watching Oliver and Lois, 'allowing them an importance as living examples of a satisfactory marriage', Win wondered

... if her own life of perpetual frustration surrounded her with a shadow and a chill, as their obvious well-being surrounded them with an almost visible warmth. ( W , p. 164)

Nevertheless Dark, as always examining her theme from various perspectives, considered how people frustrated their own self-realisation by making unwise choices in marriage partners. She presented Arthur's side of the case with Roger's contention that the unhappy Sellman marriage was psychologically distorting, and thus responsible for behaviour which would otherwise not exist. As he reminded Lesley, 'People floundering in an impossible marriage are guilty of things they'd be utterly incapable of

<sup>24</sup> Cp. J. Galsworthy, *In Chancery* (1920), London, 1921, wherein the rape of Irene by the possessive Soames paralleled that of Win by her husband.

<sup>25</sup> Later Elizabeth Harrower, with her story of the subtly evil Felix Shaw and his victim, Laura, was to write a fearsome account of a woman trapped in marriage. See *The Watchtower* (1966), Sydney, 1987.

<sup>26</sup> B. Shaw, 'Preface', 'Getting Married', p. 254, in *The Doctor's Dilemma, Getting Married, The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet*, London, 1937.

normally.' He continued:

I know you think all the time of the wrong he has done to Winifred. You just think for a change of the wrong she has done him. Not intentionally, of course. But if he had married someone of his own kind his life would still have been stupid from our point of view - *but not from his*. (W, p. 207)

Dark then proceeded to undermine the marriage ideal when, after the ferry accident, she made Ian take an entirely practical stand which released his thoughts 'from the bondage of convention to the rather alarming freedom of naked logic'. Thus he was able to face the fact that 'he hoped with all his heart and soul that Arthur was dead', seeing him 'with a cold lucidity, not as a man between himself and Winifred, out as an obstruction in the path of some fitting and logical progress.' (W, p. 351)

Bernard Shaw's contention that parenthood was 'a very important profession'<sup>27</sup> reflected the great interest taken, in those years, in marriage and parenthood, and, throughout her novels, Dark was preoccupied with the problems of parental love and responsibility.<sup>28</sup> In *Slow Dawning* Valerie assumed an audacious stance toward her own potential motherhood. Despairing of her chances of sharing in a loving marriage, she was tempted to achieve motherhood in any case, even if she must use unorthodox measures:

Why should she not have a baby ... ? Its father - any decent and healthy man would do - it would be *her* baby. It was not good for a child to be fatherless, but one good parent was better than two bad ones. (SD, p. 241)

In *Return to Coolami*, however, Dark showed how Susan, another 'new woman' who ignored sexual conventions and became pregnant while still unmarried, paid the price for her rebellion. Susan was 'essentially

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<sup>27</sup> B. Shaw, *Everybody's Political What's What*, London, 1944, p. 74.

<sup>28</sup> It is tempting to suppose that Dark's ideas about childbearing were in sympathy with those of her father's sister, the sex-educator Marion Piddington. See K. Daniels, 'Marion Piddington', *The National Times*, 9-15th January, 1983, p. 26. In the early twentieth century Marion Piddington argued that if motherhood were taken to be woman's premier role, then all women should be given the chance to fulfil it. She therefore advocated 'celibate motherhood', the artificial fertilisation of women who were unable to marry, but who wished to have children. Her proposition was greeted with more revulsion than approval, and her appeal to Sigmund Freud for support failed with his denunciation of its sexually repressive aspect and his fear that fatherless children would develop psychological problems.

sporting in her whole attitude to life' (*RC*, p. 257) and revelled in taking risks, exhibiting a 'flame of adventurousness flickering fascinatedly towards danger.' (*RC*, p. 42) She discovered, however, that life was indeed a contest and 'wouldn't run to the charming pattern she had shaped for it.' (*RC*, p. 28) Having no illusions about the marriage ideal, her affair with Jim was also a rebellion against the accepted idea that a girl was 'expected to buy a pig in a poke' when choosing a husband. Susan found such a convention both impractical and unreasonable, 'seeing that it was upon her fell all the weight of so many matrimonial miseries.' (*RC*, p. 78) Forced to accept that she had 'taken a gamble and lost and the time was come for forfeits' (*RC*, p. 81), she married a man who did not love her because convention bestowed upon both unmarried mother and child the social disgrace of illegitimacy:

She'd left the track, and the gods of the established order had snatched her back and boxed her ears and sent her off, staggering, along their appointed road again. (*RC*, p. 58)

By marrying Bret, she had 'propitiated the gods', a payment imposed upon her, Dark emphasised, not by nature but by 'the clumsy adjustments of a fumbling civilisation.' (*RC*, p. 58)

All parents were ultimately captives of their children, Dark's novels proposed. Her fictional convict, Ellen, relieved at finding Johnny after his first venture into the bush, was 'aware that the griefs and anxieties of motherhood are not less enriching than its joys.' (*TTL*, p. 104) Much later Win was to voice an ambivalent attitude toward family responsibilities: 'The minute you become a parent your life ceases to belong to yourself.' (*W*, p. 162) The needs of the family and the demand for nurture were seen to entrap women<sup>29</sup> and so determine their priorities.<sup>30</sup> Thus the family itself became an impediment along the life journey of women who must endure the loss of individuality and self-realisation in a family world which provided little nourishment for their intellectual and spiritual growth, while society permitted them few opportunities for self-definition in the public world outside it. In *The Little Company* Dark demonstrated this with the pianist, Denny, whose

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<sup>29</sup> Cp. C. Stead, *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940), Harmondsworth, 1977, pp. 45 and 72. For Henny, family life was a 'life sentence' wherein she was 'house-jailed and child-chained'.

<sup>30</sup> See D. Jordan, 'Nettie Palmer as Critic', in Ferrier, *Gender, Politics and Fiction*, *op. cit.*, p. 78. As Nettie Palmer said, 'To many of us for years at a time housework has a first call.'

domestic duties frustrated her chance of a musical career.<sup>31</sup> The writer, Marty, also resented the bondage of housework and

... could not avoid a stab of anxiety for her own brain ...  
clogged by her own domestic inertia, endlessly halted by  
the demands of her own stove and vacuum cleaner. (*TLC*,  
p. 252) <sup>32</sup>

In looking at the institution of the family from the viewpoint of children, Dark exposed their vulnerability to suffering, too, when Win, faced with losing Brenda, bitterly denounced leaders who established formal custody laws which created a situation in which 'the happiness of children has to depend on the untidy intricacies of adult life.' (*W*, p. 26)<sup>33</sup>

With her wide breadth of vision, Dark was well aware, of course, that women were not the only victims of determinism. She had several of her male characters trapped in unsatisfactory marriages,<sup>34</sup> Oliver with the frigid Helen, Kavanagh with his termagant wife (*SaS*) and Gilbert with the pathetic Phyllis (*TLC*). With the figures of Heriot and Jim (*SD*), Nigel (*PC*) and Colin (*RC*), she depicted the helplessness of ordinary men as they faced up to the fearful trial of their masculinity in battle. Aggressiveness and slavish acceptance of the ideal of patriotism were socially desirable traits in times of war, and so conditioning began early. Roger recalled being primed for battle

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<sup>31</sup> The frustrated Denny deserted her husband and went to live with the political cartoonist, Jerrold Kay. See P. Buckridge, *The Scandalous Penton, A Biography of Brian Penton*, St. Lucia, 1994, p. 150, in which Buckridge suggested that Kay was based on Brian Penton: 'The face, the posture ... are unmistakably Penton's; and it would seem from the description, that Dark regarded him with the same disapproving fascination as did most of his female acquaintances.'

Cp. the frustration of Elodie's pianistic career in K. S. Prichard's *Intimate Strangers* (1937).

<sup>32</sup> Cp. Dark, letter to Jean Devanny, 31/3/43, James Cook University, JD/CORR (P)/27, in which she stated: 'I'm trying to work all the time, but other things are demanding these days, and domestic help a thing of the past, so I don't make much headway.'

<sup>33</sup> Cp. B. Shaw, 'Misalliance', in *Misalliance, The Dark Lady of the Sonnets, Fanny's First Play, With a Treatise on Parents and Children* (1914), London, 1930, in which Shaw stated that his Preface was a 'Magna Carta for the rights of children'.

Cp. also B. Shaw, *Getting Married, op. cit.*, p. 251: 'The theory that the wife is the property of the husband or the husband of the wife is not a whit less abhorrent and mischievous than the theory that the child is the property of the parent.'

See also H. Ibsen, 'The Wild Duck' (1884), in *Plays, One: Ghosts, The Wild Duck, The Master Builder* (translated by M. Meyer) (1962), London, 1980, p. 186, wherein Relling said that 'children are as much a part of any marriage as their parents.'

