Chapter Eleven

THE LAND and its 'not unwilling captives'

> Man's immemorial urge to be identified with his environment was here frustrated. He could, as yet, neither claim this place, nor permit it to absorb him; neither call it his, nor yield to it. (*ST*, pp. 294-95)

In several of her novels Dark displayed her concern with the spiritual yearning of human beings to identify with a place of their own, and the way in which the first fulfilling of this need generated feelings of inner harmony and self-confidence in the quester on the arduous, exciting journey toward self-realisation. The Australian protagonist in *Sun Across the Sky*, secure in 'his own instant emotional response to this quiet place of flickering shadows and hot aromatic scents', wondered at

> ... those threads of feeling which bind a man to the place he knows, so that for all his admiration of other scenes, he is never quite at peace in them, never quite free of that indefinable pain which he has called nostalgia. (*SaS*, pp. 95-96)

The idea of Australia as a hostile land[1] endured well into the twentieth century among many Australian writers. In 1941 Brian Penton saw

> ... at the basis of all our writing, of all our thinking, of most of our social living together a sense of discontent in an inhospitable, unbeautiful, unkind land.[2]

Dark, however, loved it, fascinated by a continent 'whose essence is the majesty of its ages' (*W*, p. 12), a land which is 'so incredibly isolated as to seem almost mythical',[3] yet with which she whole-heartedly identified. Manning Clark could appreciate this when, in revealing how *The Timeless Land* had inspired him when he began lecturing on Australian history at Melbourne University in 1946, he commented: 'Eleanor Dark was no

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[1] Cp. J. Hallows, *op. cit.*, p. 14: 'Australians have demonstrated the remarkable range of human adaptability by coming to terms with one of the most hostile continents on the face of the earth.'

[2] B. Penton, *Think - or Be Damned, op. cit.*, p. 58. Patrick White was later to investigate the love-hate relationship between Australians and their land, particularly in *The Tree of Man* (1955) and *Voss* (1957).

[3] Dark, 'Australia and the Australians', *op. cit.*, p. 11.

spiritual exile, no gifted sensitive soul living physically in Australia, but spiritually in England ... . She belonged.' Clark had invited her to speak to his students, and recalled that she was shy until one of them asked her to tell them why 'she wrote such beautiful prose poetry about the Australian landscape', and then she displayed her romantic, subjective response [4] to the natural world:

> Words gushed out of her, her eyes, hitherto dim, lit up as though the woman within had switched on a light. The discussion became lively'.[5]

The social disruption of the 1930s and 1940s had exacerbated in concerned Australians a cultural unease, a confusion of identity, a dissatisfaction with their position as exiled Europeans in a bizarre country, and inspired in them a desire to assess Australia's place in world history.[6] The nationalist, Nettie Palmer, was asking 'if there isn't some essential lack in us, something missing that keeps our life from having meaning and depth'.[7] With the assumption that it behoved the writer to cultivate a sense of national identity, several serious Australian novelists - including Miles Franklin with *All That Swagger* (1936), Brian Penton with *Landtakers* (1934) and *Inheritors* (1936), Xavier Herbert with *Capricornia* (1938), and Dark with her historical trilogy - [8] began to examine past history, realising that 'the deeper the knowledge and emotional involvement with our past, the deeper our sense of identification with the land.'[9]

D. H. Lawrence's response in *Kangaroo* (1923) to 'the age-unbroken silence of the Australian bush', to its terror-inducing, yet unique and subtly

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[4] Cp. K. S. Prichard 's romantic treatment of the land and the Aborigines' attunement with it in *Coonardoo* (1929). Henry Handel Richardson, however, in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (1930), presented her European protagonist as alienated from, and defeated by, an antagonistic land, while, in *All that Swagger* (1936), Miles Franklin's image of the land was one which, ideally, was empty and unwelcoming to human interests. Later, Xavier Herbert's novel, *Poor Fellow My Country* (1975), as well as presenting the Aborigines' viewpoint, also expressed a passionate need for European identification with the land.

[5] M. Clark, *The Quest for Grace , op. cit.*, pp. 161-62 and 174.

[6] An unease and confusion which is still with us. See R. Gerster, 'A Bellyful of Bali: Travel, Writing and Australia/Asia Relationships', *Australian Literary Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1996, p. 362: 'As the nation continues to worry about its place in the world - something about which it has fretted since European settlement - it can be consoled that it is at least "part of Asia" '.

[7] V. Smith (ed.), *Fourteen Years*, St. Lucia, 1988, pp. 40-41.

[8] M. Barnard Eldershaw 's earlier novel, *A House is Built* (1929) concerned life in Sydney between the years 1837 and 1876.

[9] Cusack, *A Window in the Dark, op. cit.*, p. 56.

poetical atmosphere, had not only quickened the imaginations of the country's writers, but, with his conception of Sydney as 'sprinkled on the surface of a darkness into which it never penetrated',[10] had also drawn attention to the schism existing between white society and nature in Australia. As Humphrey McQueen noted, for Dark,

> ... [c]ivilisation stands as a barrier between her love of Australia as a natural phenomenon and her rejection of Australia as a socio-political manifestation',[11]

and in her work she protested forcefully at the official attitude toward the land, complaining that 'the main factor which retarded [the colony's] growth to nationhood' was that, from the beginning of white settlement, 'the real preoccupation of the "motherland" was not to develop, but to exploit.'[12] Her regretful Governor Phillip voiced this concern when, as he prepared to leave its shores, he foresaw future generations frustrating real progress by battling with the land, driven by greed and 'by an obscure urge for conquest of so aloof and invulnerable a foe.' (*TTL,* p. 505) In the conflict he saw them

> ... exhausting her earth, fouling her rivers, despoiling her trees, savagely imposing upon the pattern of her native loveliness traditional forms which meant beauty in other lands. He heard them crying out to her insatiably: 'Give! Give!' and was aware of her silent inviolability which would never give until they had ceased to rob. (*TTL*, p. 505)

In Dark's view, it was essential that Australians relinquish the false ideal of 'Englishism',[13] and mentally detach themselves from Europe and what her character, Roger, termed 'the festering diseases of its senility.' (*W,* p. 80) Only when they had changed their attitude and learned to appreciate it for its own sake could they work with, instead of against, their land.[14] Later the fictional Gilbert was to chafe at the folly of

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[10] Lawrence, *op. cit.,* pp. 397 and 8.
Cp. B. Baynton, *Bush Studies* (1902), for the evocation of terror in the bush.

