

## Chapter Five

### EDUCATION - 'Untaught and uncomprehending'

In discussing the 'intellectual side of civilisation' in Australia, Dark as social historian accused the educational system of being 'pathetically inadequate for the task of developing such culture.'<sup>1</sup> Her treatment of the crippling effects of inferior education swept from 1799 into the 1940s, as she pointed out that education was a human right, and that a well-educated populace capable of forming sensible and well-informed opinions was a necessary requirement for both individual and social progress.<sup>2</sup> The novelist protested that any educational system which failed to investigate and develop the latent possibilities within each human being must become a serious obstacle on the life journey, and she reproached the narrow-minded, parochial leaders who tolerated any such organisation.

In *Storm of Time*, however, it was Conor Mannion's involvement with the barbarous convict system which shaped her education, in the course of which she concluded that, if the minds of human beings were 'enlightened by a more general diffusion of learning, the temptation to evil would be removed.' (*ST*, p. 472) Conor was born with 'the nervous, restless itch' (*ST*, p. 203) of worldly curiosity and an open, inquiring mind. In her secluded life in Ireland, as a child 'she had found company in the books that lined her grandfather's study' (*ST*, p. 123), books which stimulated that curiosity and also a desire to travel, so that when, at sixteen, she was betrothed to the much older Stephen Mannion, he was more than a little disconcerted by her persistence in asking peculiarly pertinent questions about New South Wales and its colonists.

Two years later they married and he took her to the colony and to Beltrasna, his pastoral property on the Nepean, where he was constantly dismayed at her possession 'of a degree of curiosity about places and people which was ... unusual in a young lady.' (*ST*, p. 99) His dismissal of her 'incessant questions' with the weary accusation, 'You have no

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<sup>1</sup> Dark, 'Australia and the Australians', *Australia Week-end Book*, Vol. 3, 1944, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. H. G. Wells, *The History of Mr. Polly*, London, 1910, in which that moralist showed his concern with the inadequacies of popular education.

knowledge of the world', elicited the sensible response:

I am most conscious of that, ... but how am I to correct my ignorance if I do not ask questions? And of whom should I ask them, if not of you? (*ST*, p. 103)

As she later wrote in her journal, she was 'at nineteen, a shocking ignoramus', both 'untaught and uncomprehending' (*ST*, p. 200), and she deemed her ignorance as 'a poverty of the Spirit.' (*NB*, pp. 6-7 ) Experience was to be her teacher, but the authoritative Mannion, arrogantly assuming 'the inadequacy of female understanding' (*ST*, p. 563), was determined to thwart her education, insisting that it was his task to shield her from the colony's 'sordid concerns.' (*ST*, p. 103) She even more forcefully contended, 'A lady's ears cannot be over-delicate in this colony' (*ST*, p. 218), for she sensed that here there were no British barriers, and that 'things came close about you - close, clear, demanding, not to be ignored.' (*ST*, p. 127)

Then Dark's broad vision mirrored the 'maimed humanity' (*ST*, p. 133) of all the world's underprivileged in one convict, Finn, one of Ireland's sorely oppressed who 'had rebelled against the laws of his land, and was paying for that rebellion with servitude for life.' (*ST*, p.111) Conor's way to personal enlightenment began when she watched two felons, one of them Finn, straining to lift river stones for the construction of her rose garden. Suddenly she became aware, with shock and repugnance, of

... their sweat-streaked, unshaven ugliness, their gauntness, their strange expression of exhaustion and dammed-back revolt (*ST*, p. 125),

so that, for the first time, she saw them in their 'alarming individuality' (*ST*, p. 201) instead of as 'mere moving automata, disregarded.' (*ST*, p. 125) Conor 'had always thought the lower classes set apart as by some act of God - naturally, inevitably, finally' (*ST*, p. 127), but now, as she watched Finn face the overseer with a look of hatred and contempt, combined with something which was 'implacable, but ... also patient' (*ST*, 126), she had a flash of insight into the depth of the 'vast, impersonal enmity' (*ST*, p. 127) with which the degraded underdogs regarded their 'betters':

The thought flashed and vanished, like lightning. She was blind again, but with the memory of having seen. (*ST*, p. 126)

When a boulder crushed Finn's leg, Dark had Conor break through this enmity and establish a strange, fleeting moment of communication with him, 'a kind of truce declared' (*ST*, p. 131), during which he muttered that 'men would dare anything for liberty.' (*ST*, p. 555) About to become a mother, she, too, felt imprisoned, for she was miserably aware that 'she had never escaped from her childhood.' (*ST*, p. 203) Her ignorance was 'like a wall through whose chinks she saw only fragments of a bewildering and incomprehensible whole' (*ST*, p. 184), a wall which balked her advance on the life journey. Finn, however, had given her 'a glimpse of what was outside' (*ST*, p. 203), so that, invading 'the false serenity in which Stephen had enclosed her life' (*ST*, p. 137) was a new consciousness of her husband's assigned convicts as men sunk deep in misery, and she felt 'their ugliness and servitude as she had never felt it before.' (*ST*, p. 133)

Her progress to any deeper understanding of this outside world was slow, but 'she was seeking it all the time' (*ST*, p. 219), and, in the harshness and cruelty of such an environment, 'she felt herself sometimes almost at grips with it.' (*ST*, p. 226) She soon learnt 'that an active mind will find food for its thoughts somewhere' (*ST*, p. 224), and callers to Beltrasna supplied that food with, for example, their account of the brutal treatment meted out to the convicts by that immoral and 'inhuman monster' (*ST*, p. 222), the captain of the transport, *Atlas*. As she brooded over the disturbing thoughts which those visitors provoked, she found herself 'wringing the last fragment of enlightenment they had to offer, as a starving man might gnaw endlessly at a bone':

Such enlightenment as she won was less the steady light of intellectual comprehension than the intermittent bonfire-flare of emotion. Her knowledge was too scant, and what there was of it too faulty, for a successful plunge beneath that ugly and confusing surface of life where incidents occurred. (*ST*, pp. 224-25)

As to why there should be such ugly incidents, she could find no answer 'save the brutality, the duplicity, the greed and the malice of individual men.'

(*ST*, p. 225)

Finn was conscious 'not only of shackles made of iron, but of others, invisible, which held men's minds imprisoned' (*ST*, p. 296), and when the overseer discovered him 'attempting to introduce pernicious, inflammatory and revolutionary doctrines' (*ST*, p. 230) by opening the minds of his fellow convicts to Tom Paine's tract, *Common Sense*, Mannion, with 'cold, implacable cruelty' (*ST*, p. 227), had him flogged. Conor defied her outraged husband with her spirited plea for mercy: 'I abhor cruelty, and here there is naught but cruelty'. Rescuing a few pages of the tract from the fire where Mannion had thrown it, she read Paine's impassioned claim that 'more worth is one honest man to society and in the sight of God than all the crowned ruffians.' (*ST*, p. 228) Shocked though she was, this rousing protest against oppression, together with Paine's cry for 'an asylum for mankind' (*ST*, p. 229) seemed to her to be 'noble and enlightened.' (*ST*, p. 260)

Spiritually and emotionally estranged from her husband, she began to forge her own way ahead, evading him 'as an obstruction in her path.' (p. 254) She reached the reasonable conclusion 'that in so new and large a land there should surely be decent subsistence for all, and even ... freedom for all.' (*ST*, p. 259) Yet Dark demonstrated the way in which ignorance blocked the way to any such freedom when she had Finn's fellow convicts 'repel him with their stubborn disbelief' (*ST*, 298) as he tried to persuade them that they could find salvation 'in this land, so lightly marked as yet by tradition', where 'new patterns of life seemed possible.' Their inability to plan ahead defeated him: 'Sometimes he could strike fire from them, but it was a fire like the flaring of dead leaves - hot, fierce, and quickly dead.' (*ST*, p. 298)

After Johnny Prentice effected Finn's escape, Conor's worldly education advanced apace as she pursued what was, according to her disapproving husband, 'a perverse interest in matters of no concern to a gentlewoman.' (*ST*, p. 379) On periodical visits to Sydney, which she began to see as 'the great world in miniature' (*ST*, p. 136), she started to take 'a lively interest in the botanical curiosities of the country', all the time gathering gossip

... upon a variety of subjects, from irregular unions and

illegitimate children to legal actions, commercial intrigues and political manoeuvres. (*ST*, p. 380)

This she regarded as 'not knowledge, but the raw material of knowledge', which she hoped to 'sort, and turn and consider' (*ST*, p. 380) upon her return to Beltrasna. From her secluded life she came suddenly upon the fast growing unrest 'whose menace had been present since the foundation of the colony' (*ST*, p. 137), and was puzzled by the way in which the people contributed to the instability of the colony by forming warring factions, changing sides, 'attracted by some prospect of advantage, ... goaded by spite, driven by fear.' (*ST*, p. 380) Her mind was confused but curious, for while she regarded money-making as 'not only natural but praiseworthy', she questioned the morality of 'business transactions whose devious ways she could not follow', in which 'the most estimable and respected people were involved' (*ST*, p. 380):

Her scraps of knowledge made no clear pattern in her mind. They yielded what was worse - an ugly, amorphous impression of rapacity and corruption, of hypocrisy, trickery, slander and intimidation. (*ST*, p. 281)

When Johnny and Finn raided Beltrasna with the idea of putting into practice their dream of freeing more convicts, Finn was taken captive. In the course of his relentless flogging the near-hysterical Conor intervened, snatching the lash away, whipping the overseer over the face and commanding that the convict be taken to the house. For somehow, even though Finn had done nothing more than answer her questions, 'he had claimed a part of her, and would not let it go', while between them

... this thing which took no account of his sex or hers, but sped arrow-like from his humanity to pierce her own, was too strange to be welcomed, but too strong to be denied. (*ST*, p. 557)

Finn had revealed to her the evils of social injustice and when, dying, he was thrust into the storeroom, Dark had Conor make a moral choice to obey her own conscience, to be true to herself. She knew that 'what she had seen had thrown her irrevocably on his side of the gulf that had yawned between them', and just being with Finn in his agony became for her the

fulfilment of her human potential: 'To be with him was a complete act; her body merely prepared to follow a spirit which had already joined him.' (*ST*, p. 561) In the absence of Mannion and the overseers she tried to revive the convict, and to ratify 'the emotion so frighteningly aroused in her' which led her to the 'condemnation and abhorrence of the whole machinery of her society.' (*ST*, p. 562) Searching for reasons for these feelings, she could 'find no sanction of her pity', for 'every passage of her mind was blocked somewhere by unyielding dogmas, traditional maxims', by 'rules hammered into her ... and tirelessly reiterated by every authority she had been taught to venerate':