<sup>34</sup> Cp. Ada Cambridge's male victims of unhappy marriages; for instance, Richard Delavel in *A Marked Man: Some Episodes in His Life* (1891), Tom Braye in *Materfamilias* (1898) and Dr. Dallas in *The Devastators* (1901).

as a youth by militaristic authorities:

I'd had all the usual dope pumped into me. Flags and glory, King and Country, war to end war - all that stuff ... . We were all very effectively doped. (*W*, p. 204-05)

For Dark, not the individual male but the power structures with their male-generated activities, which manipulated all human affairs, were the real antagonists. Eric Dark also criticised the ubiquitous social conditioning which programmed people to fit into the prescribed societal pattern:

The State does its best to enslave the mind of the child. It seeks to impose its will on those immature and plastic natures to gain the approval of its ruling class - so that it may turn out from its rigid moulds those hordes of right-thinking, psalm-singing, go-getting, cinema-minded, patriotic model citizens who will fully support the social order.<sup>35</sup>

With *Prelude to Christopher* the novelist confronted a more spectacular kind of conditioning with the fate of a woman who became a captive in the role of potential madwoman. Because her father was insane, Linda was 'damned by inheritance' (*PC*, p. 80), for, in a society which assumed that the individual was powerless against the external forces of heredity, as she told her husband, 'I'd been judged and condemned before I was born.' (*PC*, p. 91) Her conditioning continued with her own sadistic uncle blocking her growth by constantly tormenting her with his 'gently spoken promise of ultimate lunacy' (*PC*, p. 35):

He had ... filled her childhood with terror and mistrust, pushed her frantically-resisting brain a little further along its dark road (*PC*, p. 37),

so that she was 'stricken with the knowledge of a prison more inescapable than any made of stone and bars.' (*PC*, p. 36)

Dark presented a chilling irony in having Linda marry a eugenicist, Nigel Hendon, whose goal in life was the establishment of a colony 'whose basis was to be the rearing of healthy children from untainted stock.' (*PC*, p.

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<sup>35</sup> E. P. Dark, *op. cit.*, p. 83. Eric Dark was here quoting from R. S. Ellery, *Schizophrenia, the Cinderella of Psychiatry*, 1942, no other details given.

49) On her tortured life journey, Linda, 'searching, stumbling, groping through a maze dark with unspeakable fears', had discovered 'an opening, an escape into the light' (*PC*, p. 136), when she became convinced that her goal in life must be the conception of a healthy child. That, she believed, would protect her sanity and enable her to cope with 'a hostile future' and 'a malevolent past.' (*PC*, p. 169) When she told Nigel, after their marriage, of her heredity, he became the greatest impediment to her progress for, 'taking science as [his] footrule' (*PC*, p. 91), he made her a slave to his own austere idealism by insisting that she remain childless: 'I will not carry on a ... tainted stock', he told her. 'You're the last; it dies out with you.' (*PC*, p. 103)

Linda's unspeakable situation fostered in her a sense of personal and inflicted alienation, restricting her powers of communication and so limiting her capacity for enriching experience. This separation from the flow of life left her with the sense of 'seeing its reflection go by in some vast, cold mirror' (*PC*, p. 173), and of being 'doomed, like the Lady of Shalott, to see only the reflection of beauty.' (*PC*, p. 116) In her society she was set apart by 'the smug, sane people' as someone 'different'. Thus public opinion further blocked her hope of preserving her sanity: 'Mad they called her - mad they made her', and 'she became, as though by enchantment, all that they believed her to be' (*PC*, p. 73):

Because standards were standards and one didn't question them, there raved behind her aloof silences a mob that shouted imprecations and flung stones, there loomed the shadows of a stake and a ducking-stool, there ... whispered the hatred that is ... fear of the normal for the abnormal, of the crowd for the outcast. (*PC*, p. 73)

At this point the novelist introduced a wide range of more general psychological perceptions as to sanity. Dr. Marlow hesitated to define the term:

What's mad, anyhow? There were plenty of people who used to say Hendon was cracked himself. We know that isn't true. (*PC*, p. 65)

But Nigel, who prided himself on being the essence of normality, admitted that, when he was fighting for his life on the island, he had become 'what

Linda feared to be, a homicidal lunatic.’ (*PC*, p. 68) He remembered, too, during the Great War, those ostensibly sane women, ‘infected by the madness that was right because it was universal’, who worked in munition factories, ‘new life quickening, perhaps, in their bodies while they made their engines of death and destruction.’ (*PC*, p. 169) For Linda, too, that war had banished any respect for so-called sanity: ‘She had seen sanity burn cornfields and wreck cities and pour out life like water on the ground.’ (*PC*, p. 60)

Ingeniously, Dark presented a situation in which Linda, the brilliant biologist, must keep her own disturbed brain under the microscope. She referred to that brain as ‘half-sound, half-rotten’ (*PC*, p. 161), the ‘sound half’ being her practical ability to watch herself objectively, and it was this grotesque state of affairs which prompted her husband’s insistence that ‘there’s nothing abnormal about Linda but the knowledge of her abnormality.’ (*PC*, p. 51) Until she met Nigel her only hope had been for

... a little superficial pleasure before ... the inevitable end; a padded cell, perhaps, and windows with bars on them. (*PC*, pp. 91-92)

He, however, rejected social determinist thinking and insisted that self-determination, the force of her own will, was capable of staving off insanity. Thus he became the only one ‘who believed that with the germ of madness in her she was and could always be victoriously sane’ (*PC*, p. 60) while, paradoxically, the merciless sentence of childlessness which he, as a scientist, imposed upon her frustrated her only chance of doing this.

In the insecurity into which Nigel’s accident plunged her, Linda felt ‘as though some unguarded moment might bring catastrophe.’ (*PC*, p. 33) For her the ultimate horror was her ability to gauge every nuance in the progression of her deterioration, so that, after her second dangerous encounter with the servant Nancy, like the Lady of Shalott she was forced to admit, ‘The curse is come upon me.’ (*PC*, p. 60) As she opened the door to her detested mother-in-law she was aware ‘that the first of some cataclysmic series of events was about to happen’ (*PC*, p. 191), and that first event was her frenzied attack on the older woman. Alone again, Linda walked into the storm, and her brain, which all day ‘had been clogged and dragging’, now,

'like a machine cleaned of dust and grit and rubbish, began to function ... with a terrifying ruthlessness.' (*PC*, p. 206) She thought frantically:

What is happening ... here in my head? Something that I can't alter, can't control. ... What is happening to the cells, the molecules, the mysterious tissues of my brain? ... A brain slowly and surely decomposing. (*PC*, p. 207)

So Dark left her readers to decide whether Linda's madness was the result of her heredity, or whether it was caused by the social pressures of deterministic thinking.<sup>36</sup> In her last moments, Linda found some comfort in the knowledge that her suicide would prove to Nigel that she was sane enough to recognise the onset of her own insanity. Society, she believed, would attribute her death to derangement, but

... to Nigel the news of her death would be her last message to him, a message of victory, an assurance that in the end she had vindicated his faith in the ultimate triumph of the normal. (*PC*, p. 204)

Her suicide was the means both of escape from 'the prison and the torture' (*PC*, p. 134) of her heritage and of her bestowal of peace upon Nigel. Thus death was, for Linda, both 'release and ... expiation.' (*PC*, p. 135)<sup>37</sup>

Dark went on to explore the contrast between the natural and conditioned human being, between spontaneity and social restraint, as she challenged the validity of the false ideals with which social leaders burdened

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<sup>36</sup> See Croft, in Hergenhan, *op. cit.*, p. 416. Cp. H. H. Richardson, *Ultima Thule* (1929), the final volume of the trilogy, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, for a somewhat similar situation. Was Mahony's madness due to disease or was it 'the product of a spiritual antipathy to an age of materialism'?

Cp. M. Sinclair, *Mary Olivier: A Life* (1919), London, 1980, in which Mary, an intelligent girl with a strong will, rejected the biological determinism which presumed that she would inherit the insanity afflicting her Aunt Charlotte and, unlike Dark's Linda, did not succumb to her predetermined fate.

See also L. Stevenson, *The History of the English Novel, Vol. XI, Yesterday and After*, New York, 1967, pp. 258-65. It is interesting to note the many parallels between Dark and May Sinclair (1863-1946). Sinclair, too, was involved in the ideas and movements of her time and wrote from a middle-class point of view, being one of the earliest English novelists to display the influence of Freud and Jung as she used psycho-analytic ideas to explore the effects of emotional repression. Like Dark, Sinclair enjoyed twenty years of international acclaim before her work dropped from sight; the 1920s were the years of her greatest fame, but illness ended her career in the early 1930s and her work was discredited as being out of date.