[11] McQueen, 'The Novels of Eleanor Dark', *op. cit.*, p. 41.

[12] Dark, 'Caroline Chisholm and her Times , *op. cit.*, p. 63.

[13] Penton, *Think Or Be Damned, op. cit.*, p. 67. Derek Cabell, the English protagonist of Penton's novels, *Landtakers* and *Inheritors*, never accepted, and was never comfortable in, the Australian environment.

[14] Some fifty years later Dark's hopes have yet to be realised. See D. J. Tacey, *The Edge of the Sacred, Transformation in Australia,* Melbourne,1995, p. 73, where Tacey discussed 'the chasm that exists between the primal earth and the sterile consciousness of white society.'

the Europeans' antagonistic attitude with the Aborigines' physical and spiritual bonding with the environment, their 'cradle, hunting-ground and bier.' (*TTL,* p. 37)

So the fictional white woman, Conor Mannion, was made to puzzle over the land's unresponsiveness, regretting that there was 'no human legend to bind it to one's life.' (*ST*, p. 199)[20] On the other hand, the indigenous people enjoyed 'the deep spiritual comfort of a lifelong familiarity.' (*TTL*, p. 470) To them the landscape was 'a living field of spirits and metaphysical forces',[21] for their culturally complex society was enriched with sacred traditions and legends of supernatural beings, with corroborees, songs and ceremonies, 'things to be guarded jealously, and passed on to future generations, still sacred and revered.' (*TTL,* p. 22) The Bennilong of history was described as being conscious of 'a secure and all sufficient world' and of 'fitting into it, belonging to it, drawing strength and joy and existence from it.' (*TTL,* p. 14)[22] Dark's character, Mark Harvey, recognised this affinity when, to him, 'the natives seemed less inhabitants of the place than projections of it - growing from it like trees and falling back into it like seeds.' (*ST*, pp. 65-66)[23]

In the contemporary-set novel, *Waterway*, as he pondered present social evils, Dr. Oliver Denning mused, 'In such moments ... your soul seeks an escape - backward, forward, anywhere out of an unendurable present.' (*W*, p. 12) With the historical trilogy Dark escaped her present and went back to the first settlement, to 'that day ... which had marked the end of [the land's] primeval solitude' (*W*, p. 11), and considered anew the various responses of the European invaders to its brooding presence. Governor Phillip sensed early that, with its 'terrifying differentness' (*TTL*, p. 89), it constituted a

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[20] Cp. Penton, *Think - or be Damned, op. cit.*, p. 60: 'Feelings about [countries] come of living in them, on them, soaking them with family and personal and social associations, through which you build a kind of imaginative association between yourself and the continent.'

[21] Tacey, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

[22] Cp. K. S. Prichard's *Coonardoo* (1929) and X. Herbert's *Capricornia* (1938) which were also concerned with the way in which the Aborigines' understanding of the land was basic to their physical and spiritual survival within it.

[23] Cp. Stanner, *op. cit.*, p. 44: 'Our word "home", warm and suggestive though it be, does not match the aboriginal word that may mean "camp", "hearth", "country", "everlasting home", "totem place", "life source", "spirit centre" and much else all in one. ... When we took what we call "land" we took what to them meant hearth, home, the source and locus of life, and everlastingness of spirit.'

humankind:

> Making an enemy of his home, criminally assaulting his earth, destroying the harmony which should exist between himself and his environment, man was cutting himself adrift from his spiritual anchorage. (*TLC*, p. 224)

Dark's conception of nature embraced the physical landscape and the vital spirit of the life force emanating from the earth itself. Her romantic sensibility held that human imagination and consciousness were linked with nature, and she urged all Australians to acknowledge and share such an emotional and spiritual fusion.[15] This involved the recognition of the land's 'inner tenderness' (*TTL,* p. 504)[16] and its poetical and mythical dimension, an insight which would enrich the current materialist and mechanistic culture.[17] The novelist implied that such organic harmony must surely lead to a fruitful relationship between civilisation and nature and so shape a cultural identity transcending mere nationalism, one based on the expression of the spirit and natural energy of the continent.[18] Eric Dark wrote:

> The great struggle that will never cease while men live is the struggle to bring human life into perfect conformity with the laws of Nature. Life is waiting to be enlarged to an undreamed of extent as we bring ourselves into harmony with all the hidden laws and forces of the Universe.[19]

Upon their arrival in 1788, the European invaders had felt 'a soil beneath their feet whose very texture was alien', and they were startled by 'a hard earth, which smelled not of grass and flowers and hay', those 'reassuring, familiar odours of man's long habitation' but 'of an age-old solitude.' (*W,* p. 186) The novelist showed the convicts preserving their images of the country which had rejected them as 'a shield unconsciously set up between them and an alien environment' (*TTL*, p. 87), and she contrasted

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[15] Later, P. White's *Voss* (1957) and R. Stow's *To the Islands* (1958) were to deal with the search of white Australians for spiritual identity with the land.

[16] Cp. B. Hodge and V. Mishra, *Dark Side of the Dream, Australian literature and the post-colonial mind* (1990), Sydney, 1991, p. 166. These writers argued that Australians must attain the 'habit of viewing Australian earth as mother.'

[17] See also B. Elliott, *Singing to the Cattle and other Australian Essays,* Melbourne, 1947, pp. 107-09.

[18] See also Stephensen, *The Foundations of Culture in Australia, op. cit.,* p. 15: 'It is the spirit of a Place which ultimately gives any human culture its distinctiveness'.