She had doubted, but never before challenged her society - only travelled with it, acquiescent in the smooth path it offered - and she was shaken now by the rage of unreasoning conviction with which she could condemn it. (*ST*, p. 562)

Unable to refute established standards, or even question them, she 'could only retreat, as she was doing now, into her newly-discovered self, and resist.' (*ST*, p. 563)

When he regained consciousness, Finn made his choice, too, to be true to himself, to strive toward the personal goal of freedom which had beckoned him throughout his life, and he crawled to the door, demanding that she open it. Conor, 'so ignorant before his tragic knowledge' (*ST*, p. 563), yet recognised the rightness of that choice:

He could lie here - to live or die - in the knowledge of captivity; or go out and die in the illusion of freedom. She felt ashamed before the clarity of his delirious thought; humbled by the confidence with which he could still see the path he must take; awed by the superhuman endurance with which he could force his wrecked body along it. She opened the door and they stumbled through. (*ST*, p. 564)

So she helped him on the way, falling as he fell, swept from 'her safe and sheltered world.' (*NB*, p. 39) 'We escaped - and you are free now' (*ST*, p. 564), she told him, knowing that now she, too, was free to make her own way, for both had achieved 'some kind of triumph' (*ST*, p. 575), and 'his eyes told her, before death made them blank, that he had felt it too.' (*ST*, p. 564)

Conor's way eventually led her to Mark Harvey, the Mannion boys' former tutor, who had opened a school for the sons of convicts and ex-convicts in Sydney. In this venture he was encouraged by Dark's Governor Bligh who doubted 'if there [was] a nobler work than the instruction of the young.' (*ST*, p. 442) After Johnny Prentice murdered Mannion, Conor moved her household to Sydney, and, in *No Barrier*, Dark told of her marriage to Mark and of her fulfilment through their rewarding work in the school, where the children of free tradesmen and artisans at last sat with those of convicts. Conor found her direction in life as she eased 'the deprivations of the dispossessed' (*NB*, p. 314), both materially and spiritually, discovering as she did so that it was less alms than sympathy which comforted most, and that

... it was this, perhaps, that must always open the way for changes that improve the lot of man; for the heart stirred the mind to seek solutions, and the stirred mind, in turn, exploring and expounding, provided that accumulating reservoir of facts and knowledge upon which other minds, goaded by uneasy hearts, could draw. (*NB*, p. 314)

In the 1920s there was abroad in Australia 'an upsurge of interest in the relationship between sexuality, marriage, and human reproduction',<sup>3</sup> and Dark considered these issues in *Slow Dawning*, setting the novel in the fictional country town, Kawarra, where there remained a great deal of nineteenth-century, middle-class prudery and general ignorance concerning physical health. As a doctor, the protagonist, Valerie, found it hard to 'understand the inexplicable':

It had taken her some time to accept the fact that, ... to the masses, a working knowledge of one's own body was 'not nice'; many days and nights of horror to realize that men and women produce unwanted children ... in poverty and filth, through prudish ignorance or sheer callous indifference. (*SD*, p. 35)

Anne Summers claimed that contraceptives and abortifacients were widely

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<sup>3</sup> A. Curthoys, 'Eugenics, Feminism, and Birth Control: The Case of Marion Piddington', *op. cit.*, p. 73.

advertised and available to all classes in Australia from the 1880s,<sup>4</sup> and, in the years immediately following the Great War, various groups, such as the eugenicists, had been insisting that sex education would prove a vital weapon in the battle against venereal disease. Yet Dark's character, the elderly Dr. McNab, had to fight a 'war against ignorance, prejudice and dishonesty' and he recalled with disgust the many times he had delivered

... illegitimate babies, babies with venereal disease, idiot babies. And all about them he seemed to see like a mist ... damning them, prudery and superstition, clammy, unresisting, but closing again into a wall after his tearing hands. (*SD*, p. 31)

Of this battle against ignorance Eric Dark wrote that

... it can be convincingly argued that faulty education causes more ill-health and death than any other factor in our life today,<sup>5</sup>

and the novelist illustrated this with Valerie and the tubercular mother. When the doctor suggested to the woman that, for the sake of her daughters' health, she must be isolated, she found herself 'up against a rock of ignorant sentimentality' when her patient insisted that she 'couldn't bear to part with them.' (*SD*, p. 129) This demonstrated Eric Dark's contention that, when doctors began waging 'a crusade for perfect health',

... [t]he group of men chosen to organise and ceaselessly carry on the propaganda will find themselves continually up against heart-breaking difficulties and prejudices.<sup>6</sup>

Charlatans abounded in Kawarra, enlisted to 'treat incurable diseases with quack remedies.' (*SD*, p. 35) As Dr. McNab said in his broad Scottish accent,

They love a charlatan wi' his red bulb better than a doctor wi' his stethoscope; he's reason, but the other's mystery, which is sae much more intriguing. (*SD*, p. 259-60)

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<sup>4</sup> A. Summers, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

<sup>5</sup> E. P. Dark, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

<sup>6</sup> E. P. Dark, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

Valerie, 'who feared nothing but ignorance' (*SD*, p. 175), was anguished to see

... a woman die in agony from a cancer of the throat, and leave her daughter penniless because the herbalist who had promised a cure had had all her money. (*SD*, pp. 35-36)

Advertising had proliferated in the 1920s and exploitative mass-publicity did much to popularise 'quack' medicines. When, in Wells's *Tono-Bungay*,<sup>7</sup> George denounced the valueless patent medicine which he and his uncle had concocted with the accusation, 'it's a damned swindle', Ponderevo's reply, 'After all, there's no harm in the stuff - and it may do good', would have appealed to many in Kowarra. Her housekeeper shocked Valerie with the tale of a sister who, rather than carry out the doctor's instructions regarding her pneumonia-stricken child, put her trust in a neighbour's bottle of 'Nunn's Neumonia Nuts.' (*SD*, p. 93) As the girl reflected, 'In one little old woman it's a joke, but in thousands of little old women it's a catastrophe' (*SD*, p. 92), with their ignorance 'barring the way' (*SD*, p. 94) to any kind of improvement in their well-being. The idealistic Valerie was unwillingly forced to the conclusion that in a world 'where incredible stupidity breeds crime and disease and all their attendant miseries' (*SD*, p. 151), the people would not let themselves be helped, and she was practical enough to accept the fact 'that one cannot heal where one's healing is rejected', or 'help and improve people against their will.' (*SD*, p. 35)

Dark's condemnatory depiction of the naive Kitty's prudish mother perhaps owed some of its force to the teaching, in those years, of the sex-educator, Marion Piddington, who claimed not only that sexual ignorance and prudery undermined the well-being of both the individual and the race, but that parents were predominantly responsible for the sex education of their children.<sup>8</sup> Conditioned herself to the conception of sex as shameful, Mrs. Ray entertained a 'proud conviction of having done well' (*SD*, p. 47) in keeping her daughter, nineteen and about-to-be-married, 'as ignorant of everything

<sup>7</sup> H. G. Wells, *Tono-Bungay* (1909), in *Tono-Bungay and A Modern Utopia*, London, undated, p. 106.

<sup>8</sup> Curthoys, *op. cit.*, p. 84. Marion Piddington was Dark's aunt.

pertaining to sex as a child of three.' (*SD*, p. 48) Dark's central plea here, as elsewhere, was for a change of such distorted social values. Kitty's mother, with a mind 'shackled by conventions and sublimely ignorant of anything beyond the price of groceries and the latest fashion in hats' (*SD*, p. 28), typified the puritanical outlook and limited horizons of so many women in those years, a limitation which warped their own and their children's growth.

Questioning the morality of these attitudes, the writer aptly illustrated their destructive psychological effects when, after a 'lifetime of furtiveness and prudery' (*SD*, p. 85) as her mother 'stealthily [skirted] the borders of sexland' (*SD*, p. 50), Kitty's ignorance became a serious impediment to any kind of development. For 'not only her womanhood had been starved, ... but her brains and her character' (*SD*, p. 110), so that, dreading the unknown physical aspects of marriage, she wanted to withdraw from what, to her, had become 'loathsome, shameful Life.' (*SD*, p. 52) Although the 'murky curtain of her ignorance had been inevitably torn' as 'a gleam had come to her here, a glimmer there' (*SD*, p. 53), it was only when Kitty consulted Valerie about 'all the dreadful fragments of half-knowledge' (*SD*, p. 52) which she had gathered about marriage that her 'warped and repressed womanhood' (*SD*, p. 81) broke free and she was able to confront the realities of life which had previously been 'walled up by some monstrous, hideous obstruction.' (*SD*, p. 80)

Dark went on, in *The Little Company*, to consider the damage inflicted on the general public by what she saw as 'that misbegotten monstrosity' (*TLC*, p. 207), the Australian education system which pertained in the first four decades of the twentieth century. The character, Gilbert Massey, remembered his own education as being 'like a fish net, more holes than substance' (*TLC*, p. 18), providing no stimulation for questing minds and no expansion of consciousness. Instead of encouraging individual talents and original thinking, the system was bent, instead, on standardisation, on 'spiritual mass-production' (*TLC*, p. 52), while the officially prescribed, ready-made opinions which were forced upon the students shaped them into undesirable uniformity. This, Eric Dark ironically called 'the implanting in the child's mind of a firm belief in the status quo':

Naturally in a State system there must be central control, but that need not necessarily mean a deadening uniformity; the duty of a central authority is to provide the best possible framework for education, and then encourage the widest variety within its limits - which should be very elastic'.<sup>9</sup>

Looking back, Gilbert's sister, Marty, born in 1900, realised that up to the year 1914 'she and the Century had seemed to share ... an age of innocence, of unsophistication, of downright naïvete.' (*TLC*, p. 37) Fuming at the under-estimation of children's intelligence, Dark made Marty accuse the authorities of holding a 'black screen of ignorance before their eyes' (*TLC*, p. 38), of repressing their curiosity lest they 'uncover the indolence, the shirking, the confusion and hypocrisy of adult thinking':

Keep them carefree, keep them merry, and above all, ...  
keep them ignorant while we wreck the machinery of their  
lives! (*TLC*, p. 38)<sup>10</sup>

She was shocked at the basic unreality of a public education system which was irrelevant to the everyday lives and futures of its pupils.<sup>11</sup> Never were they alerted to the significance of topical events, to the forces which were shaping their times, nor given any intimation that they were 'living in history' (*TLC*, p. 38), let alone taught social morality such as 'the fundamental relationship between man and man.' (*TLC*, p. 38) The accumulation of facts was assumed to be knowledge, and Gilbert recollected being forced to 'recite the rivers of New South Wales from north to south' (*TLC*, p. 25), while the

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<sup>9</sup> E. P. Dark, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>10</sup> See D. Adelaide (ed.), *A Window in the Dark*, unpublished manuscript by D. Cusack (1973), Canberra, 1991, pp. 42, 43 and 74, in which Cusack, referring to the 1920s, wrote: 'It was a time when we were all ... disorientated by the colonial type of education which taught us to believe that there was nothing historically worthwhile in our own country and nothing worthwhile from a literary point of view in our own generation anywhere. ... We were an outpost of Empire indeed, and education was determined that we should remain one.'