<sup>37</sup> Cp. A. Miller, *The Death of a Salesman* (1949), in which Willy Loman justified his suicide as a way of helping his wife, Linda.

the people. In *Sun Across the Sky* Dr. Oliver Denning was the energetic protagonist attracted to the romantic ideal of the primitive, to the appeal of a morality directed by natural instinct. His nature demanded that 'life should be lived completely, that sensations as well as theories should be fully explored', and he thought that 'a body not feeling intensely was as poor and as pathetic a thing as a mind not thinking intensely.' (SaS, p. 12) Considering the poet's young daughter, the beautiful Maeve Kavanagh, seeing her as the epitome of 'pure joy, pure freedom' (SaS, p. 49), in romantic vein he resented the 'contemptuous logic' (SaS, p. 70) of social laws which continually quenched the individual's vital impulses.

To Oliver, Maeve represented youth, 'with its hunger and its eager zest, opening to life as a flower opens to the sun which is ultimately to wither it.' (SaS, p. 19) Society, however, was not prepared to embrace spontaneity as a principle of life, so that 'youthful passion with its lovely impulses [was] inhibited and starved.' (SaS, p. 34) Dark illustrated this when she made Oliver's wife, Helen - always a slave to bourgeois ideals - disapprove of Maeve's nude bathing and remind him that 'there *is* a convention that people should wear bathing suits.' (SaS, p. 19) Rebelling against such restraint, Maeve 'got caught', and social propriety forced the pregnant girl and her youthful lover into marriage, so that, still little more than a child, 'captivity lay over her like the shadow of vast wings' and she was 'already fastening chains upon herself [of] love, pain, denial.' (SaS, p. 49) And so Oliver mused:

Queer with what self-righteousness people would struggle to break a law of nature, who would shrink in horror and virtuous indignation from breaking a law of society! Queer that social laws had not been formed to fit natural laws. One built a shoe to fit a foot; one did not make a square shoe and then fume and fret because the foot would not adapt itself. (SaS, p. 33)<sup>38</sup>

Still protesting that modern civilisation, with 'its strange sensual passion for self-denial' (SaS, p. 161), had proscribed 'those impulses, those beliefs, those desires which alone give its value to any individual soul', Oliver

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<sup>38</sup> Cp. B. Shaw, 'Misalliance', in *Misalliance, op. cit.*, p. 254: 'We must finally adapt our institutions to human nature. In the long run our present plan of trying to force human nature into a mould of existing abuses, superstition, and corrupt interests, produces the explosive forces that wreck civilization.'

rejected the idea of submitting oneself wholly to convention, 'to a set of arbitrary man-made rules.' (SaS, p. 127) The individual had become a captive, weighed down by

... [c]hains of his own forging, chains which, from the cradle to the grave he busily fastened on himself and his children and his children's children (SaS, p. 33),

bonds which 'settled down insidiously about his spirit', so that 'it went bound, stupid, accepting, not daring and at last not needing to think.' (SaS, p. 128) Oliver contended that this forcing of 'beliefs or ... emotions into tracks wellworn for them by custom and convention,' would lead to the soul becoming 'an ugly thing, atrophied, barren, captive.' (SaS, p. 139)<sup>39</sup>

The doctor was, however, a practical idealist, and Dark had him conclude that complete freedom was an ideal which could never be realised outside a state of anarchy; that, without responsibility, freedom would lead to a negation of genuine progress, in that it meant ignoring real life issues in favour of focusing on the self. With Oliver's reflections the novelist suggested that individuals must be practical and sublimate their natural impulses to some extent, for 'you could never ... study a life solely your own, but always a life thrumming and alive with contacts' (W, p. 13), and he conceded that the framework of society was a determining force, with each individual having moral obligations toward others,<sup>40</sup> and unable to indulge in 'a-social individualism'.<sup>41</sup> Dark made him admit, too, that few of his friends and acquaintances, 'struggling with the complications of ... communal life' (W, p. 121), could deal with complete individual freedom: 'Most of them ... weren't ready or able to behave properly without rules.' (SaS, p. 129)

Nevertheless, he was convinced that the ever-evolving human being,

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<sup>39</sup> See P. O'Rane (Dark's pseudonym), 'Man of Honour', *The Home*, 1/7/1932, pp. 25,53. In this short story the heroine and her husband's best friend - both trapped in barren marriages - loved each other, but he rejected her offer to elope with him because of the ideal of honour: 'He would sacrifice a blossoming tree to a dead stick - a harmony to a discord.'

<sup>40</sup> Cp. B. Shaw, 'Misalliance', in *Misalliance*, *op. cit.*, p. 59: Percival said, 'Freedom ... means being able to count on how other people will behave.'

See Stevenson, *The English Novel, A Panorama*, *op. cit.*, p. 478. This attitude contrasted sharply with that of Aldous Huxley's characters in *Point Counter Point* who depicted modern society as 'fragmented into individuals without common beliefs or duties to hold them together', so that 'each follows his own desires without regard for anyone else.'

<sup>41</sup> E. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes, The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (1994), London, 1995, p. 15.

'tormented by a thousand grim, self-made tabus' (*W*, p. 295) which deterred progress, must abandon outmoded ideals. Then, perhaps, a responsible humanity, exercising flexibility, 'yielding quietly here and there', would use its power not to break the chains but to 'patiently unravel them' (*SaS*, p. 33) and so achieve a reasonable balance between individual and social demands. There could be no truly harmonious society, Oliver believed, until society adopted genuine ideals which contributed to the growth and happiness of the individual.

Trapped with Helen in a stagnant marriage which was 'at its best a mockery' and, for her, 'so firmly captive' (*SaS*, p. 71) in sexual frigidity, 'a slow torture' (*SaS*, p. 21), the spirited Oliver felt that he had every chance of finding personal fulfilment with the painter, Lois, so different from Helen in every way. With Oliver's dilemma, Dark followed Ibsen's lead in questioning the morality of the role which the individual assumed in fitting into society: <sup>42</sup> should he sacrifice the integrity of his individual self, his right to live to his full potential, in order to conform to the expectations of others and the social ideal of marriage? He wondered whether 'one really *must* go on with misery and deceit and frustration in the name of morality?' (*SaS*, p. 17) As he faced 'his dread of life with Helen' (*SaS*, p. 120) and considered leaving her, there was 'no part of him, logical or emotional, which did not insist that that would be a good and rational thing.' (*SaS*, p. 21)

When he realised that he must choose between Lois and Helen, he was assailed by hosts of 'small scruples, of inherited prejudices, of values born in him and in his ancestors for generations.' (*SaS*, p. 161) Despite the protective tenderness and 'nagging sense of responsibility' he retained for Helen, 'this poor, driven woman' (*SaS*, p. 17), he believed that their marriage had 'all the elements of moral degeneration' (*SaS*, p. 21), and, having 'his own clear-cut convictions and desires' (*SaS*, p. 50), he was determined not to confuse morality with social propriety. Oliver refused to conform, to practise self-abnegation, claiming 'the right of man to possess his own soul in

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<sup>42</sup> See also Clurman, *Ibsen* (1977), New York, 1989, p. 12.

Ibsen had posed a similar problem in *A Doll's House* (1879), where, in a bid for self-direction, Nora rejected the same ideal, while, in *Hedda Gabler* (1890), Mrs. Elvsted decided to abandon a marriage in which her husband exploited her as a housekeeper, rather than deny her own happiness and that of Lovborg. Hedda, on the other hand, was 'a Nora with clipped wings', a 'moral coward under the pressure of social inhibition' (Clurman, *ibid.*, pp. 164 and 163), who chose suicide as an escape from her unsatisfactory marriage with Tesman.

peace' (*SaS*, p. 142), and finding his solution in the dawning consciousness of

... a voice crying clearly and strongly, but distantly, from across intervening gulfs of time ... the voice of all humanity, which humanity had long ago repudiated in its strange sensual passion for self-denial ... 'To thine own self be true'. (*SaS*, p. 161) <sup>43</sup>

Contending that 'the voice can only sing himself' (*SaS*, p. 190), Dark pointed to the uniqueness of each individual, suggesting that human beings must establish an independent sense of selfhood, based on their own moral values. For

... the self has a right to feel that it grows as an integral, self-poised, spiritual growth, whose ultimate justifications rest in itself, whose sacrifices and compensations must be justified to itself.<sup>44</sup>

Irrevocably convinced that the human spirit cannot be made to fit sham social ideals,<sup>45</sup> and determined that he 'wasn't going to be guilty of any criminal abortion of the spirit!' (*SaS*, p. 163)<sup>46</sup> Oliver acted according to his own values, deciding that, in this case, the social ideal had no validity in that it was not worth the sacrifice it demanded.

Illustrated in this chapter is Dark's concern with the way in which historical and social determinism constrained human beings as they struggled toward self-realisation. Considering sexism, through Valerie she denounced society's double sexual standard, and, with Susan's predicament, she opposed the social convention which, by heaping disgrace

<sup>43</sup> Clurman, *op. cit.*, p. 51: '[Ibsen's] credo as man and poet [was] "Each man alive must aim to stand alone, in truth and freedom."'