[19] E. P. Dark, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

powerful force in itself, while the military and civil administrators were unimpressed and unsympathetic with a land which seemed to be 'passively obstructing them.' (*TTL*, p. 67) The irascible Lieutenant-Governor Ross condemned it as 'hopeless, barren and unprofitable' (*TTL*, p. 173); urbane Captain Tench saw its pervading ambience as indifference because 'it offered no enmity, no resistance. It simply waited' (*TTL*, p. 64); and the Reverend Johnson was bewildered by 'an environment which seemed to set aside ... every standard and custom to which he had been bred.' (*ST*, p. 14) Querulous Lieutenant Clark dismissed it as 'the poorest country in the world' (*TTL*, p. 169), while the exasperated Surgeon-General White hated it 'heartily and savagely.' (*TTL*, p. 170) Later, Governor King was to term it 'barbarous' (*ST*, p. 401), while to Lachlan Macquarie it seemed

> ... a distant, uncouth, unpredictable, unresponsive land whose effect upon transplanted Englishmen appeared to be disturbing. (*NB*, p. 29)

The thoughtful character, Mark Harvey, reflected, 'Already the mark of civilisation lay upon the land' (*TTL*, p. 335), and he worried about the blight which the white invaders were imposing upon it:

> What kind of gift was this civilisation which had already bound a legend of despair upon a place surely designed by nature as a symbol of aspiration? (*ST*, p. 279)

As men of the Enlightenment, committed to reason and convinced that human beings must bend the forces of nature toward human ends and social progress, the Europeans were 'full of schemes and projects for [the land's] subjection' (*ST*, p. 294), thereby defeating any immediate chance of harmonious integration. Governor Hunter expressed their common belief, 'Surely the country, with its vastness, its impassivity, its droughts and floods, was only something else to be coerced and mastered?' (*ST*, pp. 18-19) The white men

> ... wanted to rouse it, to mark it, to shatter its siesta with their commotions, to scar its earth with plough and fire, and raze its trees; ... to build and traffic with what they could tear from it. (*ST*, p. 294)

Dark used both fictional and historical characters to illustrate the

saga of misuse and cruel exploitation which the administrators encouraged, and the colonists practised enthusiastically when 'ambition enlarged, and hands stretched out to grab.' (*ST*, p. 115) Stephen Mannion, the free settler and acquisitive individualist, decided that, in this country there were 'no limits to the possibilities of profit.' (*TTL*, p. 463) Taking up farming, he 'bound his fortunes to the land, but not himself. He would make wealth out of its soil - but he would spend it elsewhere.' (*ST*, p. 21) He was taken aback, however, when Phillip warned him, 'You intend to exploit this land. Have a care, Sir, that it does not end by exploiting you!' (*TTL*, p. 462)[24] The entrepreneur, John Macarthur, was another who regarded it as 'virtually untouched and unrealised. A land for plunder.' (*ST*, p. 194) Dark had Mannion's son, Patrick, who loved the place, reflect:

> They had barely begun to know this land; had they ever tried to learn it, or had they merely attacked it savagely with axe and plough'? A rape, he thought - all taking, and no love. (*NB*, p. 339)

For its part, the land 'was not hostile, but indifferent, and its indifference assailed [the] spirit with a loneliness more wounding than any hardship.' (*ST*, p. 451) Here 'human activity almost seemed incongruous', and the intruders were left feeling 'awkward and ignored, like uninvited guests.' (*ST*, p. 294) Gradually and painfully, however, it began to dawn upon them that, having 'delivered themselves up to it' (*TTL*, p.195), they must accept the fact that this land dictated the rules for the humans who lived within it, and they realised that they must be flexible enough to make compromises:

> Life was life still, but all its customs, all its concepts, all its traditional shibboleths and contrivances here underwent a slight distortion, and an involuntary process of adjustment coloured every thought and action. (*ST*, p. 21)

From the first Phillip had become conscious of the need to adapt to change, thinking, however, of that adjustment as a voluntary act, not

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[24] Cp. Richardson, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (1917-1929), *Australia Felix* (1917), Harmondsworth, 1977, Proem, p. 8. In this first volume of the trilogy the narrator discussed the fate of the gold diggers: 'It was like a form of revenge taken on them, for their loveless schemes of robbing and fleeing; a revenge contrived by the ancient, barbaric country they had so lightly invaded. Now, she held them captive - without chains; ensorcelled - without witchcraft.'

understanding that it was 'the first moulding process of the land.' (*TTL,* p. 89) Yet when, in those early days, Captain David Collins read aloud the pompous proclamation of ownership, the Governor experienced a revelation, seeing this officious act as a 'colossal and grotesque' presumption which deserved 'nothing but the aloof indifference with which the land was treating it.' (*TTL*, p. 106) By 1790 Phillip would concede that the land 'was quietly taking matters out of his hands' (*TTL,* p. 441), with the pattern of the social structure they had known changing, becoming unreal, 'and some new conception arising.' (*TTL*, pp. 134-35) As a man of his times he had taken for granted the role of Englishmen as empire builders, but now he became conscious of 'a power which was even stronger than the power of his race, an influence from the land itself.' (*TTL*, p. 195) Later, Governor Bligh was forced to admit that this country 'would mould its inhabitants to its own purposes', a realisation which 'outraged his masterful and impatient spirit.' (*ST*, p. 544)[25]

Already, however, as Ross Gibson observed,

> ... [t]he practical activity of growing into the land, of allowing the earth to enter into "the colonists' " bones and tissues, into their minds and souls, had just commenced.[26]

It was a harrowing experience:

> There was pain in the slow adjustment of their senses, effort in the attunement of their ears and the re-focussing of their eyes, a struggle between nostalgia for an old, and craving for a new abiding place. (*ST*, p. 295)

Slowly among the early settlers there grew a reluctant affection for the continent. 'They had tried to make a war between themselves and the land, counting cleared acres a victory, and new discovery a conquest'. It was, however, 'not a war, but a bloodless capture, and they, as yet imperfectly aware, the not unwilling captives.' (*NB*, p. 339) Phillip was shown to find reassurance in its calm silence, and when Wileemaring speared him in the shoulder on the day of the whale-feast, he was startled by the thought that he would not mind his bones resting in the soil 'which he had come near to

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[25] Cp. Richardson, *op. cit.*, *Ultima Thule* (1929), Harmondsworth, 1978, p. 114: Richard Mahony's struggle against the need to adapt to the new land, 'this accursed place', was seen to contribute to his mental disintegration.