<sup>11</sup> Cp. A. Huxley, *Ends and Means, An Enquiry into the Nature of Ideals and into the Methods employed for their Realization*, London, 1941, p. 195: 'Liberal education should foster intelligence and be the source of a principle of integration, integration of knowledge and experience.'

Cp. also Huxley, *Island, op. cit.* pp. 237-38. On the island of Pala educators assessed the harmony of each child's physical and mental elements.

See also Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 102: Referring in general to elementary schools, the writer claimed that 'the problems of life at large, the problems of family existence, the meaning of the community, the relation of the family to the community, even the relations of fathers and mothers, the relations of parents and children to one another within and outside of the family, are for the most part handled indirectly, or not handled at all.'

character, Tom Drew, at last learning to appreciate the beauty of his native state on the trip to Coolami, complained that 'school lessons took the glamour out of a thing.' (*RC*, p. 204)<sup>12</sup>

The ineffectuality of such an education was compounded by the Massey family's situation in which their conservative father's 'merciless repetition of dogmatic statements' had 'tied up' the minds of the adolescent Gilbert and Marty, and reduced life to an inflexible pattern which, although 'it *looked* all right' (*TLC*, p. 124), seemed to have no meaning in it and offered no apparent way out of it. As Gilbert fretted, 'Yet we were too ignorant to know where it was false.' (*TLC*, p. 124) Even at twenty-one he was 'sublimely ignorant, not only of international issues, but even of the domestic national policies of his own country.' (*TLC*, p. 64) Consequently, he remembered resentfully, as adults he and Marty had to get rid of 'much accumulated rubbish' before they 'could learn to think.' (*TLC*, p. 116)

Commenting on the state of education in the 1920s and 1930s, Dark's fellow-author Brian Penton admitted that Australians 'asked the educationist to provide no more than just sufficient equipment for a directionless amble into the future.'<sup>13</sup> Such miseducation meant that most of the pupils were to grow up with no intellectual vitality. Instead of questioning the circumstances of their lives, these people had minds which were at once 'incorrigibly apathetic, sentimental, superstitious, ignorant and undisciplined.' (*TLC*, p. 125) In profound ignorance of the social and political forces which govern humanity, they were aware only of their own personal struggles. The novelist had Gilbert cite, for instance, the way in which the public impeded society's progress by neglecting to evaluate the worth of political candidates:

You put a mark on a ballot paper because you knew you'd be fined two quid if you didn't. And your cross helped to elect John Snooks - but what the hell did you know about John Snooks? (*TLC*, p. 126)

This resulted in the misplaced trust of people like Elsa's bland friend, Baxter.

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<sup>12</sup> Cp. F. Eldershaw, 'History as the Raw Material of Literature', in *Royal Australian Historical Society Journal and Proceedings*, Vol. 20, Part 1, 1934, p. 8. Eldershaw was shocked at 'the eradication of creativeness in the young by overburdening their minds with information and substituting memory work for thinking or creation.'

<sup>13</sup> B. Penton, *Advance Australia - Where?* London, 1943, p. 43.

Gilbert was disgusted when that young man dismissed the opinion of a Domain orator who criticised the wisdom of a particular wartime strategy with the vapid comment, 'Mistake, you know - all this agitation. People in charge know best.' Cautioning him against such an infantile clinging to authority, Gilbert insisted that 'the theory that those in power know best and mustn't be criticised is a dangerous one', adding, 'Unless you *want* a dictatorship. It's Hitler's favourite - in fact, his only theory.' (TLC, p. 196)

According to Gilbert, the Great War 'was a nightmare from which most people had awakened only to roll over with a sigh of relief and go to sleep again', while those few alert ones who, 'with tiresome, persistent, and ill-mannered vociferousness', had interrupted the sleep of the majority with their warnings, were labelled 'agitators, scare-merchants, war-mongers.' (TLC, p. 18) He was one of the few who 'had been roused by the clamour to listen ... reluctantly, and then with rising anxiety to the hullabaloo' (TLC, p. 18), while the Depression, another 'bad dream', stirred more sleepers 'with the shocking ruthlessness of a douse of cold water.' (TLC, p. 18) Some were still torpid, however, when 'the second nightmare' was about to engulf them, and others, 'whose sleep had drifted into coma, would never waken.' (TLC, p. 18)<sup>14</sup>

In the interwar years, 'the uneasy thirties' (TLC, p. 37), Dark saw most Australians as being socially and culturally isolated from the currents of thought in Western Europe and in the United States, and by no means equipped to face a political crisis. With the Second World War impending, she made her character, Gilbert, fear that 'the intellect of humanity in general, and of himself in particular' (TLC, p. 18) was ill-equipped 'to come to grips with the man-made forces now almost uncontrollable by man.' (TLC, p. 132) Finding himself 'continually betrayed by his ignorance' (TLC, p. 19), he became convinced that education was the only means of breaching the 'solid prison walls of custom, conditioning, prejudice and propaganda' (TLC, p. 179) which blocked the way on his life journey. So, after 'innumerable false starts' (TLC, p. 19), Gilbert set out on 'his ghastly road of trying to cram a lifetime's education into a few years' (TLC, p. 132), making 'intellectual

<sup>14</sup> Cp. D. Walker, *Dream and Disillusion: A search for Australian Cultural identity*, Canberra, 1976, p. 165: 'In October 1936, on her return from Europe, it seemed to Nettie Palmer that Australians needed to be shaken from complacent slumber to face the realities of a violent and uncertain world.'

explorations' (*TLC*, p. 179) into the state of society and keen 'to probe, pry, analyse and criticise.' (*TLC*, p. 132) He pushed on,

... feeling his way through the fog of his 'conditioning', stubbing his toes against his own prejudices, bumping into time-honoured traditions, endlessly beguiled by some fancied gleam of light from a tempting by-path, only to find it a blind-alley, and return again to a road of still Stygian blackness. (*TLC*, p. 18)

With 'a certain native habit of perseverance', (*TLC*, p. 19), he doggedly persisted. Dark showed him eventually finding a path through the 'sociological labyrinth', gaining in confidence and overcoming the habit of 'baulking' and 'making nervous attempts to bypass a problem, or scuffling efforts to avoid it altogether.' (*TLC*, p. 20) As light began to filter through the darkness, Gilbert realised that he must reject the conservative ideas which his father had forced upon him, and his political thought became increasingly leftist, even though the act of rejection of his old beliefs was 'as painful as the stripping of bandages from a dried wound.' (*TLC*, p. 19) At this point it is interesting to examine the way in which Gilbert's experience paralleled that of Eric Dark. As Eleanor Dark told an interviewer:

... during the depression years Eric became more and more perturbed about the conditions of the people as he saw them exemplified in his patients and about economic factors generally. As a mere matter of commonsense he began to look for reasons for a condition that allowed hundreds of thousands of people to suffer want in a country that was producing more than enough to feed, clothe and shelter them all. ... he went from book to book till he had completed the painful process of moving from Right to Left.<sup>15</sup>

Dark pointed out that the many who never dared to think for themselves were incapable of forming intelligent judgments. As the Second World War dragged on, the legislators' ineffectual bombast did little to enlighten them, with radio news broadcasts consisting of 'the tedious

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<sup>15</sup> Devanny, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

See also Giuffre, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-7. Explaining his change from Tory to socialist, Eric Dark stated that 'the Depression ... did more than anything else to finish my turning. I set out to understand, if I could, the economics and politics of the Depression. Naturally, I became a socialist.'

quotation of unilluminating “statements” ’ scarcely to be endured for ‘the few meagre grains of news among the chaff of verbiage.’ (*TLC*, p. 130)

The people were politically naïve. Nick complained of an acquaintance who was ‘one of those who think socialism wouldn’t let you own your own toothbrush.’ (*TLC*, p. 34) Unfamiliar with communist ideology, most Australians allowed themselves to be manoeuvred by what Marty termed ‘the Parliamentary sheep-dogs’ (*TLC*, p. 142) into the belief ‘that there was a bogey called Communism’ which was being ‘slyly introduced by means of subversive books.’ (*TLC*, p. 137) Phyllis’s angry charge that Gilbert had become a communist - to which he wearily replied, ‘You haven’t the faintest idea what a communist is’ (*TLC*, p. 72) - reflected Dark’s perception of the general attitude of ‘petty prejudice and mean-spirited distrust’ (*TLC*, p. 141) which, in Australia, prevailed well into the 1950s. Leonore Baxter, writing about Eric Dark, commented that then Australia ‘entered its own era of “McCarthyism” ’, and she quoted his claim that at that time, ‘once you put a foot left of centre, you were dubbed a Communist’.<sup>16</sup> The novelist’s Gilbert was made to complain that

... ill-informed dim-witted people who never put two ideas together for themselves in their lives had the colossal impudence to accuse us of being traitors. (*TLC*, p. 143)

Discussing the general public’s ‘right-about face to the Left’ when Russia joined the allies, Marty was angry that inadequate political education had the people ‘looking around wildly for some convention to take the place of the one that [had] been so rudely snatched from them’, with their minds ‘baulking, jittering, shuffling, ... huddling like sheep waiting to be told which way to go.’ (*TLC*, p. 142) Gilbert assured her, ‘They’ll work differently when they’ve been differently educated’ (*TLC*, p. 149), but she exploded with scorn:

Heaven smite them for their ignorance! They know nothing now in the way of essentials that they couldn’t have known for the past six or seven years at least. (*TLC*, p. 143)

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<sup>16</sup> L. Baxter, ‘“Fires in the Fall”’: The Story of a rational reformer, Dr. Eric Dark’, *New Doctor*, No. 32, June, 1984, p. 25.