<sup>44</sup> E. Sapir, 'Culture, Genuine and Spurious', in W. Goldschmidt (ed.), *Readings in the Ways of Mankind* (1957), Boston, 1958, p. 62.

<sup>45</sup> Cp. Clurman, *op. cit.*, p. 105: 'Duty as mere convention is social coercion, oppression. Duty not undertaken by free choice through the urgency of the individual self is what Ibsen considered vicious and immoral. The only true arbiter is the consent of one's conscience.'

<sup>46</sup> Cp. P. White, *Happy Valley*, London, 1939. There the central figure, Oliver Halliday, another medico, was trapped in an unhappy marriage with the sickly Hilda, and in love with the pianist, Alys Browne. He, however, seeking redemption through suffering, decided not to leave his wife.

See also Clurman, *op. cit.*, p. 119. Concerning Mrs. Alving, married to a wanton husband in Ibsen's *Ghosts* (1881), Clurman wrote, 'Mrs. Alving's sacrifice to her duty as conceived by the right-thinking citizens of her day ... availed her and her son nothing but misfortune.'

on unmarried mother and child, forced women into potentially destructive attitudes. With *Win*, she showed that women's economic dependence on their husbands led to parasitism and entrapment, limiting potential and eroding individual independence. As a woman in a male-dominated world, Valerie admitted that 'our sex is a handicap' (*SD*, p. 277), yet, by means of her character, Sally Dodds, the writer castigated women themselves for not confronting the social significance of their domestic problems.

Linda's predicament evoked Dark's objection to the way public opinion made outsiders of those who did not conform to the conventional idea of normality, and so aggravated their condition and restricted the development of any underlying healthy potential. By conforming to the expectations of others, Linda was seen to eventually sacrifice her spontaneity, and with the consciousness of powerlessness, she became a kind of automaton unable to advance on her life journey.

While obviously sympathetic to the right of the individual to exercise natural impulses, as a practical idealist the writer indicated that complete freedom was an impossible ideal, that behaviour must be moderated by the expectations of society. Oliver's difficulties, however, implied that society hindered its own progress by retaining false ideals and rigid conventions which were obstacles to any new way of thinking, and which restricted the recognition of life's potentialities and frustrated the 'yearning for new paths'.<sup>47</sup> Although the people could not dislodge all the obstacles which rational authority must put in the way of natural freedom for the community's good, Dark proposed that they had the power to change social rules and yet remain an integral part of society if they abandoned the constraints of predetermined social roles and of conventional morality by asserting their own moral independence. Until they did this, humanity would be unable to achieve any further development, because beneficial change and reform were necessary aids to the momentum of progress, both individual and societal.

Human beings, the character, Oliver, was made to reflect, in future years would look back in wonder at a time when they 'had created counters and allowed their value to fluctuate' so that, for some, the 'laws of economics' made life 'black with misery and confusion.' (*SaS*, p. 33) In the next chapter I

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<sup>47</sup> Murphy, *Human Potentialities*, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

shall deal with Dark's protest that economic inequality and class division were formidable obstacles in the way of human advancement because they prevented the access of groups and individuals to benefits which had the power to stimulate their development. They immobilised, too, so many who might otherwise have risen to challenge the orthodoxies, connivings and social manipulations which, both singly and in combination, stunted the lives of all individuals, and Australian women in particular.

## Chapter Four

### CLASS DIVISION - 'An old and too-familiar story'

Dark's approach as chronicler-historiographer to the particular issue of Australian class division was both romantic and clinical, having something in common with the more recent attitude of Dorothy Simcox, a character in John Mortimer's novel, *Paradise Postponed*. The latter believed that 'in an ideal world, the working classes would rule the country, but she had no particular desire to ask any of them to tea.'<sup>1</sup> Although the Australian novelist was critical of bourgeois values and sympathetic to the plight of the underprivileged, her middle-class perspective was, nevertheless, responsible for a certain distancing stance - despite her efforts in *Waterway* to establish some rapport between Oliver and Jack, when the unpatronising doctor offered the young working man both material and medical aid.

Dark acknowledged this problem with the fictional, middle-class Lesley's consciousness that she was fundamentally separated from the working class by a lack of common experience.<sup>2</sup> She felt a fraud taking sides with the unemployed, and suggested that, for middle-class people, the problem of unemployment could be only an academic one:

I want to help - understand - but you can't really - from the outside. You can't if you've never actually *been* there. You feel that they resent you because you've never been hungry

<sup>1</sup> J. Mortimer, *Paradise Postponed* (1985) Harmondsworth, 1986, p. 31.

See, for example, Dark's treatment of the servants, Mrs. Gillogley - 'her bondswoman' (*SD*, p. 37) - and Mrs. Brownlie in *Slow Dawning*, and Mrs. Trugg in *Waterway*, all of whom, with their coarse, grotesque diction, could belong to another world. In *Waterway*, Jack and Maud were drawn more sympathetically, while in *Lantana Lane*, Dark's last novel, her depiction of the bulldozer driver with his racy idiom was a delight.

Cp. A. Ashbolt, 'The great literary witch-hunt of 1952', in A. Curthoys and J. Merrit, *Australia's First Cold War 1945-1953, Vol. 1*, Sydney, 1984, p. 176: Writing of Vance Palmer, Ashbolt claimed that 'he believed in ... the common man rather than the working class', and this could be claimed for Dark, also.

Cp. H. Roberts, 'Introduction', in Devanny, *The Butcher Shop*, *op. cit.*, p. 20: 'At the beginning of the novel Devanny reveals the confusion of her own feelings about the working class. Theoretically she should see them ... as the vanguard of the new order. But to Devanny they are a pretty low order of humanity because they lack the culture she thinks so important. ... Devanny has no sympathy with the working class.' Her sympathies were 'with the Messengers and their life of culture, wealth, luxury and plenty'.

<sup>2</sup> See E. Ryan and A. Conlon, *Gentle Invaders, Australian Women at Work 1788-1974*, Melbourne, 1975, p. 7: 'Poor women were forced to seek work, while middle-class women later ... had to fight for the right to work.'

or without a bed to sleep in. It's all just a sort of academic problem. And you can't *get there*, because even if you were utterly destitute you'd still have - resources - in yourself. (*W*, p. 250)

With Roger's assurance, however, that '[w]hen enough intelligent people begin to examine it without bias as an academic problem, it will be solved' (*W*, p. 250), the writer justified her concerned interest in class conflict, stemming as it did from her conviction that such friction was a powerful deterrent to the development of the 'full potential of both the individual and the whole society.'<sup>3</sup>

With her protest against the dehumanising effects - both practical and spiritual - which possessions or the lack of them had on her characters' lives, Dark insisted that intelligent and responsible people must do something to change 'the whole insanity of civilised life' (*W*, p. 238), since it was based on a social system which permitted such inequalities. The novelist underlined her protest with a quotation from the journal of the First Fleet Marine, Captain Watson Tench: 'The first step in any community which wishes to preserve honesty, should be to set the people above want', to which she added the rider, 'a thought whose obvious common sense was, even a century and a half later, to remain unappreciated.' (*TTL*, p. 395)

Dark's historical character, Thomas Palmer, sent to Botany Bay because he 'advocated Parliamentary Reform' for the sake of 'liberty and justice', remembered his fellow reformers, Skirving and Gerrald, who had already died in the penal settlement, and wondered whether the oppressions which they fought, '[would] flourish here as they have done in the old world.' (*ST*, p. 64) The writer indicated that his apprehension was justified when her fictional, idealistic young tutor, Mark Harvey, revolted by 'the chaos and the crudity' of the colony, claimed that 'the greed, the brutality, the strife and the

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<sup>3</sup> See unnamed author, 'Dr Dark and the Secret State', The Blue Mountains Historical Library, Springwood, undated. In real life the Darks put their theories into practice by actively helping the workers in practical form. Along with a group of other Katoomba radicals, they organised a creche for the women working in the Lithgow Small Arms Factory and Katoomba's clothing factory, as well as a cottage nursery. They established 'the Oslo Lunch canteen, the children's library, the summer fitness camp, the youth club', and campaigned for, or established on a co-operative basis, a War Loan drive, while having 'post-war plans for community swimming pools, communal markets, health clinics and sewerage services.'

suffering were not born here. They were brought.' (*ST*, p. 279)

The Europeans who settled in Australia, Dark reminded her readers, brought with them their own class system, together with their conviction of the supremacy of the white race. So *The Timeless Land* presented a divided community composed of free men and felons, in which the military - later to be joined by the civil officers - ruled the convicts, while, 'with patronage and contempt', all looked down upon the Aborigines as 'inferior creatures.' (*TTL*, p. 52) Governor Phillip regarded the convicts as 'degraded outcasts' (*TTL*, p. 191), and planned to segregate them from the garrison and other free settlers even after the expiration of their sentences.<sup>4</sup>