[26] Gibson, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

loving.' (*TTL*, p. 338) The Governor's little group of naval officers, too, on their exploring expedition, for the first time felt themselves 'at peace in the land, their nerves relaxed almost as if they were home.' (*TTL*, p. 139) Even the ruthless Mannion became a prey to 'its more beguiling moods' (*ST*, p. 187),

> ...when the sunlight, shining through miles of clean unpolluted air, and upon miles of silent, virgin land, destroyed his memory of the real, civilised world, and left him instead a world where time and effort and tradition meant nothing. (*ST*, p. 188)

When his farming enterprise imbued him with 'a sense of strength and merit', he remembered Phillip's observation about the land exploiting him: 'For if the land were dragging out of him some qualities which had hitherto lain dormant, was not the land exploiting him?' (*ST*, p. 47)

Patrick Mannion could see that all were now prisoners in the gaol officially made for felons, 'and their sentence was to learn that their gaol could be a heritage.' (*NB*, p. 339) To the convicts, 'the riddle of the land' became 'an itch and an incitement' (*ST*, p. 295), and a feeling of restlessness grew as they realised that life in a place 'unstaled, hopeful' (*W*, p. 187) could be different from life in England: 'They had realised Change, and they thought: If place can be so different, why not circumstance?' (*TTL*, p. 441)

Dark demonstrated the land's rewarding, regenerative qualities with the brutalised escapee, Andrew Prentice, when, in establishing his various camps in the bush, he began to cultivate the soil and rediscovered the riches of the earth. His gradually evolving affinity with the land, which he had originally hated, was strengthened by his relationship with his Aboriginal wife and her tribe, and especially with Milbaroo. When this warrior introduced him to an initiation ceremony he discovered that the chanting had 'a rhythm which found its echoes in his blood' (*TTL*, p. 437) and brought him into contact with 'the "source" of Aboriginality.'[27] The novels showed how this bonding helped him on his life journey, inducing healing psychological change[28] and leading to his moral regeneration. When he heard Cunnembeillee's triumphant cry

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[27] Tacey, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

[28] Cp. Lawrence, *op. cit.*, where the landscape proved to be a healing element for the protagonist, Somers.

as she gave birth to their child, Billalong, it was 'as if this land, whose silence had always baffled him, had been articulate at last':

> He was identified with it - helplessly, irrevocably. The land had taken him, used him, fashioned new life from him; his blood and his breath were now, even when he died, a part of it forever. (*TTL*, p. 388)[29]

So it provided a new life for his white son, Johnny. As a child, he had told Patrick, 'I reckon this is my home. I reckon I'll stay here' (*TTL*, p. 305), and, as he grew to manhood, Johnny felt 'his identity with this place flow into him like a flood of strength and peace.' (*ST*, p.333) The convict, Finn, too, was drawn to the land when, planting seedlings in Mannion's garden before his escape, he became conscious that 'with every root they sent down into the soil, he was taking root.' He, too, was made aware of the land's undiscovered potentialities and the possibility of personal regeneration: 'To be so much alone with the earth, and to think so much of the future was to feel towards a fusion of the two' (*ST*, p. 297), so that 'he forgot his determination to live in this place, and found instead a hope that he might live with it.' (*ST*, p. 452) In helping to establish with Johnny an asylum for escapees, he realised that, 'in this land, so lightly marked as yet by tradition, new patterns of life seemed possible' (*ST*, p. 298), and that he was taking, 'almost unconsciously, one step on the long road to the union of a land with its invaders.' (*ST*, p. 452)

With the thought that 'you must return ... to your own life or it becomes a worthless thing', to your own civilisation 'in whose ultimate good you must believe or perish' (*W*, pp. 12-13), the modern Oliver Denning interrupted his reverie about the wrongs of the past and a land 'polluted by the crimes and cruelties of one petty generation of an upstart humanity' (W, p. 12), and turned again to the present. Governor Phillip's bleak vision of the future was justified as 'the lust for destruction' (*W*, p. 238) continued. The socially responsible Roger was wrathful at the damage which unthinking leaders and 'the importation of rabbits, blackberries, prickly pear, convicts, sheep and traditions' (*W*, pp. 197-98) had allowed the people to inflict on the land. The

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[29] See P. Carter, *Living in a New Country: History, travelling and language*, London, 1992, p. 146: ' ... the first magistrate of Pt. Phillip, William Lonsdale, imagined breeding a hybrid Australian race through the inbreeding of Aborigines and the British lower orders.'

rabbits' devastating habits were only too visible on Colin Drew's pastoral property as they forged ahead 'like an army' (*RC*, p. 163), leaving its surface 'pitted and scarred with holes' (*RC*, p. 162), while Roger, pointing out that 'the Sahara Desert was once good grazing land', roundly condemned the merino sheep as being, 'of all our imported pests ... the most deadly and dangerous.' (*W*, p. 202)

In her ancillary writings, too, Dark condemned the ongoing havoc caused by the callous treatment of the environment,

> ... the ignorance and greed that used the land too recklessly, overstocking it till pastures become deserts; denuding the earth of its vegetation till the precious soil eroded, and the still more precious rivers silted up; felling trees irresponsibly, ... building barbarously with no thought for beauty.[30]

She saw these, however, as the sins of obtuse leaders who bowed to the forces of industrial materialism. Naturally the land must be used, or exploited, to some extent in order to support its inhabitants, but she rebuked second-rate legislators who neglected to promote a sense of responsibility in those who did so. With little knowledge of the limitations of the environment, the people were not developing the land in ways least damaging to it. Instead, the country seemed to be, as the fictional Roger raged, 'doomed by custom and apathy to remain forever nothing but a vast producing machine of goods for export.' (*W*, p. 77)

Dark used Arthur Sellman's attitude as an example of 'the stupidity and littleness of individual men' (*W*, p. 12) when she made him refuse Win's plea that he rescue the stand of 'white gums ... a hundred and fifty feet high' which timber-getters were about to fell for pit-props. He was shocked at the idea that 'she had wanted him to buy the land - *to save them*!' (*W*, p. 19) The novelist's tree imagery added force to the description of civilisation's ravages when the fictional Professor Channon mourned the ailing Moreton Bay fig

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30 Dark, 'Australia and the Australians', *op. cit.*, p. 10.
Dark's optimistic view of the white Australians' continuing relationship with their land was not shared by Xavier Herbert. See J. McLaren, 'Reviews', *Australian Literary Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1, May ,1993, p. 119, where the critic stated that *Capricornia* displayed 'Herbert's perception of the land itself as the agent of a fate which Australians are unable to avoid because, unlike the original inhabitants, they are unable to see the land as anything but a resource for exploitation.'

with its roots under 'the hot crust of city pavement' (*W*, p. 237), an apt emblem of the confining, crushing qualities of industrial society. Resisting the urge 'to look back to a land still uncontaminated', the Professor tried to control his rage 'at the manner of its contamination', with 'lovely places violated and lovely names forgotten' and 'a brave and ancient race fading slowly to extinction.' (*W*, p. 12) He experienced 'the sudden revulsion against civilisation which comes intermittently to all those in whom the primitive still lives strongly' as the 'whole illness of humanity, the whole insanity of civilised life' (*W*, p. 238) rushed over him.