Further close reading of the historical trilogy finds Dark blaming Conor Mannion's lack of education for the powerlessness she experienced in the harsh world of the penal colony. Instead of protecting her, the surrounding walls of ignorance separated her from the realities of life and hindered any advance in her understanding of the values of the new society of which she had become a part. It was the convict, Finn, who helped her escape her prison when he aroused in her a sense of social responsibility which then forced her to abandon conventional thinking, to reflect upon, judge and eventually to rise above the inherited prejudices of her class.

In *Slow Dawning* the novelist exposed the dangers of ignorance in a community where, in the face of available knowledge, the people's unwillingness to confront the facts about the workings of the human body, and their consequent ignorance of sensible health procedures, led to physical disease and death. With Kitty's confusion, Dark remonstrated that, in this puritanical society, prudery born from ignorance warped women's lives and denied them the chance to develop the sexuality which played such an important part in the cultivation of a satisfying life.

The problems of the characters in *The Little Company* allowed the novelist to demonstrate that education develops in individuals the perspective for observing the world through which they must journey, and the nature of the obstacles which they must overcome, thus providing some idea of what existence holds for them. She questioned the wisdom of authorities who promoted an education system which failed to encourage in people the mental and moral freedom to apply ethical principles to their behaviour. By withholding information about the forces which shaped both national and international societies, the novels implied that such a system did nothing to encourage understanding between different peoples, the lack of which allowed world leaders to instigate wars.

As a result of the stunting of the growth of independent, reflective and original thinking, the great body of citizens was content to be led and willing to conform to the status quo.<sup>17</sup> Thus, by failing to use their own critical

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<sup>17</sup> See D. Horne, *The Lucky Country Revisited*, Melbourne, 1987, p. 45: Horne contended that this led to 'a cowardice of the imagination.'

See also R. H. Tawney, 'Keep the Workers' Children in Their Place', in Hinden, *op. cit.*

intelligence and initiative in a socially and morally responsible way they did nothing to strengthen the spirit of communal solidarity and raise the general level of society. Clearly Dark, like so many slightly earlier English reformers, saw the need for learning, elucidation and understanding of their society as the first need of any people who were intent upon social and moral reform. Clearly, too, the onus was on the individual, since there appeared to be no chance of real emancipation coming through either parliamentary or educational leadership.

Eric Dark wrote:

... if men had been taught to understand themselves and the world about them, they would be able to utilise (as they cannot at present) the technical knowledge and power which they possess for the abolition of the last remnants of poverty. <sup>18</sup>

In the next chapter I intend to examine the way in which, according to the novelist, the people misused this technological power.

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<sup>18</sup> E. P. Dark, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

## Chapter Six

### THE MISUSE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY - 'doing evil more efficiently'

'Our age has been captured by the scientists and technicians, who are the dispensers of many marvels',<sup>1</sup> Dark wrote, affirming the fact that science, with its resulting inventions and technologies, had assumed control of modern life. As a writer she was always socially progressive in her appreciation of science - in the form of intellectual enquiry - as being a liberating force which enriched life and expanded human powers, thus playing a crucial part in humanity's quest for enlightenment. Saluting 'the miraculous efficiency which could give to the poorest a comfort, a security once beyond the reach of kings' (*Sa.S*, p. 151), she bowed to the capacity of technology to ease the rigours of the life journey.<sup>2</sup> By the early 1930s, however, for concerned people there had come an element of dissatisfaction with the way in which the use of machines had failed to produce any sense of spiritual well-being,<sup>3</sup> so that Dark was moved to question whether the ideal of progress had become a false ideal, and she voiced the fear that, for technocratic Westerners,

... nine-tenths of [our] 'progress' has been a mere elaboration and improvement of the technique, as opposed to the art of living. ('Preface', *TTL*, p. 9)<sup>4</sup>

In those years the immensely successful science fantasies of H. G. Wells - such as *The Time Machine: An Invention* (1895), *The Invisible Man*

<sup>1</sup> Dark, 'Appreciations of Vance and Nettie Palmer', *Meanjin*, XVIII, No. 2, 1959, p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> See Dark's enduring interest in technology in her amusing short story, 'How Uncle Aubrey Went to London,' *The Bulletin*, May 30, 1923, p. 57, in which her description of 'travelling by wireless' had some affinity with H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine: An Invention* (1895).

<sup>3</sup> Cp. R.H. Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society* (1921), London, 1961, pp. 80 and 15: 'The purpose of industry is to provide the material foundation of a good social life' and 'to bring life to body or spirit. In so far as it is governed by this end, it is among the most important of human activities.'

See also H. McQueen, *The Black Swan of Trespass*, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-3.

<sup>4</sup> Aldous Huxley, too, feared the misuse of science and technology. See L. Brander, *Aldous Huxley, A Critical Study*, London, 1969, p. 12: '[Huxley] was troubled by the use to which so many of our discoveries are put in our irresponsible and acquisitive societies.'

See also J. Brooke, *Aldous Huxley* (1954), London, 1958, p. 22: *Brave New World* (1922) featured 'a world in which humanity has been dehumanized, a world in which scientific "progress" has been produced the the *n* th degree.'

(1897) and *The War of the Worlds* (1898) - had led casual readers and critics to assume that, as the critic, Lionel Stevenson, expressed it, the writer was preaching 'the gospel of progress'. Stevenson, however, believed that a 'more perceptive reading dispels this impression', and suggested that Wells's 'portrayal of the scientist's dispassionate curiosity becomes horrifying in its implications of inhumanity and amorality'. With *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), positing as it did the 'horrifying recognition that science divorced from humane wisdom results in tyranny', Stevenson saw Wells trying 'to shake the complacency of the contemporary mind' and suggesting that 'a new absolutism of power, even more corrupt than political dictatorship, may well eventuate from scientific control of natural processes.'<sup>5</sup> Dark's novels also projected this sense of disillusionment with progress which was purely technical when she had her character, Marty wonder

... what all these technical advances were but a streamlined super-mechanism for making mistakes more quickly, being stupid on a larger scale, doing evil more efficiently, and telling lies to a greater number of people at a given time. (*TLC*, p. 97)

The sensitive character, Dr. Oliver Denning, feared that human beings were jeopardising their own welfare in that technology's 'miraculous efficiency ... was slowly robbing them of the enterprise and the zest which alone can make a life worth living.' (*SaS*, p. 151) Watching the sunbathers on Thalassa beach, Oliver was made to consider what Tawney termed the 'crippling psychological and social effects of industrial capitalism'.<sup>6</sup> He could not help wondering 'whether anything could be, finally, more disastrous to the spiritual morale of the human race than the increasing security of its own life', when, with the overcoming of natural dangers, 'all that menaced their physical security were the artificial perils of their civilisation.' (*SaS*, p. 150)

The lure of mass entertainment, another product of technology, exasperated Oliver when he noticed the crowds ignoring the natural world and 'going to the picture theatre on a perfectly gorgeous afternoon' (*SaS*, p. 119) Dark pointed out that the cinema was responsible for other human

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<sup>5</sup> L. Stevenson, *The English Novel, A Panorama*, *op.cit.*, pp. 17 and 21.

<sup>6</sup> Tawney, in Hinden, *op cit.*, p. 97.

shortcomings.<sup>7</sup> When slick American movies ushered in 'a science of beauty',<sup>8</sup> her character, the vain Lorna Sellman, became so obsessed with her appearance that she dreaded wrinkles 'with a shrinking worthier of threatening death.' (*W*, p. 126) Again, when postwar ideas of sexual liberation were linked with heady, romantic American cinema productions glamorising personal 'sex-appeal', this cultural shift led many people to discard old moral values without formulating new ones. So, in *Sun Across the Sky*, the sexually attractive Myra perfected a 'technique' with which to collect admirers, a move which deflected her on her life journey when her flirtatious ways led to expulsion from her nursing course, and to her gravitation toward a materialistically rewarding but spiritually depleting relationship with the gross Sir Frederick Gormley.

Eric Dark, too, indicated another danger of industrialisation with his conviction that 'the present social order ... has failed in the sane use of machines'. He continued:

Another madness in our present system is seen in the disastrous effects of labour saving machinery; instead of meaning more food, more clothing, better housing and more leisure, it means more unemployment, more men and women in misery, more children growing up undernourished and hopeless; instead of using machines to increase the joy and fullness of life, man is letting them slowly destroy him.<sup>9</sup>

The novels implied that all joy went out of work when it ceased to deal creatively with the production of whole things.<sup>10</sup> By harnessing human effort to machines and making individuals impersonal units with no overall

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<sup>7</sup> This is interesting in view of the fact that Dark had, according to her friend, the writer Eric Lowe, 'a plebeian passion for the screen'. (See Dark, letter to Nettie Palmer, dated 14/12/33, Palmer Papers, NLA, MS 1174 Palmer, 1/Box 6/Folder 57) She even invested modestly in the making of a film, 'When the Kellys Rode', which, suspected of glorifying bushrangers, was banned by the police. (See Dark, letter to Nettie Palmer, dated 16/5/?, Palmer Papers, NLA, MS 1174/1/4438)

Illustrating the fact that cinema-going was a seductive affair for adults in those years was the visit which the characters, Clem Hagan and Vic Moriarty, paid to the movies in Patrick White's first novel, *Happy Valley* (1939), in which cinema lechery became a mechanism of the plot.

<sup>8</sup> K. Reiger, *The Disenchantment of the Home: Modernizing the Australian Family 1880-1940*, Melbourne, pp. 81-82.