When he condemned three convicts to hang for stealing food, the

... subterranean hatred and resentment always  
smouldering among desperate and degraded people ...  
woke to a fierce and glowing heat. Sullen, menacing, it  
became an almost visible emanation from their sorry ranks;

while through those ranks, in the hours leading up to the execution,

... a dark undercurrent of shackled power ran dangerously,  
gathering the accumulated bitterness of past generations,  
fortifying it with new resentments, to hand it on, a little  
stronger, to the hour when it would become at last  
omnipotent and destroying. (*TTL*, p. 123 )

The narrator's next comment - 'That hour was not yet. The land was to delay it here' - could be taken as a present warning to society that the power of the oppressed was not to be discounted.<sup>5</sup>

As his vision widened, however, the Governor's conception of the situation began to alter. 'Conventions, customs, morals, the intangible things by which human society orders its communal life, had already become strangely ghostly here' (*TTL*, p. 81), and he had been made acutely aware that 'hunger breeds crime', and that if hunger had been unknown in their own homelands, 'there might have been fewer of these unhappy people to bring

<sup>4</sup> See also Atkinson, 'Sunshine From Frost' *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> See also Doecke, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-3.

to Botany Bay.’ (*TTL*, p. 502) Upon his departure four years later the Governor acknowledged that circumstances had effected an unexpected change, that in this strange new world,

... discomfort, exile, hunger and despair had welded into one community two classes which in their own country had been the poles apart. (*TTL*, p. 422)<sup>6</sup>

Dark had Andrew Prentice mirror the felons’ attitude toward the ruling class with the hatred which had been ‘bred in him by generations of ancestors who had lived hardy and died bitterly for the benefit of their betters.’ (*TTL*, p. 82)<sup>7</sup> After his escape, his loathing of ‘the dominant class of his own race’ revived as he saw them continually encroaching onto the Aborigines’ hunting grounds:

‘They’ had flung him and his kind out of their own land, but that was not enough. ‘They’ must have this land too, and make of it another hell on earth for the poor as they had made their own. (*TTL*, p. 409)

Victims of an oppressive society in England, products of ‘crowded city slums, of thatched hovels in the country’ (*TTL*, p. 87), and born to ‘a tradition of subservience that misted their manhood’ (*ST*, p. 332), the convicts with their ‘pallid faces and ... emaciated frames’ (*TTL*, p. 395) were without the spiritual strength needed to improve their lot.

Stephen Mannion, the free settler who believed that the lower classes were ‘beings of a coarser fibre than those in his own walk or life’ and ‘less sensitive to physical suffering’ (*TTL*, p. 463), had instituted at Beltrasna<sup>8</sup> a

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<sup>6</sup> Phillip had introduced an unexpected egalitarianism to the colony with his orders that everyone - including the Governor - must receive the same rations. See H. McQueen, ‘Introduction’, *The Timeless Land*, North Ryde, 1990, p.v. Commenting on the subversiveness of the novel, the writer pointed out that Phillip’s ‘refusal to eat more than the poorest and most damned of the convicts stands in sharp contrast to Australia’s leaders in the 1930s depression, for whom “equality of sacrifice” meant that millionaires and unemployed would each give up ten per cent of their income.’

<sup>7</sup> See Dark’s short story, ‘The Leader’, *Australian Writers’ Annual*, 1936, pp. 24-7, in which the Russian peasant prisoners whom ‘the leader’ liberated and cared for betrayed him because he belonged to the oppressing class: ‘He was not one of them. A dark hatred of the oppressor, centuries old, centuries strong, would surge up into their hearts.’

<sup>8</sup> In a conversation with the present writer in 1996, Dark’s second cousin, Helen O’Reilly, stated that ‘Beltrasna’ was also the name of one of the O’Reilly properties in Ireland.

brutal regime which the rebellious Irish convict, Matthew Finn, considered was 'the beginning of an old and too-familiar story.' (*ST*, p. 297) Mannion's assigned felons found themselves 'at the mercy of a man whose tyranny seemed the blacker because he was their countryman'. Remembering the miseries of the hungry peasants who were exploited by rich landlords, their hatred was reinforced by the knowledge that their own work on Beltrasna would increase 'the wealth and influence by which their master held the tenants of his Irish estate in bondage.' (*ST*, p. 56) Finn knew that the oppressed had nothing with which to challenge the power structure 'which, from its massive fortress of privilege, could turn a different battery upon them wherever they might seek to breach it':

A cry for justice was answered coldly by the courts; a cry of protest brought admonishment from the pulpits; a cry of hunger, if it were answered at all, was answered with a bowl of soup, a poorhouse, and the bitter bread of charity; the ultimate and desperate cry of rebellion was cut short by the crack of muskets. (*ST*, p. 302)

Aware that their exile offered the chance of a new life, Finn tried to convince his fellow prisoners that their very hopelessness contributed to their oppression,

... that the menace of the flogging post was in their fear of it; that the invincibility of a red-coat was in their doubts of themselves; that the power of the Governor was built upon their resignation, their fecklessness, their ignorance and their despair.

They, however, 'looked at their chains', at the musket in the overseer's hands, 'and jeered at him.' (*ST*, p. 298)

When Governor John Hunter took over the colony in 1799, he discovered that his predecessor's hope that all the 'diverse and hostile elements' might be parts 'of some pattern which might one day absorb them all' had not come to fruition. 'Now the pattern was broken up, the parts scattered' (*ST*, p. 69), and at the hub of this discordance was the New South Wales Corps whose officers, under the military administration of Major Grose, had banded together to buy up cargoes of spirits and other commodities and

thus had become tycoons, a 'close ring of monopoly' (*ST*, p. 68) forming 'the tight, united front of privilege.' (*ST*, p. 33)<sup>9</sup>

It is useful to examine here the varying degrees of subjectivity in modern responses to past events during this period of Australian history. Dark had Governor Bligh reporting to his superiors in 1807 that 'farmers are involved in debt and either ruined by the high price of spirits, or the high price of labour which is regulated thereby' (*ST*, p. 459), and her contemporary, H. V. Evatt, contended that this state of affairs hindered the progress of the colony<sup>10</sup> because, although the monopolists prospered, the interests of the small settlers could not advance. In this context, the fictional Conor Mannion's reflection on William Godwin's theory of the law being 'better adapted for a weapon of tyranny in the hands of the rich than for a shield to protect the humbler part of the community against their usurpations' (*ST*, p. 414) was verified by events in the settlement. The historian, George Parsons, however, would insist that the settlers' land was not seized by officers, civil or military, and that they did not ruin or attempt to ruin the small settlers. He argued that the monopoly in spirits had ceased to exist after 1800, when 'trade and commerce became the province of emancipist and free merchants', and that, although some officers, including Macarthur and Johnston, were involved, they did not wield enough power to retain the monopoly.<sup>11</sup>

From the first, according to Dark, Governor Phillip had looked with disfavour on the 'sordid huckstering' (*TTL*, p. 443) of the Corps,

... these scourings of the other regiments in the service, these ex-inhabitants of military prisons, these thieving, plotting tradesmen in uniform. (*TTL*, pp. 521-22)

In the opinion of A. G. L. Shaw, however, as active traders and merchants the officers 'have been ... quite unjustifiably criticized', for in moving to

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<sup>9</sup> See A. G. L. Shaw, 'Rum Corps and Rum Rebellion', *Melbourne Historical Journal*, Vol. 10, 1971, p. 23, wherein the writer stated that there were no conflicting classes, only opposing groups seeking the spoils of power.

<sup>10</sup> H. V. Evatt, *Rum Rebellion: A Study of the Overthrow of Governor Bligh by John Macarthur and the New South Wales Corps*, Sydney, 1947.