So long before, Governor Phillip had seen it as

> ... a country reticent of its beauty, demanding a wakening of the heart and a new perception in the eyes of the beholder before it spread its treasures for his gaze (*TTL*, p. 504),

and Dark demonstrated the burgeoning of this attitude as it extended into her own society. About individual white Australians the novelist was optimistic, considering them now 'welded into [their] land as firmly as were the black Australians',[31] having accomplished a 'slow, resistant merging with their environment', as, 'imperceptibly, the land felt its way into the hearts and minds of its new inhabitants.'[32] She wrote,

> The big, indifferent land had captured the imagination and so transformed the half-friendly antagonism of early days into the quiet and certain love of those who now called it home.[33]

Although Dark had Lady Hegarty reflect, 'How seldom a human being fits perfectly into his environment, comfortably, snugly, like a kernel in a nut!' (*W*, p. 151) in the novels not only the Aborigines but many of the white characters did. Gilbert Massey confessed, 'The country is here inside my body, and its air is the breath out of my lungs.' (*TLC*, p. 177) Both Oliver and Lois were shown to feel 'firmly and serenely at home' (*W*, pp. 143 and 280), and Win and Brenda were 'completely one with their environment of bright

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31 Dark, 'Australia and the Australians', *op. cit.*, p. 12.
Cp. Penton, *Think - or be Damned, op. cit.*, pp. 58 and 59: 'We do not love it. We hate it. ... We have not fitted ourselves into it.'

32 Dark, 'Australia and the Australians', *op. cit.*, p. 10.

33 Dark, 'This Land of Ours', in G. Farwell and F. H. Johnston (eds.), *This Land of Ours ... Australia,* Sydney, 1949, p. 15.

light and warm strong-scented air.' (*W*, p. 124) Lesley, reflecting on the fascination which the land held for her, remembered certain well-loved items in the landscape, and knew that her 'acceptance of these good things' and 'her unthinking sense of unity with them,' were 'the measure of its influence and the test of its mysterious power.' (*W*, p. 187)

Even the city-dweller Tom Drew, who had always thought of Australia as 'born out of the womb of Mother England in the year 1770 with Captain James Cook for midwife' (*RC*, p. 290), was shown to gradually appreciate the 'fugitive, fragile, ephemeral, incredibly elusive' (*RC*, p. 60) beauty of the landscape, and to recognise in the ancient cliff faces and gullies 'a world of tremendous, of majestic antiquity.' (*RC*, p. 291) His deeper emotions were aroused by the sight of various distinctive features of the landscape which he had hitherto thought of as mere geographical facts, and he was touched by the thought that out of these 'there might some day blossom things you felt.' (*RC* p. 290) Drawn into pantheistic devotion, his country-loving wife and daughter experienced 'a sense of spiritual expansion' (*RC,* p. 68) as, having 'drunk the country like a strong wine', they felt it 'rising in them, warm, swimming, an intoxication.' (*RC,* p. 57)

If they were to love and live in harmony with it, Dark suggested, Australians must learn to respect the land's power for, 'in the end ... the land must always win':

> Its rule is aloof and dispassionate - not an enmity, but a discipline with which to mould and drive its people, hurt them, gladden them, terrify or exhilarate them, kill or save them so that they must become, whether they wish it or not, shaped to some pattern which will make them one with it at last. (*W*, p. 384)

So it can be seen that, in positing harmony with the land as a source of comfort, of 'sustenance and unfailing refreshment' (*TLC*, p. 224), Dark regarded it as an invaluable aid on the life journey. Her work disclosed her belief that the interior world of the human being is never entirely separated from the outer, and that the interior self can never be fulfilled without the interaction of these two worlds. To be truly human, Dark intimated,

individuals must develop a sense of the sacred in the non-human, yet somehow animate, natural world, with themselves as part of it, and in touch with 'the larger forces of life'.[34] This conception of their place in the cosmic order, the novels implied, would broaden the limited meaning and perspective of the life journey which the rational, industrialised world offered, and, by providing emotional and spiritual support, make easier for the questers the realisation of their full potential.

Concerning the vast land mass of Australia, then, Dark's protest was aimed at the way in which, for the most part, the early Europeans denied themselves any chance of bonding with it because of its very difference from anything they had ever known, and at the ruthless efforts to exploit it which they made from the beginning of white settlement, and which narrow-visioned authorities allowed to continue in contemporary society.

Governor Phillip feared that the convicts 'were to die as they had lived, full of hatred and frustration', but he was also confident that 'the wide land ... was to offer to their descendants a richness of opportunity which they themselves had never known.' (*TTL*, p. 123) Dark's novels revealed that the convicts, themselves, eventually did recognise the regenerative quality of the land when they reasoned that so different a place must give rise to different circumstances, and the experiences of the escapees, Prentice and Finn, and the convicts' son, Johnny, proved this to be so.

The novels exhibited clearly the writer's belief that human beings had made their world and so were capable of changing or perhaps salvaging it. I shall go on to examine the kind of less rigid and more reflective society which, Dark predicted, would promote individual and social well-being, and, by making wars unthinkable, contribute much to the survival and progress of humanity.

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[34] L. Hergenhan, *Unnatural Lives, Studies in Australian Fiction about the Convicts, from James Tucker to Patrick White*, St. Lucia, 1983, p. 114.