<sup>9</sup> E. P. Dark, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> See J. Lindsay, 'The Alienated Australian Intellectual', in Lee, Mead and Murnane (eds.), *The Temperament of Generations*, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

knowledge of the whole, the leaders of industry instigated a system which resulted in the labourers losing their independence and sense of purpose, so that they treated industry not as a means of benefiting society but as an end in itself. The unemployed labourer, Jack Saunders, felt this when he decided, 'It wasn't just having a job that mattered - you had to like it. It had to seem important to you.' (*W*, p.144)

Dark was one of the first writers to introduce the technological wonder of the motor car into Australian fiction. Julian Croft wrote of her celebration of powerful cars 'which give her tormented characters the freedom to commute between a traditional polarity of Australian life - the town and the bush',<sup>11</sup> and this was borne out with the elation of her character, Tom Drew, at the performance of his new Madison: 'A miracle really, this conversion of a few gallons of petrol into annihilated miles!' (*RC*, p. 36) The novelist also used the car to indicate the widening horizons of the 'new women' who were represented in her novels by her spirited young women protagonists. The character, Valerie, for instance, not only drove on her rounds a 'little Buick' (*SD*, p. 72), but was her 'own mechanic'. (*SD*, p. 274) The Australian painter, Thea Proctor, frequently featured women motorists on the cover of *The Home*, a popular magazine of the times, prompting Mary Mackay's comment:

Images of women driving cars became signifiers of women's entry into an urban life beyond the confines of the house, out into the wider world of the male domain. ... While driving a car was an opportunity open to very few women in the 1920s, the sexual superiority indicated was indexical of the new enthusiasm of women to take the initiative, to be 'in the driver's seat'.<sup>12</sup>

Yet the novelist's usual delight in technical advances was increasingly qualified by her recognition of the dangers involved in some forms of progress, and the plethora of car accidents<sup>13</sup> throughout the novels can be interpreted as a reminder of the precarious position of human beings in the

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<sup>11</sup> Croft, *op. cit.*, p. 411. This writer pointed out that Dark's celebration of motor vehicles had echoes of Futurism, the cult of speed and of the machine.

<sup>12</sup> M. Mackay, 'Almost dancing: Thea Proctor and the modern woman', in Dever, *Wallflowers and Witches*, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>13</sup> See also H. McQueen, *Gallipoli to Petrov: Arguing With Australian History*, Sydney, 1984, p. 91, where the writer suggested: 'At a surface level her distaste for civilization [is shown in the] recurrence of car accidents.'

contest of life.

Industrialisation spawns materialism, and Dark's romantic sensibility inspired in her what Vincent Buckley described as 'an aesthetic distaste for the commercial ethos',<sup>14</sup> one shared by many writers in those years. Thus Vance Palmer's disapproval was mirrored in Ernest, his character in *The Swayne Family*, who observed that 'it had been impressed upon him that the capacity to earn money was the one sure test of character',<sup>15</sup> while Eric Dark wrote caustically that

... there is only one article in the capitalism creed - that the sole motive of human effort which is worth considering is profit.<sup>16</sup>

Obviously regarding those engrossed in making money as a threat to human dignity, with a touch of romantic excess Dark presented the rapacious tycoon, Sir Frederick Gormley, with his 'never very agile brain' (*SaS*, p. 144) and 'bulging paunch' (*SaS*, p. 5), as both a ruthless, self-centred Nietzschean superman and an 'inverse cripple.'<sup>17</sup> Babbitt was no prouder of his town, Zenith,<sup>18</sup> than this acquisitive property developer was of Thalassa, 'his masterpiece.' (*SaS*, p. 7) Gormley had converted the sleepy coastal village of Murragoondah into a glossy, industrialised tourist resort, crisscrossed with 'concrete roads from which petrol bowlers sprouted like exotically-coloured growth', and on which cars came 'tearing down in hundreds.' (*SaS*, p. 6)<sup>19</sup>

Gormley's early life as a 'dingy larrikin' (*SaS*, p. 89) in the city slums

<sup>14</sup> V. Buckley, 'Intellectuals', in P. Coleman (ed.), *Australian Civilization: A Symposium* (1962), Melbourne, 1967, p. 95.

<sup>15</sup> V. Palmer, *The Swayne Family*, Sydney, 1934, p. 175.

<sup>16</sup> E. P. Dark, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>17</sup> W. Kaufmann (ed.), *The Portable Nietzsche* (1954), Harmondsworth, 1978, p. 250. In 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra: Second Part', 'Or Redemption', Zarathustra commented on 'human beings who are nothing but a big eye or a big mouth or a big belly or anything at all that is big.' For the inspiration of this image, see D. Brown, 'Christina Stead's "Drama of the Person"', *Australian Literary Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2, October, 1987, p. 143.

<sup>18</sup> See S. Lewis, *Babbitt*, New York, 1922.

<sup>19</sup> Cp. I. Turner, 'The Retreat from Reason' (1966), in Lee, Mead and Murnane (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 182, where the writer, complaining of pollution and other disadvantages of a technological society, stated that '[r]eason, which created the machines, has lost control', that 'all internal combustion engines are an abomination', and cited the petrol bowser as the 'symbol for the ultimate irrationality, the psychosis of a whole society.'

had nurtured the belief that riches were 'the only measure of success' (*SaS*, p. 89), without arousing in him any accompanying sense of social responsibility or moral restraint.<sup>20</sup> 'Money gave you power', he reasoned, 'and you used it to get more money which brought you still more power.' (*SaS*, p. 143) When the impoverished Kavanagh refused to sell him the fisherfolk's cottages which he wanted to demolish, the unworldly poet's indifference to money began to undermine Gormley's certainties, and he was forced to wonder whether perhaps money power was 'not altogether as omnipotent as he had once believed.' (*SaS*, p. 5) Dark's moral indignation at the destructive aspects of materialism was implicit in the climax of *Sun Across the Sky* when the callous businessman had the cottages destroyed, in the course of which Kavanagh was stricken with a fatal heart attack.<sup>21</sup>

In a competitive society in which the acquisition of property had become a false ideal, with the individual's worth reckoned by possessions,<sup>22</sup> Gormley took pride in his stylish car and elegant mistress:

They were both conspicuous - the last word in sophistication and expensiveness; they were both possessions which reflected credit upon their owner, which labelled him a man of seasoned taste and ripened judgment. (*SaS*, p. 142)

As Erich Fromm warned, however, 'There is no genuine strength in possession as such'.<sup>23</sup> In *Return to Coolami*, Tom Drew had directed all his energy and purpose on the life journey into heaping possessions on his wife, Millicent, yet they failed to bring either of them any sense of fulfilment. In Millicent's case, 'she did not really think of the car as being in any way her own. Her fur coat even ... was really Drew's fur coat' (*RC*, p. 11).<sup>24</sup> After the

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<sup>20</sup> See E. P. Dark, *op. cit.*, p. 23. Referring to poor housing conditions in Melbourne, Eric Dark wrote: 'One of the moral results is that juvenile delinquency in proportion to population is five times as high as in the outer suburbs.'

<sup>21</sup> See G. Greene, *England Made Me* (1935), London, 1947, pp. 229 and 233: Cp. the irresponsible ruthlessness of the tycoon, Krogh, and his henchman, Hall, toward the workmen, Andersen and his son.

<sup>22</sup> See Dark's short story, 'The Urgent Call', *The Home*, August 1, 1935, in which an aging woman realised that she had squandered her life in the 'mere lust for personal possessions.'

<sup>23</sup> Fromm, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

<sup>24</sup> This theme paralleled that of J. Galsworthy *The Man of Property* (1906), Harmondsworth, 1967.

shock of momentarily losing control of his car on the cliff top, Tom realised that he had attained his goal, in that 'there was, almost literally, nothing he couldn't buy for her' (*RC*, p. 235), yet at the same time, he had a despondent feeling that the pursuit of this goal had led them both into a cul-de-sac where he felt 'more spiritually astray than he had ever felt before.' (*RC*, p. 236) With suddenly clearer perceptions of the way ahead, his consequent decision to buy Millicent's old country home, Wondabyne, currently up for sale, was a way of breaking out of that cul-de-sac, that existence in which 'there was nothing left to fight', and of coming to grips with life on the land, a contest which would provide 'a glorious, an inexhaustible source of combat!' (*RC*, p. 291)

Ian Reid commented that 'the Depression brought a new urban consciousness into Australian writing',<sup>25</sup> and many novelists in the 1930s and 1940s demonstrated a romantic aversion to the city, seeing it, with 'all the enterprise, the wealth, the industry' (*W*, p. 177), as an obscenity embodying palpably false values.<sup>26</sup> In *Waterway*, Dark used an epigraph recounting the entry of the First Fleet into the then serene harbour and went on to describe Sydney as 'the growth whose parent cells had fastened upon the land that day' (*W*, p. 11), with the 'harmony of Nature sacrificed to the urgent discords of human progress.' (*W*, p. 238)<sup>27</sup> As her later characters followed their urban pursuits, she underlined this discord with an evocation of the city's 'strange, incoherent, ominous noises' (*W*, p. 185) and the 'smell of dust and hot pavements.' (*W*, p. 176) In the city human dignity seemed to be negated and all individuality lost, with people 'hardly more distinguishable from each other than ants.' (*W*, p. 176) The novelist stressed, however, that the people themselves were responsible for this, as

... the human individual became lost in the the city-concept

<sup>25</sup> I. Reid, 'The Australian City Novel', *Quadrant*, XIV, No. 5, 1970, p. 29.

<sup>26</sup> This attitude persisted in later years. See A. Burgess, 'Introduction', in H. Selby, Jr., *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1965), London, 1968, p. xvii: 'We look round at this great modern city, with its triumphs of technology, and wonder when it will achieve the ennoblement of man.'