<sup>11</sup> G. Parsons, 'The commercialism of honour: Early Australian capitalism 1788-1809', in G. Aplin (ed.), *A Difficult Infant, Sydney Before Macquarie*, Kensington, 1988, pp. 110 and 113.

prevent exploitation by ships' masters, either by chartering ships themselves or bargaining collectively for what arrived, 'they benefited rather than harmed the colony'.<sup>12</sup>

When Governor King was in command, Dark had Conor find the settlement still very much divided. The Corps was not only antagonistic toward the governor, but regarded 'with great disfavour' merchants such as the young Robert Campbell, while 'at the mention of the lower classes - convicts, emancipists, the poorer settlers - they became almost wolfish in their enmity.' (*ST*, p. 137) However dubious its origins, wealth, rather than birth, was important now. As Dark saw it, the machinations of the elite group within the community had stultified the growth of the underprivileged who, as she claimed, 'had every incentive to develop the country.'<sup>13</sup> So the convicts' despair was

... reinforced by the despair of emancipists who found that emancipation bestowed few practical benefits, and by settlers who became ever more embittered as the prices of commodities soared farther beyond their resources. (*ST*, p. 137)<sup>14</sup>

Governor King's power was shown to be 'inadequate against the complicated power of wealth' and Conor understood that the monopolists had set in place 'a society building up upon a foundation of felons a superstructure which sometimes looked uglier than felony itself', and which controlled the lower classes 'by means which seemed to brand it as lower than they.' (*ST*, p. 381) Much to the disgust of the privileged Mannion, some of the despised tradespeople and merchants - such as the emancipist, Simeon Lord - had 'waxed rich while their clients sank to penury' and, indeed, had gained a place in 'the upper ranks of [the] colonial hierarchy.' (*ST*, p. 466)

In such a materialistic community it was the fear that the 'respectable - which in their language meant the wealthy - members of the community were

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<sup>12</sup> A. G. L. Shaw, 'Some Aspects of the History of New South Wales 1788-1810', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol. 57, Part 2, June, 1971, p. 101.

<sup>13</sup> Dark, 'Caroline Chisholm and her Times', *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>14</sup> See E. V. Timms, *The Valleys Beyond*, Sydney, 1951, a novel which explored the concerns of wealthy landowners, free settlers and emancipists.

to be ruined' (*ST*, p. 565) which eventually led to Governor Bligh's downfall. The novelist had the disenchanted George Howe of history, editor of the *Sydney Gazette*, offer the fictional Mark Harvey this opinion of the monopolist group:

We have here, Sir, a colony which has been held in grievous bondage by a set of rogues who now descend like wolves upon the Governor because he has lifted up his arm to protect it from their ravenous clutches! And who *are* these who dare set aside an authority which His Majesty has appointed? To what do they owe the eminence in society that they have so shamefully used? Not to dignity of birth, Sir - not to superior education - not to liberality of sentiment, but ... to the petty retailing of three-watered grog, Sir! (*ST*, p. 582)

Both Governors King and Bligh were men of their times who 'shared a belief in the rightness and efficiency of their social order, its natural and inevitable cleavage into upper and lower classes.' (*ST*, p. 434) The next Governor, Lachlan Macquarie, was also 'no believer in equality', and yet, like Phillip, he was able to recognise 'the common pattern of humanity in all these ill-assorted, and incongruously placed people.' (*NB*, p. 76) By now there were several groupings in the colony - the officials, the free settlers, the emancipists, the convicts and the native born. 'The upper classes', Dark's Macquarie told his subjects at his inauguration ceremony, 'must show a good example to the lower by readily conforming to the colony's laws and regulations', at which 'certain well-barbered faces ... became studiously blank', while among the convicts and humbler residents there were seen 'a few sour, fleeting smiles.' (*NB*, pp. 45-46) The Governor's expectation that 'his difficulties were to come from the higher stratum of society' (*NB*, p. 44) was fulfilled when he introduced his benevolent policy regarding emancipists.

Convinced that the former treatment of these ex-convicts was 'unwise and inhuman', Governor Macquarie planned to change matters. He intended to implement his belief that the 'reward of good conduct should be re-admission to respectable society' (*NB*, p. 48) when convicts were set free 'in a country where their decent instincts had a chance to develop.'<sup>15</sup> Having

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<sup>15</sup> Dark, 'Caroline Chisholm and her Times', *op. cit.*, p. 64.

decided to 'proceed with *great* delicacy' (*NB*, p. 48), he immediately outraged the wealthy colonists' sensibilities by receiving certain emancipists at Government House, and, with the belief that they must begin 'sharing both rights and duties with free men' (*NB*, p. 308), by appointing several to public office. The Reverend Samuel Marsden disapproved wholeheartedly of the emancipists and indignantly refused to act as a Trustee of the turnpike road with two of them, Andrew Thompson and Simeon Lord, thereby putting one more impediment in the way of the progress of both the emancipists and the colony itself. Dark censured such 'harsh and illiberal views', when she had the Governor's wife ask, 'Was not this odd, in what might be termed a professional Christian?' (*NB*, p. 63)

The modern historian, John J. Eddy, supports Macquarie's actions, writing that, for all the contention it aroused, the Governor's handling of the emancipists was 'an intelligent policy aimed at normalizing the social, commercial and ultimately political life of the colony.'<sup>16</sup> The 'superior' social set, the 'exclusives', however, opposed Macquarie's ideas 'with quite remarkable vehemence.' (*NB*, p. 63) John Macarthur, still in England, was horrified: 'Is it possible', he wrote to his wife, 'that Governor Macquarie can associate with, and bring to the table, men who have been Convicts?' He was forced to conclude that 'the colonial pattern', with its 'bold irrevocable lines of cleavage between the felon and the free' (*NB*, p. 126), was surely disintegrating.

Discussing the attitude of the exclusives with the historical figure, William Wentworth, the fictional Mark Harvey was made to ask whether, for the sake of progress,

... it would not be reasonable in them to arise and embrace fellow-citizens whose efforts could now combine with their own to create a new and prosperous country, to their mutual advantage? (*NB*, p. 151)

Macarthur's complaint answered that question:

How could the respectable maintain their advantage if cunning rogues with the brand of felony upon them were

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<sup>16</sup> J. J. Eddy, 'Empire and Politics', in J. Broadbent and J. Hughes (eds.), *The Age of Macquarie*, Carlton, 1992, p. 42.

not only permitted to a mass wealth, but even admitted to the society of the Governor himself? (*NB*, p. 126)

Macquarie knew that he could not keep segregated the evergrowing band of emancipists whose existence was 'breaking down the old colonial pattern' of felon and free, while the exclusives,

... who had lived so snugly and profitably within it, were now noting with resentment that His Excellency seemed not only to accept, but to encourage its disintegration. (*NB*, p. 263)

Dark had William Wentworth protest that such people justified and perpetuated their power by regarding the convicts as a symbol of criminality and by supporting a policy which 'would make felony an hereditary defect'. So they succeeded in 'raising an eternal barrier between their own children and those of convicts' (*NB*, p. 152), a situation which the tutor Mark Harvey confronted, for, as he told Governor Bligh when reporting on the progress of his school, 'The respectable inhabitants ... do not care to have their children mix with the children of convicts and ex-convicts.' (*ST*, p. 441)

Class division, as the writer demonstrated, had a significant effect on the individual. His wealthy background did Mannion's son, Patrick, a disservice when, as a child, he failed in his attempt to befriend Johnny Prentice, the son of convicts, because they regarded each other 'from different worlds.' (*TTL*, p. 352) In later life he was aware that they were separated by 'a barrier whose very invisibility, whose very intangibility, made it insurmountable' (*ST*, p. 89), while the wary Johnny, only too conscious of 'the bitter, interminable war between high and low, rich and poor' (*NB*, p. 247), would not trust Patrick because he was one of 'the possessing class.' (*NB*, p. 292) As Johnny told his half-brother, Billalong, admitting that all white people were not grasping, 'It's the ones that have the money you got to look out for.' (*NB*, p. 333)

Dark had written that it was preposterous 'that individuals should monopolise the natural resources of their country and make private fortunes out of them',<sup>17</sup> and Eric Dark, too, slated the social disease of economic

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<sup>17</sup> Dark Papers, Box 10 (25), ML, undated fragment.

inequality with his comment that the present social order 'has so far failed ... to distribute the immense riches that can be produced.'<sup>18</sup> He condemned the hideous snare of poverty, that 'dreadful biological imperative from which there is no escape'.<sup>19</sup> Thinking of the underprivileged Sally Dodds, the character, Marty, observed, 'Life ... has been shoving her around ever since she was born.' She found the look of detachment in Sally's eyes typical of 'the expression of poor women who look neither back nor forward, but husband their resources for what each passing moment may bring'. For women like Sally there was no joy as they faced

... a life which had always been incomprehensible, and against which there had never been any defence but a patiently and stubbornly continued existence. (*TLC*, pp. 253-54)

In *Sun Across the Sky*, Dark showed the inhabitants of Fishermen's Flat practising the philosophy of the poor, the belief that they could only overcome their troubles by ignoring them:

Not even by a lifetime of saving and denial could they hope to achieve security. Not all the sixpences and shillings of their working lives would ever buy them ease. (*SaS*, p. 61)

They saw no road ahead, and defeated fate 'simply by continuing to live, by leaping perilously like someone crossing a river on stepping stones, from one day to the next.' (*SaS*, p. 60) With her depiction of the feckless inhabitants of the Flat, the novelist suggested that, although poverty does not warp everyone, nor destroy the individual's ability to make decisions, on the whole it is a moulding force which perpetuates itself in that the children of the poor absorb their parents' values, and are afterwards psychologically unprepared to take advantage of altered conditions or improved opportunities.