Chapter Twelve

A FLEXIBLE SOCIETY - 'the art of continual little adjustments'

> All the same, you can't right the world in a day ...
> But you can begin to right it any day at all. (*PC*, p. 65)

Writing for an 'unrestful generation' (*ST*, 'Preface') in what she called 'these disillusioned times' (*TTL*, p. 9), Dark made her stand against the competitive practices and economic inequality inherent in the capitalistic system, which she considered socially divisive. Discouraging though the outlook seemed, however, the novels and her ancillary writings demonstrated her hope for reform. As Humphrey McQueen commented in pondering her largest canvas,

> When Governor Arthur Phillip looks forward from the mean and brutish prison camp at Port Jackson to envisage a free and prosperous community, Eleanor Dark is standing beside him seeking that same goal beyond the economic depression and war-making of the 1930s. His confidence presents her hope just as her doubts echo through his reverses.[1]

What kind of society did this social reformer envisage? Hers was the classic plan of all reformers - the gradual changing of what she saw as a repressive system ruled by the profit motive, into a caring community which was based on socialism and primarily considered the common good. There the people would be interdependent, possess social equity, gain rewards for effort, with 'nobody humiliated, nobody suffering.' (*W*, p. 68) Dark tempered her idealistic vision with practicality, however, by advocating the installation of flexible rules which would encourage respect for each individual within the group and so reduce the tension between the private individual and the social norm.[2]

It was the core admix of idealism and practicality in the novelist which committed her emotionally to socialism, while, at the same time, she

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[1] H. McQueen, 'Introduction', *The Timeless Land* (1941), Sydney, 1990, p. vii.

[2] Dark made no mention of Aborigines forming part of a new society. In those years it was generally believed that the race was doomed. See *The Timeless Land*, Preface, p. 9: 'The race is nearly gone, and with it will go something which the 'civilised' world has scorned too easily.'

entertained an intellectual preference for liberalism - a position made possible by the personal flexibility which prevented her from accepting any completely rigid doctrines. Social flexibility, Dark proposed, would best be realised through a blending of liberal individualism and socialist collectivity. As the narrator/Dark persona in *Lantana Lane* claimed, there had been many 'blueprints of quite infallible Systems capable of dealing with every conceivable problem in human affairs, except humans.' (*LL*, p. 81) In Dark's 'pattern for existence' (*TLC*, p. 318), however, it was essential that, if there were to be both individual and social progress, the aims of the individual and society must coincide. When this was effected, all the members of the community, working for the common good [3] and behaving humanely toward one another, would still have the freedom to develop themselves to their full stature, and, as R. H. Tawney put it, 'since virtue should not be too austere - have their fling when they [felt] like it.'[4]

Dark regarded economic inequality as unjust and morally unacceptable. She once commented that, to her, '[it seemed] preposterous that individuals should monopolise the natural resources of their country and make private fortunes out of them.'[5] Thus, topically describing the people's greedy, panic-stricken rush to buy clothes when rationing was introduced during the Second World War, the fictional Gilbert asked, 'What else ... *could* you expect of people nourished from birth on an immoral doctrine - every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost?' (*TLC*, p. 206)

As Eric Dark wrote,

> ... the whole shape of life is competition for individual gain, when we all know (all who are reasonably civilised) that we should be co-operating for the community's gain.[6]

He went on to observe, all too prophetically, in Tom Paine's terms, that 'while the rights of property are considered more important than the rights of man,

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[3] Cp. Ibsen, *An Enemy of the People*, *op. cit.*, Act 1, Scene I, p. 14: 'Society ... is like a ship - every man should do something to help navigate the ship.' See also Act 1, Scene 2, p. 24: Hovstad, talking about the underdog's needs, claimed that 'he's got to have a say in the government of society - that's what brings out ability, intelligence, and self-respect in people.'

[4] Tawney, 'British Socialism Today', in Hinden, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

[5] Dark, 'Political Parties', undated, Box 10 (25), ML MSS 4545.

[6] E. P. Dark, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

brutal and stupid things will still be done',[7] and stated that his work, *Medicine and the Social Order*, had became 'an indictment of capitalism, and a plea for socialism as the only alternative to a recoil into a darker age than the world has ever seen.' He continued,

> As the examination of our present society went on, it seemed more and more obvious to me that capitalism, which at its beginning had been the friend of human progress, had become its most bitter enemy; that if we were to advance to a real civilisation, competitive must give place to co-operative production.[8]

It is worth noting that his highly moral definition of socialism rested on

> ... the belief that all races are equal; that every individual has a right to education, health, an equal say in the government of his country, to useful work for a just reward - a right to the opportunity for the fullest possible intellectual and spiritual development. ... The aim of Socialism is the material, cultural and spiritual enlargement of mankind, without any distinction as to race, colour, religion, or sex.[9]

The novelist's distaste for capitalism's essentially militaristic practices of social domination and economic competition did not, however, push her into intolerant political dogmatism. She claimed that she 'never felt the smallest impulse to throw in [her] lot with a political party', insisting that she preferred to remain outside parties, 'supporting what seems good and opposing what seems bad quite regardless of party alignments.'[10]She applied as her credo the maxim which resounded throughout her novels - 'To thine ownself be true' - as she argued:

> There is always another alternative [to being a Communist or Fascist]; there is always yourself - perhaps a poor thing, but your own. It is a hard and lonely alternative, but it is always there, and an artist, of all people should be able to recognise it.[11]

Her political stance was obviously based on individual moral values rather than on any party concerns. Instead of concentrating on abstract ideas as a

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[7] E.P. Dark, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

[8] E.P. Dark, *op. cit.*, Preface.

[9] *ibid.*, pp. 115 and 117.

[10] Dark, 'Political Parties', *op. cit.*

[11] Dark, untitled fragment, undated, ML Box 10 (25) 4545.

true doctrinaire socialist would, she was more interested in the welfare of the individual, particularly in relation to the injustices which she saw associated with the distribution of wealth. As a practical idealist, she kept her aims within the limits of the possible:

> My own conclusion is that capitalism makes it intolerably difficult for people to behave well, and that socialism, by eradicating that 'root of all evil' which St. Paul declared the love of money, might make it considerably easier; I should not personally ask or expect any more of it than that.[12]