<sup>27</sup> See K. B. Clarke, *Pathos of Power*, New York, 1975, pp. 11 and 8: 'Man has the intellect and the capacity to develop cities of the future that are responsive to and stimulate the soaring human spirit and the empathic quests for human communication, interaction, and love. ... Real progress comes - a community enriched and a civilization of depth and substance - when some human beings insist that the created environment reflect a respect for that which is human in man.'

of mass humanity which he had created, living and dying within crumbling walls, behind dingy curtains in labyrinthine lanes. (*TLC*, p. 150)

Among the intellectuals of the time the particular fear persisted that urban living in industrialised conditions limited the vision of the artist, that a world 'where culture comes to it through the agency of the cinema and the gramophone will presently be incapable of art'.<sup>28</sup> Vance Palmer wrote of city dwellers as 'people who've lost their guts and become bits of mechanism',<sup>29</sup> while M. Barnard Eldershaw's character, Knarf, accused the city of 'making men in its image, conditioning their characters as well as their daily lives'. In the same novel the working man, Harry Munster, saw the city as 'a strange machine for devouring men', while the Communists were driven to destroy it:

The city was the symbol of greed and profit, every stone of it was tainted; only by its utter overthrow could men free themselves from it, its numbing delights and illusory prizes.<sup>30</sup>

There was to be some disagreement with this derogatory opinion of the city. In the words of William Dean, Australian novelists still believed 'that the just city may be attainable, even if the struggle is great', and he observed that, in later novels - for instance, Patrick White's *Riders in the Chariot* (1961), George Johnston's *Clean Straw for Nothing* (1969) and Maurice Shadbolt's *Strangers and Journeys* (1972) -

... there is the recognition that it is in the cities and not in the natural world that the arts must flourish and, paradoxically, that out of the need to reject the alienation of the modern city there is a motive force to creativity.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> D. Walker, *Dream and Disillusion*, *op. cit.*, p. 151. This statement was made by the socialist, F. Sinclair (a member of Melbourne's literary circle and editor of the magazine, *Fellowship*, in the interwar years), in 'Australian Literature - The Outlook', *Age*, 12th September, 1927. See also D. Cusack, *Culture in War Time - Being Proceedings of Conference, Fellowship of Australian Writers*, Sydney, September 1, 1940. A dispirited Cusack admitted, 'The whole principle of an industrialised community is against the development of the artist.' See also B. Penton, *Think - Or Be Damned*, Sydney, 1941, where he referred to Australia as a country 'which assesses intellectual and spiritual activity at a lower rate than technical or material efficiency.'

<sup>29</sup> Palmer, *The Swayne Family*, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>30</sup> Barnard Eldershaw, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, *op. cit.*, pp. 91, 113 and 385.

<sup>31</sup> W. Dean, 'A Vision Splendid? The City in Australian Fiction', *Landfall*, No. 128, 1978, pp. 341-42.

With her prevailing broad vision, Dark moderated the romantic idea of the evil city by presenting various other practical attitudes which highlighted its more favourable attributes. There was, after all, as Tom Drew pointed out, 'other enterprise than country enterprise, other endeavour, other achievement' (*RC*, p. 61), while her working man, Jack Saunders, was 'drawn by the fascination which gregarious humanity feels in any city' (*W*, p. 176), and enjoyed its excitement, 'movement, things happening' and a sense of community with '[o]ther men round you, a sense of being one with them.' (*W*, p. 177) The character, Gilbert, too, was comfortable in his native Sydney, having lived 'not so much in this city as with it', so that 'it had seemed less an environment than a loose outer skin'. He appreciated its 'easy informality', and the way in which 'its inhabitants had built their characters together in a happy-go-lucky harmony'. Most of all he was attracted to its radiation of a kind of enjoyment of life, 'a vitality not necessarily expressed in movement or in "progress", a vitality of existence rather than of performance', yet having in it 'nothing of debility.' (*TLC*, p. 150)<sup>32</sup> Exercising her penchant for approaching her subject from different angles, however, the novelist pointed out that it was the enhancement of the natural world which contributed most to Sydney's appeal. For 'it was through no plan or virtue of its inhabitants that the city remained an adjunct of the harbour, and not the harbour of the city.' Gilbert regarded it as 'a city rescued from man by the sea', admitting that, '[b]eyond the protection of its blue water, defenceless, the city became any city.' (*TLC*, p. 150)

The suburbs were also a target for criticism, and a common cry of intellectuals was that Australians had lost their way in the quest for moral enlightenment and social harmony because of their suburban mentality. David Walker wrote, 'Minority culture and mass culture represented contending moral worlds',<sup>33</sup> and Tim Rowse saw this idea taking shape because of

... a contest between two attitudes to life: one whose intellectual horizons were broad, and which liked to look ahead and aspire to adventurous schemes of individual and

<sup>32</sup> Cp. C. Stead, *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, *op. cit.*, p. 313: Baruch commented, 'The sight of a large city always stirs me almost to prayer', and Joseph says, 'I always feel most a man when in the city; in the country, I am almost afraid, there are no voices out there.'

<sup>33</sup> Walker, 'Introduction', in P. Spearritt and D. Walker (eds.), *Australian Popular Culture*, Sydney, 1979, p. 4.

social progress; and one that was narrow, self-satisfied, materialistic and parochial.<sup>34</sup>

Dark presented the inner Sydney suburbs as barren and without appeal when, as they left the city on their way to Coolambi, her questers passed 'jumbled shops and houses, cheapish, resentful-looking.' (*RC*, p. 28) She mirrored the Drews' spiritual imprisonment in the more prosperous suburbs with her description of their luxurious home set amongst other such houses, all secure behind their 'high brick walls.' (*RC*, p. 16) There could be no progress on the life journey in places like that where Millicent chafed at the 'safe, stagnant resignation of her life.' (*RC*, p. 279)

Vance Palmer, too, was scathing about suburbia, referring to 'frowsy-minded suburban women' in 'featureless surroundings that sucked all the passion out of people except the pass on for conformity'.<sup>35</sup> D. H. Lawrence was aware of the human alienation, the keeping-themselves-to-themselves conformism, implicit in 'the little square bungalows dot-dot-dot, close together and yet apart',<sup>36</sup> and later Patrick White would create his Sarsaparilla, symbolising all the mediocrity and materialism inherent in modern life.<sup>37</sup> The essayist, Walter Murdoch, condemned the 'suburban spirit', and advised young Australians that they 'must not tamely settle down to the unadventurous, barn-yard sort of life to which modern civilization is apt to condemn us',<sup>38</sup> while Manning Clark's statement that 'by the mid-1930s the inhabitants of suburbia [had] become slaves to their own respectability, to their own rites',<sup>39</sup> offered little hope for growth and self-realisation. On the other hand, David Walker suggested<sup>40</sup> that such attitudes were deaf to

... the proposition that suburban life could have stability, order, purpose and emotional fulfilment, or that it could produce people capable of reasoned and intelligent political opinions.

<sup>34</sup> T. Rowse, 'Heaven and a Hills Hoist: Australian Critics on Suburbia', in G. Whitlock and D. Carter, *Images of Australia, An Introductory Reader in Australian Studies*, St. Lucia, 1992, p. 242.

<sup>35</sup> Palmer, *The Swayne Family*, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

<sup>36</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo* (1923), Sydney, 1982, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> P. White, *Riders in the Chariot* (1961), *The Burnt Ones* (1964) and *The Solid Mandala* (1966).

<sup>38</sup> W. Murdoch, Preface to 'Speaking Personally', *Collected Essays*, Sydney, 1941, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> C. M. H. Clark, *A History of Australia, Vol. VI*, *op. cit.*, p. 478.

<sup>40</sup> Walker, *Dream and Disillusion*, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

In taking a more flexible position in *Waterway*, Dark, also, found a positive value in the suburb<sup>41</sup> of Watsons Bay with her presentation of its sheer physical beauty. As one of her characters drove through it, he saw with delight that on one side 'lantana spilled itself in almost breathtaking profusion over walls and fences, and jacaranda trees repeated more ethereally its lovely note of amethyst', while, on the other, 'the roofs were shrouded in trees, and the hillside dipped to join the harbour' (*W*, p. 151), blending harmoniously with the natural world.

Dark's vision of the natural world as having the power to foster spiritual contentment and cultural growth<sup>42</sup> reflected the romantic notion that the self's integrity and natural instincts were more likely to be preserved in natural surroundings rather than in corrupting 'civilisation'.<sup>43</sup> And so she presented Australians trying constantly to escape the constraints of society, spending their holidays 'struggling down wild rivers in frail canoes or tramping with packs on their shoulders through trackless bush.' (*SaS*, p. 151) It was upon their return to idyllic Coolami that Bret's love for Susan awakened, while, on the long drive into the country, Tom Drew was shocked into realisation of the constricting city life which he had imposed on Millicent. Reluctantly, he experienced the allure of the landscape and 'a stirring of excitement in the mere thought of distance', together with an urge for 'some sense of spaciousness.' (*RC*, p. 235) The frustrated Jack began a quest for freedom from the city's trials when, in the hope of realising his dream of farming, he decided 'to get outback a bit' (*W*, p. 309), like Harry Munster convinced that he 'could live off the country somehow, but not off the paved streets'.<sup>44</sup> For all that, Dark's practical common sense would not countenance any simplistic idealisation of the country, and she had Tom face life in the country not in any 'haze of sun-bewitched romance' (*RC*, p. 310), but with the recognition of its harsher aspects:

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<sup>41</sup> See Dark, 'Australia and the Australians', *op. cit.*, p. 12, where she wrote of 'the snug, gregarious suburb.'

<sup>42</sup> Cp. T. Keneally, *Woman of the Inner Sea*. London, 1992, in which the protagonist, Kate, found spiritual healing in the country town of Myambagh after the tragic events in the city.

<sup>43</sup> See C. Lansbury, *Arcady in Australia: The Evocation of Australia in Nineteenth-Century English Literature*, Melbourne, 1970, p. 84, for an interesting opinion on the city/country tension: 'The theme of nature restoring man to his innate innocence is a literary reversal of original sin and the Fall. It is more emotional, less intellectual, and it is incapable of causing offence since it is expressed in terms of such vague generality.'

<sup>44</sup> Barnard Eldershaw, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

When you weren't praying for rain you were being flooded out! Rust in your wheat, fluke in your sheep, rabbits and droughts and bushfires. (*RC*, p. 21)

It was *Waterway* which best illustrated Judith Wright's contention that '[c]ity and country should each complement the other',<sup>45</sup> as Dark depicted the harbour integrating the city with the natural world. In all its guises the waterway was a vital part of the city,

... so entangled in one way or another with the lives of its inhabitants, in so true a sense their highway and their playground, that its permanence seemed to promise them, too, security and anchorage. (*W*, p.188)<sup>46</sup>

The writer expressed her fascination with the life-enhancing beauty of Sydney harbour in such a vividly detailed presentation that, in the novel, the waterway became a living presence, probing the shores with watery fingers. Smelling of salt and seaweed, noisy with wild seagull cries, its glassy-green waters silver-streaked and edged with rock pools teeming with anemones, the harbour was animated as sailing-boats and launches darted among ferries whose red and green signal lights transformed them at night into magical visions.<sup>47</sup> Practicalities, such as the arch of the bridge, the light tower off Shark Island and the Channel Buoy, however, were reminders of the civilisation which connected the romantically-viewed outer harbour to the practical commercial reality of Glebe Island and the busy inner reaches. There human beings themselves defiled the 'imprisoned and polluted' (*W*, p. 144) harbour. Dust and petrol fumes enveloped the bustling wharves where there were

... ships spewing out their dirty water into it, stewards emptying their buckets of garbage, tourists throwing the

<sup>45</sup> J. Wright, *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry*, Melbourne, 1965, p. xxviii.