Writing of housing conditions in the slums of Melbourne, Eric Dark stated that the children born there 'have at birth, as has been shown, just the same natural inheritance of mental and bodily well-being as the children of the professional classes', but he went on to explain that

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<sup>18</sup> E. P. Dark, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 21.

... [r]epeated investigations by psychologists demonstrate that the intellect may be stunted as surely as the body. ... The inevitable conclusion is that people are not poor because they are stupid and stunted; they are stunted and stupid because they are so poor that they have not been able to get adequate nourishment for either body or mind.<sup>20</sup>

Although the novelist made the middle-class doctor, Dr. Oliver Denning, feel drawn to the community of fisherfolk, experiencing the atmosphere of their community as 'oddly seductive' (*SaS*, p. 60), she did not idealise the working class and, on the whole, her proletarian figures had a more clinical than human interest as they bore out the validity of Eric Dark's judgement. Hence Oliver summed up the hawker's wife, Em Sayers, as having 'no self-control and no intelligence.' (*SaS*, p. 119) Her pathetic husband, Herb, too, had never developed the ability to reason from cause to effect:

No thought of Herb's was father to a second thought; his brain dealt in single pictures, amorphous and detached - pictures which sometimes came just far enough forward into his consciousness to be translated laboriously into clumsy and unrevealing words. (*SaS*, p. 80)

*Waterway* found Dark focusing on a suburban community during a time of general social, ethical and spiritual confusion in the prelude to imminent world war. Here the clash of class outlooks paralleled the larger international clash of the interwar years between Fascist and democratic values, and she demonstrated this opposition in a dramatic scene where a group of wealthy wedding guests - the 'parade of the Idle Rich' (*W*, p. 254) - confronted a restless crowd of unemployed workers outside a city church.<sup>21</sup>

During the 1930s the position of the materialistic middle-class gained strength, despite the erosion of liberalism. The wealthy had escaped the miseries of the Great Depression while the working class was unjustly and drastically affected, but, as Drew Cottle found in a study of the wealthy families of the suburb of Woollahra, 'the *premier* suburb of Sydney', those

<sup>20</sup> E. P. Dark, *op. cit.*, pp. 23 and 22.

<sup>21</sup> See J. Mackinolty (ed.), *The Wasted Years? Australia's Great Depression*, p. 39, in which the writer pointed out that the possibility of mass action was the unemployed's only source of threat.

families 'defined themselves socially as an elite, quite apart from the rest of Sydney's population', and 'felt no personal guilt or responsibility for the existing social inequalities which were only heightened by the Depression.'<sup>22</sup> In *Waterway Dark* indicted the lack of appreciation and acceptance of the 'other' as she showed how the privileged class's determination to live within its own exclusive group succeeded all too well in diminishing the potential of many of her characters, warping their personalities and poisoning human relationships.

So the novelist had the ostentatious wedding guests, freely enjoying a tasteless exhibition of wealth, get 'an eyeful of the proletariat' (*W*, p. 218), regarding the crowd of unemployed with 'a look of utter and irrevocable detachment', as if to say, 'How sad! But it is not our affair ... . Our world is different.' (*W*, p. 254) Win, the radical wife of wealthy Arthur Sellman, was increasingly attracted to socialism and she refused to attend the wedding of George Hegarty - one of the local socialites - deciding 'that she would rather die than conform any longer' (*W*, p. 105) to such a selfish lifestyle with its superficial values. Her offended husband, however, insisted that in times of economic insecurity she should fulfil her 'social duty' (*W*, p. 105) and realise

... the importance of people in their position - well, hanging together. Showing a united front. Class loyalty and all that kind of thing. (*W*, p. 21)

Historian Cottle discovered that this was a common attitude, as the Depression

... brought out all the resilience the rich possessed as a social class. They clung tenaciously to their values and attitudes and their entire social world, even though it never appeared to be seriously endangered.<sup>23</sup>

In the novel, Arthur and his sister, Lorna, embodied Dark's idea of

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<sup>22</sup> D. Cottle, 'The Sydney Rich in the Great Depression', *Bowyang*, September/October, 1979, pp. 74 and 86.

Cp. F. W. Eggleston, *Search for a Social Philosophy*, Melbourne, 1941, p. 321: '... the desire to be entrenched and secure from personal calls to service is evil.'

Cp. G. Greene, *It's a Battlefield* (1934), London, 1948. This novel was an indictment of the inequality existing in contemporary society in England, and an exposure of the plight of the unemployed during the Depression.

<sup>23</sup> Cottle, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

hollow bourgeois pretentiousness.<sup>24</sup> For Arthur, on the life journey, wealth was an obstacle to striving as he dedicated his whole existence 'to an anxious hoarding of himself' in order to 'preserve his comfort, to guard his possessions.' (*W*, p. 295) Consequently, among those concepts 'which ... gave life graciousness and meaning, he blundered like a blind man, irritated, uncomprehending, incredulous', existing in a closed world, 'from which all but the obvious, the trite, the conventional, was excluded.' (*W*, p. 24) It is ironic that Arthur's only recorded experience of striving was the desperate effort he made during the ferry accident to save his own life at the expense of Professor Channon's.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, effort and striving were strangers to the beautiful Lorna, as she used her possessions to get everything she wanted: 'For things there was money; for men there was beauty.' (*W*, p. 131) This arrogant woman regarded Martin, the chauffeur, as 'part of her equipment' (*W*, p. 22), while her relationship with the house servants conformed to one which Erich Fromm would term 'domination -submission',<sup>26</sup> so that she was furious when she saw the egalitarian Win treating them 'as if they were her equals.' (*W*, p. 224) Lorna's sense of power was 'the very breath of her life' (*W*, p. 182) and Dark emphasised this superiority complex with the scene in which her character looked down from the hairdresser's window on the noisy gathering of the unemployed:

To look down from a high window upon some vulgar turmoil  
in the street was not only a physical but a comfortingly  
symbolic action. (*W*, p. 181)

<sup>24</sup> Cp. Galsworthy, *The Man of Property*, *op. cit.*, with its condemnation of the dubious materialistic values of the class to which the Forsytes belonged.

<sup>25</sup> With the ferry accident, the climax of *Waterway*, Dark linked the tragedy with two significant historical events. On the night of August 20, 1857, the *Dunbar* was wrecked near the harbour entrance, with only one man saved from a personnel of sixty-three passengers and a crew of fifty-nine, and the fictional Jack's imaginative reliving of the event foreshadowed the sinking of the ferry in the novel. This had a more recent parallel, too, in the sinking of the Sydney ferry, *Greycliffe*, which, on November 3, 1927, on its way from Circular Quay to Watsons Bay was cut in two by a collision with the ocean liner, *Tahite*, causing the deaths of forty passengers, many of them schoolchildren.

See also C. Stead, *The Salzburg Tales* (1934), Sydney, 1974. Stead used the sinking of the *Greycliffe* in 'The Schoolboy's Tale, Day of Wrath'.

The accident, in *Waterway*, which conveniently resolved individual, if not the social, problems, had a literary parallel. See J. Frame, *The Adaptable Man*, Christchurch, 1965, and compare the fictional mass deaths in this novel, where a chandelier fell on the group of principal characters, thus resolving seemingly unsolvable problems.

<sup>26</sup> Fromm, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

Much earlier, observing the apathetic convicts, Governor Phillip had begun to see 'that the human being can support all torments but the one final torment of feeling himself useless.' (*TTL*, p. 422) In *Waterway* Dark exposed the plight of the vigorous young working-class man, Jack Saunders, who was, a century and a half later, suffering the same torment. Unemployed for years, life for Jack provided no adventurous contest, but had become 'not only an enemy, but an enemy invincible and without pity.' (*W*, p. 138)<sup>27</sup> On his journey he was 'grotesquely contorted and flung about by life, abased and maltreated and stripped of human dignity' (*W*, p. 375), and he lost any sense of purpose, feeling only a 'dull inertia.' (*W*, p. 177) Yet he was 'driven forward in the dark', not knowing 'when or where an abyss might open at [his] feet.' (*W*, p. 61) He could see no goal ahead: 'Give me something with an end to it, something to make, to build, something of my own.' (*W*, p. 177) Jack suffered an 'agony of slow disintegration' (*W*, p. 61) as unemployment wasted his strength and energy, a waste which the sympathetic doctor, Oliver, thought to be 'as painful as if a great artist were to waste his gift for a mere lack of material or instrument.' (*W*, p. 141) The young man's dissipated vitality became 'like another self, a dark and violent stranger in his body', which he had 'to drug ... with promises of a time when [it] would at last find an outlet in some wild fury of destruction.' (*W*, p. 61)

When he went to Oliver's surgery to have his injured hand dressed, Jack unconsciously embraced work as an ideal when he was impressed by the doctor's self-assurance and by the way his work appeared to be 'the crowning point of [his] well-being' (*W*, p. 143), while his own days were 'endless with idleness.' (*W*, p. 357) Instinctively he recognised the cause of this difference: 'It's 'aving a job and being your own boss.' (*W*, p. 144) Eric Dark, too, stressed the importance of the self-esteem which work bestows: 'A man's health demands that he ... must have personal dignity, the assurance of a useful place in society, [and] a feeling of economic security.'<sup>28</sup> Despite his limitations, however, Jack possessed 'that cold common sense which defies and defeats intellectualism' (*W*, p. 178), and he could not accept the idea that in the teeming city 'there should be no use for the restless strength

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<sup>27</sup> Cp. Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, p. 85, where, quoting from *The Times*, 23rd January, 1943, the writer stated that, next to war, 'unemployment has been the most corroding malady of our generation'.