The Depression had prompted in many sensitive people the desire for social change.[13] Dark had the fictional Roger assure Sim, 'Everybody of any intelligence is a Socialist nowadays' (*W*, p. 63),[14] while, when his reading inspired him to join the few who took 'an intelligent interest in the USSR' (*TLC*, p. 142), the rebellious Gilbert also decided that socialism had to be a more acceptable system than capitalism. In Australia, those who knew least about it were the keenest to discredit socialism. Thus Dark's character, the wealthy merchant, Arthur Sellman, was 'shocked and alarmed' when he glanced into the socialist literature which his radical wife, Win, brought home, regarding it as 'nothing more nor less than blasphemy.' (*W*, p. 21) To him, socialism was 'the the thin end of the wedge for out and out Communism.' (*W*, p. 292) It is useful to note that, although capitalists like the fictional Walter Massey, 'who regarded innovation of any kind with loathing' (*TLC*, p. 17), labelled the Labour Government of the time as a set of 'agitators and windbags' (*TLC*, p. 47), in real life ts leaders would not risk losing bourgeois votes by committing themselves to full socialism, and were unwilling, even - as Brian Penton expressed it - 'to advocate the pale-pink socialism of the English Labour Party.'[15]

For the most part, in the opinion of the fictional Gilbert, the solid majority of Australians did little to achieve social and personal growth. They

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[12] Dark, 'Political Parties', *op. cit.*

[13] See R. A. Gollan, 'Some Consequences of the Depression', *Labour History*, No. 17, 1970, p. 184.

[14] Cp. N. Mitchison, *We Have Been Warned*, London, 1935, p. 344, wherein Muriel said to Dione, 'Everyone sensible is a Socialist - more or less. It's only a matter of time.'

[15] Penton, '*Think- Or Be Damned, op. cit.*, p. 62.
Cp. also Barnard Eldershaw, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow, op. cit.*, p. 173, where Bowie said, 'Socialism if the policy of the Labour party - subject to the law of Detours.'

were 'conditioned to obey the law, and conditioned also never to question it' (*TLC*, p. 137), ever too apathetic to appreciate the need for change, 'moving through life in the bewitchment of a familiar routine, stepping from to-day's problems to to-morrow's', and always 'declining to meet those of next week half-way'. They dismissed those who criticised the status quo as

> ... cranky, tiresome people who seemed to have nothing to do but stand on soap-boxes in the Domain and lay down the law about things they couldn't possibly understand. (*TLC*, p. 125-26)

These protesters, however, were not all wild talkers. In the Domain, Ian listened to a socialist orator - who was 'not just a ranter, an iconoclast, a windbag', but a thinker and a reader, who 'believed the gospel that he preached' - as he denounced government policies which had resulted in widespread unemployment. His argument was so persuasive that his words

> ...ran about the silent mass of his listeners, flickering, searching like tongues of flame, so that they came to life under them, stimulated, bewitched for the moment from the inertia of acceptance, seeing farther than the next meal, ... farther than their own lives'. (*W*, p. 246)

Naturally this protester alarmed Arthur Sellman, who was only too aware of the 'danger to all his jealously guarded world' (*W*, p. 265) which such dissidents posed: 'Gaol's the place for him and his kind. Disturbing the peace ... inciting to sedition.' (*W*, p. 264) Officialdom was perturbed, too, so that when the orator persuaded his mostly unemployed listeners to demonstrate outside Parliament House, the police dispersed them, for, as the narrator observed wryly, unlike the wealthy wedding guests, such underdogs had the misfortune to be 'disciplined and not protected by the police.' (*W*, p. 182) The authorities used much the same method to distract general attention from the problem of those who were forced to take to the roads in search of work, keeping them moving, reasoning that '[u]nemployed people get talking when they settle down together, and that's bad; they get thinking, even, and that's worse.' (*TLC*, p. 126)

Eric Dark commented that 'so many people still don't know what socialism is' because they had 'been carefully misinformed for decades by a

naturally interested capitalist press'.[16] Marty wrote of *The Messenger*, the fictional newspaper to which her conservative father subscribed, that it could be trusted neither to disturb 'the public complacency' nor question its readers' 'moral [and] political prejudices.' (*TLC*, p. 122)[17] When the radical Gilbert looked to other sources for information, his 'dubious pamphlets' about socialism outraged the proprieties of his employees. These people 'accepted what they were told' (*TLC*, p. 137) when their leaders assured them that communism was being introduced into the country by means of just such subversive literature. So Gilbert saw 'uneasy faces become closed and hostile', and encountered 'the herd's suspicion of anyone whose opinion cared to diverge from the dictated mass-opinion of Press and official pronouncement,' and he admitted, ruefully:

> To be looked at askance by the conservatives for being a communist, and to be simultaneously regarded more in sorrow than in anger by the communists for not being one, place a man ... in a very select sort of isolation. (*TLC*, p. 66)

Not unduly perturbed by such unpleasantness himself, he was angry on behalf of those 'who had suffered in being treated like lepers, ostracised, suspected, even cut dead in the street.' (*TLC*, p. 138)[18] Marty enjoyed the 'sharp, sour humour' (p. 141) of the situation when Russia joined the allied nations to fight against Germany, and the anti-communists were forced rethink their attitude toward the former 'enemy'.

As a practical idealist, Dark pointed out, however, the danger of accepting doctrinaire socialism as the ideal. There was no guarantee that socialist measures would necessarily effect universal brotherhood. Putting

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[16] E. P. Dark, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

[17] Cp. Ibsen, *An Enemy of the People*, *op. cit.*, Act 1, Scene 1, p. 7: Referring to the - at this stage - impartial newspaper, *The People's Daily Messenger*, Hovstad said of the protester, Thomas Stockmann, 'The Doctor sometimes honours the *Messenger* [with his articles] when he wants to uncover the real truth of some subject.'

[18] This was to happen to the Darks. See R. Darby, 'Interview with Dr. E. P. Dark', November, 1980, transcript of tape, NLA, TRC 896, p. 2/20, wherein Eric Dark, discussing the atmosphere in Katoomba in the early 1950s, stated, 'Even some of one's good friends looked askance on one. ... At one time I was getting, every now and again, an anonymous letter. It would be addressed to Dr. Dark, Communist. Oh, there were fairly formidable threats in it.'
See also R. Millis, *Serpent's Tooth*, Ringwood, 1984, for an account of events in Katoomba during this period.
Cp. F. B. Vickers, *Though Poppies Grow* Melbourne, 1958. Set in the 1950s, this novel's description of a West Australian community's persecution of the socialists, Dan and Elva Stroud, as communist 'fellow travellers', parallelled the Darks' situation.