<sup>46</sup> See Stead, *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, *op. cit.*, and *For Love Alone* (1944), London, 1966. Like *Waterway*, these two novels were partly set in the Sydney suburb of Watsons Bay. Unlike Stead, however, Dark did not portray the harbour Heads as portals of escape to the wider world. For her the harbour was entwined with the city and '... down there near the Heads ... you lived at its very source' (*W*, p. 188).

<sup>47</sup> See Dean, *op. cit.*, p. 336. Cp. P. White, *Eye of the Storm* (1973), Harmondsworth, 1977, p. 340, for another description of Watsons Bay: '... the lapping shallows, the littered sand, ... an aimless bobbing of corks which have served their purpose, and scum, and condoms, and rotting fruit, and rusted tins, and excrement.'

bottles of their last carousal out of the portholes. (*W*, p. 144)

Every scientific development or material advance is both potentially negative and positive in its effect on humanity and, in *Prelude to Christopher*, Dark made a moral protest against 'the soulless mechanisms of science'<sup>48</sup> which allowed the scientist, in pursuit of the goal, to abandon all compassion and understanding of human needs. Following the explosion of knowledge after the Great War and the burgeoning interest in general public health during the 1920s and 1930s, scientists had become the heroes of technological progress, and Dark acknowledged their beneficent contribution to society when Linda, herself a biologist, commented somewhat dramatically on her own white laboratory overall: 'It's the uniform of the unselfish - the men and women of science, the workers, the healers.' (*PC*, p. 23) Gormley, the tycoon, reinforced for readers this miracle-working ambience with his conception of doctors as 'wizards, medicine-men, wielders of occult and fearsome power' (*SaS*, p. 58), an opinion echoed by M. Barnard Eldershaw's Knarf, who observed tartly that '[s]cience and technology, uncomprehended, wear the same face as astrology and magic'.<sup>49</sup>

In revealing the fate of Linda, Dark exposed both the merits and evils of the topical issue of eugenics,<sup>50</sup> deliberately alerting her readers to the dehumanising implications of some of the current social theories which were full of confidence in the ability of science to control not only various aspects of social life, but also such a fundamental process as human reproduction. In *Slow Dawning*, the characters, Valerie and Dr. McNab, distressed at the

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<sup>48</sup> Dark, in her short story, 'Publicity', *The Home*, April 1, 1937, p. 83.

<sup>49</sup> Barnard Eldershaw, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>50</sup> See A. Huxley, *Brave New World* (1932), Harmondsworth, 1971. Huxley's pseudo-utopian satire presented a society which practised eugenics, and in which the automatic predetermination of every physical and mental action restricted freedom of choice and dehumanised its inhabitants.

See also Huxley, *Antic Hay*, *op. cit.*, p. 245, in which the writer displayed an interest in eugenics. The old man on the train said to Gumbriel Junior, '[T]he families of the unemployed will certainly increase', and he replied, 'And the families of the employed and prosperous will steadily grow smaller.'

Cp. also A. Burgess, 'Introduction', in R. Warner, *The Aerodrome* (1941), London, 1982, p. 10. This novel was concerned with the establishment of a totalitarian state which, in teaching that 'sex is a toy and the breeding of children an abomination', planned to release men from the bonds of the family.

breeding of feeble-minded and diseased children, showed their sympathy with this science of heredity, and in this later novel *Dark* explored the concept of eugenics more fully. She also showed how an obsession with social ideals was apt to implicate the individual in appalling betrayals<sup>51</sup> when she demonstrated the repercussions which Nigel's 'creed of perfection' (*PC*, p. 50) set in motion in his own life and in the lives of so many others.

The idealistic Nigel planned to hasten humanity's progress by elevating physical and mental standards through the practical means of selective breeding. He was shocked at the way in which human beings, who conducted the selective propagation of animals so efficiently, made no attempt to order their own breeding. He could not understand how a human being 'who bred his sheep with infinite care would marry a tuberculous wife and rear an infected family', nor why, 'undernourished, meagre both mentally and physically', a man must 'still must have his wife, his child, his long, shadowy, dreadful line of foredoomed posterity.' (*PC*, p. 26) After they were married, when Linda told him the truth about her 'tainted stock' (*PC*, p. 103), with his scientist-God mentality he imposed upon her 'the sentence of childlessness.' (*PC*, p. 159) Scientist though she was, as an individual Linda rejected eugenic logic and followed her womanly feelings, refusing to be 'offered up however necessarily as a sacrifice on the altar of science.' (*PC*, p. 124) As she protested to Nigel, 'You haven't the right to deprive me of any hold I have on ... normality.' (*PC*, p. 103)

Full of faith in the power of reason, the eugenicists had contended that the control of inferior stocks by the superior elements of society was 'historically inevitable action - and therefore of unimpeachable morality'.<sup>52</sup> So the writer cleverly instigated a discussion of the matter, with her characters questioning such an inflexible opinion and offering various responses for evaluation. Even Nigel's moral certitude regarding his decision to remain childless was assailed by nagging doubts as he imagined 'the just and righteous wrath of his ancestors':

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<sup>51</sup> See also Howe, *Politics and the Novel*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>52</sup> J. Devanny, 'What do I Know of Eugenics?', in *Health and Physical Culture*, May, 1930, p. 6. See also Havelock Ellis, *Impressions and Comments, Third (and Final) Series 1920-1923*, Cambridge, Mass., 1924 (2nd Impression), p. 66: '[Eugenists are] striving ... to make a new world by breeding out the foolish stocks, and, when we are not strong enough for that, standing aside to smile while they carry on their majority world.'

To build for so many generations, to put so much into you, such sound and solid material into your body, so many strains of decency and strength into your character, so many treasures of intelligence, imagination, humour into your brain! Good has been poured into you - what have you done with it? Squandered it on futilities! All you had to do was to hand it on ... Who are you to reform the world? (*PC*, p. 53)

Yet Dark had him preserve a fundamental faith in the practical value of his theory, claiming that somewhere 'far down the remote, shadowy, diverging lines of one's posterity, there were children to whom he had been right.' (*PC*, p. 102)

His colleague, Dr. Marlow, was made to wonder 'how possible it is to ... guide or hurry the process of human evolution', at the same time contending that 'those who profess to be scientists are the people above all others who should be looking out for theories - trying things.' (*PC*, p. 78) Even the conservative Dr. Bland, confronting the case of the fecund Mrs. Jones and her alcoholic husband, was forced to admit, 'This breeding of the unfit must stop somewhere - someday.' (*PC*, p. 177) Nigel's mother, however, reflecting on the emotional and social factors involved, was convinced that human beings were more likely to consider their own individual welfare than that of the race:

Never could you tell a man in love that for the good of posterity he must marry elsewhere! Never could you convince a woman that she must bear the children of a husband allotted to her by some scientific formula! (*PC*, p. 123)

Nigel's refusal to father a child with Linda resulted in her having an affair with the artist, D'Aubert, and a much-wanted pregnancy which was terminated by her fall on the night of the colonists' riot. Having placed her faith in the goal of motherhood as the means of retaining her sanity,<sup>53</sup> she then lost her will to continue that quest, and so plunged into the 'queer death-in-life' (*PC*, p. 135)

<sup>53</sup> Cp. H. Ibsen, 'When We Dead Awaken', J. McFarlane and G. Orton (eds. and translators), *The Oxford Ibsen*, Vol. VIII, London, 1960-1977. Dark's novel had many Ibsenesque overtones: Nigel's science and Rubek's art were shown to be destructive forces in the lives of two women. The scientist's self-control was comparable to that of the sculptor, which caused the suppressed sexuality and subsequent madness of his model, Irene. Like Linda, she experienced a spiritual death, and claimed, 'The desire to live died in me.'

which culminated in suicide.

The concept of material progress at any cost threatened the fullness of living in *Lantana Lane*, where a group of small-farmers formed a true community of families bound together by their concern for one another. This was in danger of disruption when the government broached a plan to transform their lane into a modern motorway which would cut through the farms and divide the families. Dark had her narrator comment uneasily, '[A]nticipation of this change brings no gladness to any of our hearts.' (LL, p. 39) The farmers had reservations, not only about the benefits of such progress, but also about scientific research in general, well aware as they were that 'all knowledge interlocks, and that fiddling with one bit disturbs the whole cohesive structure.' In their opinion, the alarming result of the contemporary probing 'into the dreadful fastnesses of the Atom' was that 'we now know enough to blow ourselves into small pieces.' (LL, p. 11)

Since the Enlightenment there has existed the belief that civilisation must dominate nature, that humanity must harness natural forces for humanity's use. Yet, the narrator advised, we 'should do well not to rile this ancient lady' (LL, p. 102), for we had been warned, 'Treat Nature well, and Nature will treat you well. Hurt or destroy Nature, and Nature will soon destroy you'.<sup>54</sup> Science - in the eyes of Dark's Dame Nature 'a younger, upstart hussy' (LL, p. 102) - had devised a poison spray which the farmers used to kill weeds growing between the pineapple rows. Yet the farmers reasoned, if a spray were available to protect the valued pineapples, then perhaps the scientists would produce one capable of destroying the pestilent lantana. This possibility, however, evoked more alarm than relief, because, as they saw it, there was a bond of sympathy between Dame Nature and lantana, 'her simpleton-child' (LL, p. 103), the breaking of which could have dire effects. After all, pest though it was, the lantana did hold together the soil on the steep hillsides, kept the cows away from the pineapples and served as a rubbish-dump for such things as worn-out frying pans and 'dead marines.' (LL, p. 105)

'For the moment', the narrator ironically remarked, 'we echo the

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<sup>54</sup> Huxley, *Island*, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

prevailing cry that Science is wonderful',

... though what its ultimate, and less conspicuous effects on all sorts of other things may prove to be, we must leave to learned research workers of the future. (*LL*, p. 102)

Perhaps the residue of the poison spray would 'sport with the playful wind which ... is already sporting with the residue of all the other sprays', together with 'the other by-products of our scientific genius, including atomic fall-out'. Perhaps Nature was 'sardonically waiting for us to discover that deep draughts of beautiful country air may no longer be confidently recommended', because 'breathing is not what it was in the days when she had sole charge of it.' (*LL*, p. 103)<sup>55</sup>

Dark made her Australian farmers all too conscious of their vulnerability to 'progress' and to the manipulations of the leaders of that 'outer world [where] Organisation is firmly entrenched' (*LL*, p. 80) when they saw

... the little businesses being swallowed by the big businesses, the suburbs being swallowed by the cities, the little nations crouching beneath the wings of the big nations from whose benevolent shelter they never will emerge. (*LL*, p. 81)

Remonstrating that 'our age is content with nothing less than the super-colossal' (*LL*, p. 140), Dark drew attention to a situation in which the small-farmers were forced to compete with huge, impersonal, international monopoly syndicates operated by a privileged few who enjoyed 'the support of a benevolent Government and the plaudits of a grateful public.' (*LL*, p. 141) She suggested that, to those few,<sup>56</sup> what made

... small-scale activity so undesirable and dangerous is clearly the solitude it involves, and the temptation, inherent in solitude, to think. (*LL*, p. 141)

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<sup>55</sup> See Dark's short story, 'Water in Moko Creek', *Australian National Journal*, Vol. 7, March, 1946, pp. 17-21, which was a celebration of the precious natural elements of fire and water, and a plea that 'the primitive respect of mankind for them [might be] remembered and renewed.'