<sup>28</sup> E. P. Dark, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

which he could feel consuming him.’ (*W*, p. 177) As he protested, ‘You don’t tell me there ain’t jobs to be done! You don’t tell me this ain’t just bloody muddlin’ ... or worse.’ (*W*, p. 178)<sup>29</sup>

Smarting with the ‘impotence of the oppressed’ (*ST*, p. 302), Jack compared his lot with that of his childhood friend, the wealthy Sim Hegarty, and wondered bitterly

... what had Sim done that all his life the way should have stretched before him so broad and straight and smooth? That the money he hadn’t earned should clear it of obstacles, smooth it into comfort, adorn it with beauty? (*W*, p. 58)<sup>30</sup>

When he noticed the newspaper announcement of the impending wedding of Sim’s brother, George, all the resentment which had been ‘banked and dangerously smouldering’ (*W*, p. 336) became focused on the monied class, so that with

... the awakening of an unreasoned but deeply felt scorn his bitterness had been purged of envy, leaving a hatred undiluted, concentrated, malevolent. (*W*, p. 61)

Eric Dark asserted that ‘the incidence of crime ... increases when there is mass unemployment.’<sup>31</sup> With violence ‘growing inevitably out of a not inevitable misery’ (*W*, p. 269), it was the sight of the wealthy newspaper owner, Manning-Everett - who had been responsible for the arrest of Jack’s younger brother on a trivial charge - arrogantly ordering the crowd of unemployed workers aside after George’s wedding which lit the fuse of Jack’s rage. Now all his resentment: at ‘accumulations of injustices’ (*W*, p. 301) became centred on the magnate, and, with ‘hatred quickening to the wild onrush of action’ (*W*, p. 259), his frustrations erupted. Just before he hurled a beer bottle at Manning-Everett’s head, he recognised in the crowd’s

<sup>29</sup> Cp. J. Galsworthy, *Plays: The Silver Box, Joy, Strife*, London, 1909, in which the unemployed character, Jones, complained: ‘A man wants to sweat his soul out to keep the breath in him and ain’t allowed - that’s justice - that’s freedom and all the rest of it.’

<sup>30</sup> Cp. J. Bryce, *Modern Democracies*, London, 1921, Vol. 1, p. 71: ‘[E]veryone feels that the chances of birth have given to some and refused to others a share of the external conditions of well-being which has no relation to intrinsic merit, so that the disparity ought not to be artificially increased.’

<sup>31</sup> E. P. Dark, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

unrest the possibility of mass action, when

... for the first time he saw the established order, which had no place for him, opposed by something in whose latent, undirected power he saw his own bitterness, his own frustration, his own resentment multiplied a thousand times. (*W*, p. 258)<sup>32</sup>

There were 'bitter contrasts' (*W*, p. 62) indeed in the circumstances of Jack and Sim, both born on the same day, one into poverty and the other into wealth. On their twelfth birthday, the sensitive Sim was appalled by the disparity apparent in their birthday gifts, his soul 'one wild clamour of protest.' (*W*, p. 70) His distressed mother's promise to reduce his privileges by never giving him expensive presents again was, as Dark had the narrator remark,

... [a] poor distorted embryo of the right idea! Not that you should be ready to give out of your own plenty to them, but that you should be ready to take on your own shoulders a little of their need, a little of their lack. (*W*, p. 71)

On that day Sim's incipient progress to his full human potential was blocked when his father taught him his 'first lesson in acceptance' (*W*, p. 70), the acceptance of class division: 'Things are so. There is no way to alter it.' (*W*, p. 71) For Sim,

... the acceptance had begun on that morning when he had first realised that there was something to accept, and by his thirteenth birthday he had become already more philosophical about it. (*W*, p. 71)

So Dark had Sim remain a captive of his class, 'conditioned beyond all capacity for freedom' (*W*, p. 232), for

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<sup>32</sup> See D. Aitken, M. Kahan and S. Barnes, 'What Happened to the Depression Generation?', *Labour History*, No. 17, 1970, p. 178. It is intriguing to find that, after a national survey of electors carried out in 1967, the authors stated: 'One might have expected the depression, because of selective unemployment and poverty, to have intensified class antagonisms and to have made class barriers seem rigid. Yet ... the depression generation were insouciant about class conflict in Australia. Indeed, the men of the depression generation were the most united of all (82%) in the belief that classes "get along together without conflict." Nor were the depression generation any more inclined to see money as the basis for social class, or to think that mobility between classes was difficult. ... Instead of setting class against class [the depression] may have made Australians aware of their common nationality, or desperateness. In any case it seems likely that the fact [that] the calamity was shared tended to mute rather than exacerbate class antagonism.'

... his thoughts were not free; customs dragged at them, and conventions and false conceptions of duty, and false standards and false ideals. (*W*, p. 235)

His mother admitted that she was largely responsible for warping his growth, that she 'had helped to fasten this burden on him', and that, ceaselessly repeating the propensity of human beings to hinder their own development, Sim 'would help to fasten it on to his children.' (*W*, p. 235)

In the historical trilogy, as this chapter discloses, Dark accused the members of the elitist set of retarding the growth of their own colony by crippling the small settlers with the high prices demanded for commodities which they monopolised, and by trying, at all cost, to defend their privileges. Later, these 'exclusives' did their utmost to hamper progress by creating civic unrest with their opposition to the governors who tried to curb their power, and by their determined efforts to prevent the emancipists from achieving any success in trade and as public administrators.

Revealed here, also, is Dark's contention that the division of the world into bourgeois and proletarian sectors shapes the entire pattern of behaviour of those who belong to them. She objected to the artificial barriers by which society divided people who were, after all, members of the same species, and, in her consideration of an unequal society, she drew attention to the similarities between the working and middle classes. With the scene at Oliver's surgery when he and Jack discussed their feelings about war, Dark demonstrated that, 'in both their minds thought processes had flowered into the same resolve' (*W*, p. 147), while, after the ferry accident, the doctor was impressed by the 'generous anxiety' (*W*, p. 369) of the domestic staff at the Sellman menage when they feared that their employers' children had drowned. If only, he reflected, 'it could be husbanded and directed, this sympathy, this compassion, this decency', because essentially there was

... no such thing as hatred of man for man, but merely hatred of man for his own blunders, for those errors in judgment, those failures in imagination, whereby the graciousness of life was denied to half of humanity. (*W*, p. 369)

With the impoverished folk at Fishermen's Flat, Dark suggested that economic inequality, by confining them to the restriction of their own world, deprived them of experiencing other worlds, thus limiting their options and preventing any clear view of the way ahead on the life journey. In the same way, wealth was shown to become an obstacle to the spiritual growth of people like the egoistic Arthur and Lorna who, detached from the concerns of common humanity, existed in their own closed world of privilege. Dark demonstrated that frustrated workers like Jack suffered the loss of selfhood and the means of advancement because their well-being was at the mercy of nameless others who wielded economic power, while their labour, instead of making an inestimable contribution to progress, was wasted. The behaviour of the wealthy Hegarty family showed that parents had the power to warp the spiritual growth of their own children by firmly entrenching in their minds an acceptance of class division as inevitable.

The novelist's practical idealism was exercised, when, in the face of Lesley's vague, sentimental sympathy for the poor, Roger insisted that the problem of economic inequality would be resolved only when it was made the subject of unbiased, academic investigation. It was as a practical idealist, too, that Dark criticised people like Sim and his mother who failed to convert theory into action. For all their nebulous, idealistic hopes for a fairer world and their consciousness of the misuse of privilege and power, they took no practical steps toward improving the lot of unemployed workers like Jack.

In the next chapter I shall consider Dark's opposition to the process by which she believed the populace had reached a stage of apathy so pervasive that it deprived a great body of people of the power of independent, critical thinking. Consequently, as she pointed out, they were left a prey to leaders who, lacking political expertise, failed to promote the well-being and development of those whom they should have served.