<sup>56</sup> See Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action* (1929), New York, 1960, p. 80: Dewey observed that 'the knowledge which regulates activity is so much the monopoly of the few, and is used by them in behalf of private and class interests and not for general and shared use.'

In a technically complex society where the 'proper study of mankind is not man, but matter' (LL, p. 142), thinking, it seemed, had become 'profitless nonsense.' (LL, p. 141) Science was in control, and would inevitably 'devise means of producing all foodstuffs in its laboratories' (LL, p. 143), so that the small and more natural producers, whose work was enriched with the warmth of human endeavour, were doomed.

The amusing story, 'Bulldozed', in which a bulldozer formed a road down a precipitous slope on Ken's farm, again emphasised the alarming aspects of much mechanisation. As the women gathered to watch, the practical French Aunt Isabelle praised the constructive side of the operation, demanding, 'How ... would the agriculture flourish if good land were to remain uncultivated because its natural state was pleasing to the eye?' (LL, p. 216) Marge, however, 'profoundly cut of sympathy with machines', and foreseeing the wounds about to be inflicted on the landscape, reflected moodily that they could 'devastate the face of nature with a speed formerly reserved to earthquakes.' (LL, p. 211) This bulldozer promptly turned into a monster as, 'with rapid and methodical ferocity' (LL, p. 213), it

...lowered its head with a snarl, sank its teeth deep into the turf, tore up a large section, swung it sideways, and contemptuously spat it out down the hill. (LL, p. 213)<sup>57</sup>

The disenchanted Marge wished 'that we might employ the marvels we invent with a little more wisdom and restraint', for she expected

... that before the grass and weeds grew once more over the torn hillside, the rains would have washed many tons of earth from it into Black Creek, and thence into the Annabella River, which in turn would deposit it in the ocean, where it would nourish neither pineapples, nor tomatoes, nor even uneconomic weeds. (LL, p. 212)

After a hair-raising episode in which the almost autonomous machine turned into 'an engine of assassination' (LL, p. 224) and nearly crushed Ken 'into the earth like an ant' (LL, p. 223), Marge concluded that

... since human beings have never been really sure what they ought to do, and have usually guessed wrong, it was

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<sup>57</sup> Cp. A. Marshall, *How Beautiful Are Thy Feet*, Melbourne, 1949, p. 1: 'The Factory snarls as it eats ... it is a dinosaur ... it is Tyrannosaurus Rex.'

better in the days when they had to do it slowly and laboriously, because that did impose some check upon their enthusiastic blundering. (*LL*, p. 211)

Dark left her 'Lane' dwellers still apprehensive at the threat of the highway which spelled change to a community in which they had found a measure of physical and spiritual fulfilment, and still 'not entirely convinced that speed and convenience add up to civilisation.' (*LL*, p. 252) For 'not all the triumphs of science and technology, nor all the persuasiveness of mass communications' had led them to abandon the idea 'that in order to become civilised, one must, first of all, remain human.' (*LL*, p. 252)<sup>58</sup>

During the Great War, trench warfare had provided a proving ground which effectively displayed the results of competition among those industrialists who controlled the manufacture of the ever more 'diabolically ingenious' (*RC*, p. 199) technology of impersonal slaughter.<sup>59</sup> Not only did that war cut a swathe through a whole generation of young men, but it profoundly undermined Western positivist thought by revealing the barbarity of which human beings were capable, and the utter disrespect which aggressive nations displayed for the well-being of humanity as a whole. In the Second World War science and technology were to make possible even more 'insane destructiveness' (*TLC*, p. 136), the rocket bombing of entire civilian populations and the use of the atomic bomb.<sup>60</sup>

*Return to Coolami* emphasised the ongoing misery inflicted on the individual as a legacy of technological y-waged war. After the Great War, Colin, the son of Tom and Millicent Drew, became an alcoholic as a result of psychological damage which left him 'like a lusty young plant ... shrivelled

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<sup>58</sup> The lane, in real life Mill Hill Road in Montville, Queensland, had not yet been incorporated into the highway when the present writer visited it in 1993. Nor had it by June, 1994, when the writer had a telephone conversation with Madge Glover. In the novel the Hawkins family was based on the real-life Glover family, and Madge (Amy Hawkins) and her husband Arty (Jack Hawkins) are the only original residents still living in the lane.

<sup>59</sup> Cp. S. Griffin, *A Chorus of Stones, The Private Life of War*, London, 1992, p. 297: 'What an irony that nuclear weapons, which spring from such creative insights, should reduce the warrior to a technician.'

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p. 154: 'For the most part, the men who designed the first missiles were not interested in weapons so much as flight. In his account of the early work at Peenemunde laboratories, Wernher von Braun explains that the scientists there had discovered a way to fund their research by making rockets appeal to the military.'

overnight by frost.' (*RC*, pp. 131-32) With moral urgency, Dark had his anguished wife, Margery, condemn the direction of scientific investigation toward the wrong goals, until it became an agent of obstruction rather than a facilitator of human advancement. In a somewhat sweeping generalisation, the young wife claimed that '[m]en still like to smash and women still like to create' (*RC*, p. 199),<sup>61</sup> and she asked of the male:

Did he really think it more interesting to pick a quarrel with his fellow man than to pursue his quite reasonable argument with, say, a typhus germ to its victorious conclusion? Did he really prefer sinking under the ocean for the purpose of ambushing and drowning some hundreds of human beings, to cruising about in a new world of smothered light and sound, still virtually unexplored ...? Why not war on sharks and rats and blowflies? (*RC*, p. 200)

As Robin Gerster observed more recently, 'The mechanized butchery on the Western Front seemed to invalidate any reapplication of the myth of the all-powerful warrior' when heavy artillery 'mocked pretensions to prowess',<sup>62</sup> and Colin's mother acknowledged this truth with her repulsion at the technological application of enmity, 'not in any hot outburst of natural hostility but coldly and mechanically, from afar.' (*RC*, p. 25)

The concern of this chapter has been Dark's protest that western society, in the thrall of the forces of industrialisation and commercialisation, had allowed scientific progress to outpace moral progress. With Tom Drew's frustrations, she proved that the accumulation of possessions failed to fulfil the human longing for spiritual satisfaction. Through the thinker, Oliver, she channelled her fear that the comforts of modern society were despoiling, rather than nourishing, society, in that they eroded human purpose and dignity, and blunted that 'adventurous acceptance' (*SaS*, p. 151) of risk which was so 'necessary to the moral health of the human animal.' (*SaS*, p. 150) The callous machinations of the obscene capitalist, Gormley, added even more weight to her suggestion that the possession of power without

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<sup>61</sup> Dark bowed to Huxley, *Brave New World*, *op. cit.*, with the pregnant Margery's remark that if men were to persist in destroying life, 'there could not come too soon the brave new world peopled by artificially produced babies, food for their vile and artificial slaughters.' (*RC*, p. 199)

<sup>62</sup> R. Gerster, *Big-noting, The Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing* (1987), Melbourne, 1992, p. 5.

moral restraint shrivelled the human spirit.

In her writing, the novelist acknowledged the vital part which the discoveries of science played in humanity's understanding of itself, and conceded that any society without intellectual curiosity and respect for science must stunt its members' growth. With Linda's fate in *Prelude to Christopher*, however, she criticised the scientific approach to social problems which, with its habit of generalising, eliminated any understanding of, and planning for, the individual's uniqueness.

Although she criticised the evils of the industrialised city, as a practical idealist Dark refused to ignore its positive attributes, its vitality and excitement, and, despite her appreciation of the amplitude which is so valuable an asset in the rural way of life, neither did she idealise country living when she confronted such practicalities as 'rabbits and droughts and bushfires.' (*RC*, p. 21)

Again, amusing though they were at a more domestic level, Dark used the daily problems of the farmers in *Lantana Lane* to question whether progress can be measured by humanity's increasing domination of nature. Human beings need to understand their environment, but, in *Lantana Lane*, she pertinently asked her readers to consider whether there were any true progress inherent in humanity's increasing domination of nature when it led to increasing alienation from it. While technology alleviated the strain of land management, it was also responsible for the pollution and ecological despoliation which threatened the finely balanced equilibrium of the natural world.

In *Lantana Lane* the narrator's apprehension regarding scientists' prying into the secrets of atomic energy underlined the waste of resources and intellectual endeavour which was expended in developing the atom bomb. Throughout her work Dark saw this misdirection of science and technology into the hands of aggressive and militaristic power-mongers with their 'engines of death' (*PC*, p. 169) as a menace to humanity's survival, and she reminded her readers that, as scientists unleashed ever more powerful forces, human beings were becoming more and more

helpless under the threat of their own creation which had the power to destroy their planet.

In considering Dark's ever-present fear that industrialisation had a tendency to climax in war, in the next chapter I shall explore her treatment of the tragic consequences which ensued when the leaders of acquisitive societies directed scientific investigation into the channels of destruction.