theory into practice would be difficult, perhaps, and she had her Marty, considering the position of artists, wonder how they would fare under a socialist system. Nick assured Marty that they would be 'accepted and honoured', but she argued that, for a populace 'just breaking away from old gods, and on the lookout for new ones', they would be '[r]everenced and looked up to', sanctioned by the party line, and so become 'a class of artists with a vested interest in the status quo.'[19] This, she believed, would be 'monstrous', because an artist 'must have a chip on his shoulder or he's nothing.' (*TLC*, p. 315) [20] She insisted,

> The artist's material is life ... . But it has to be ... wrought upon by himself in his own way, and in his own good time before he can produce anything out of it. He can't be driven by any outside agency. (*TLC*, p. 317)

Marty contended, too, that, besides the 'War of the Rich Class against the Poor Class', there were many other forms that divisive class antagonism could take, such as

> ... the manual class versus the intellectual class, or the technical class versus the artistic class, or the active class versus the contemplative class, or the gregarious class versus the solitary class. (*TLC*, pp. 143-44)

Rejecting her husband's opinion that, even so, there would not be 'the bitterness and hatred that spring up between the haves and the have-nots', she suggested that while the people were 'getting ... educated to tolerance and the idea of co-operation' these minor snobberies could turn to hatred:

> The superiority of one group over another only has to be accepted ... and the group that's regarded as inferior will begin to feel resentment. (*TLC*, p. 144)[21]

The traumatic years of the Second World War forced far-seeing people,

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[19] Cp. Pritchett, *op. cit.*, p. 30: Graham Greene pointed out 'two duties the novelist owes - to tell the truth as he sees it and to accept no special privileges from the state.'

[20] *ibid:* 'The artist must have something to push against.'

[21] Cp. Barnard Eldershaw, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow, op. cit.*, p. 297: The Professor agreed that 'Socialism will not solve everything. There are evils in Socialism that humanity will have to overcome.' However, he maintained that it would 'break down the major evils of this system and provide an improved environment for the majority of people.'

'confronting an obscure future' (*TLC*, p. 318), to yearn ever more urgently for a new world order, one that the Marxist, Nick, believed was 'just around the corner.' (*TLC*, p. 33) 'Right after the war', Jack Beasley wrote,

> ... there was feisty talk of the impossibility of returning to the pre-war depression conditions, of a new order that was envisaged and of socialism, which, in some form or other, seemed to be the way forward for the whole world'.[22]

'The road to Utopia is clear', Bertram Russell wrote, lying 'partly through politics and partly through changes in the individual.'[23] Dark's work reflected this conviction that a sense of community was not enough to hold human groups together, but that 'the thinking mind is the integrating factor in society.'[24] The reformer must convince the people to change their way of thinking and of seeing the world, so that a sharing of accepted ideas formed the basis of the community. The wise Gilbert, 'groping after a broader culture and a truer democracy' (*TLC*, p. 123), posited the need to 'think globally' (*TLC*, p. 199),[25] and to understand that suddenly, because of technological advances, 'we are no longer hundreds of small communities but one vast community.' (*SaS*, p. 96) Idealistic theories must be put into practice. 'The necessity', he believed, was 'a re-making not only of policies and laws, but of the whole human outlook', with 'a vast edifice of false values to be demolished.' (*TLC*, p. 206)

'Socialism is in its essence internationalism, ... a pooling of humanity',[26]and the concept of global thinking was popular among those who argued that only through international co-operation - the sharing of the earth's raw materials on the economic plane and a belief in the brotherhood of humankind on the spiritual - could wars be avoided. As Gilbert maintained,

> If you are fighting domination, suppression, overlordship, ... you are fighting it everywhere; if you believe in freedom, self-determination, democracy, you believe in it for everyone. Global war? Well, then, global peace, global co-operation, global justice. (*TLC*, p. 249)

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[22] J. Beasley, *Red Letter Days, notes from inside an era*, Sydney, 1979, p. 131.

[23] S. Meyer (ed.), *Dewey and Russell, op. cit.*, p. 26.

[24] Eggleston, *op. cit.*, p.34.

[25] Global vision was a popular concept in these times, held also by Brian Penton and Vance Palmer.

[26] Barnard Eldershaw, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow, op. cit.*, p. 298.

Dark's contemporary, Brian Penton, subscribed to this concept, stating that the purpose of his work, *Think - Or Be Damned,* was to teach a 'technique of thinking' which could be used to 'undermine illusions and expose false prophecies',[27] and that he hoped for 'civilised tolerance expressed by international co-operation against the atavistic rivalries and bloodlusts of national exclusiveness.'[28]

Bent on developing cultural awareness, Dark's character, Roger Blair, was adamant in his opinion that Australians must develop a national consciousness. The novelist had Professor Channon applaud the idealistic younger man's love of country, but suggest that in an age of competing nationalism which had been responsible for the ugly, aggressive chauvinism of Fascism, the ideal of nationalism was a false one, and dangerous in that 'it reaches a certain pitch, it embraces a certain conception - and then it attempts to remain static'. Invoking the ideal of true internationalism, the Professor claimed that love of country 'must deepen, strengthen, enlarge, until it embraces far more than one country, one people, one ideal' (*W*, p. 78), and he argued that the human spirit was 'not national, or even international, but super-national.' (*W*, p. 79)[29] Again narrow-visioned legislators created obstacles to progress when they frowned on such an attitude, upholding the false ideal of nationalism and warning the people not to 'cast away the precious heritage which has been built for us to snatch at some fantasy of internationalism.' (*TLC*, p. 180)

Any political system which replaced the existing one, the novels implied, must be imbued with ethical qualities vastly superior to those inherent in capitalism. In the book which he was desperately trying to finish, Dark's cancer-stricken Professor Channon revealed his conviction that 'nothing on earth can save mankind but the universal acceptance of a religion.' (*W*, p. 135) To him religion meant 'the sense that man has ... of some power to which he owes reverence and obedience', and 'his moral reaction to that sense, his acceptance of it as a guide to behaviour.' (*W*, p.

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[27] B. Penton's letter to Dark, dated 15/2/40, quoted in Buckridge, *The Scandalous Penton, op. cit.*, p. 218, n. 41.

[28] Buckridge, *op. cit.*, p. 239. This opinion was expressed in an article by Penton in the Sydney *Daily Telegraph*, 5/5/1943.

[29] See A. C. Ward, *Twentieth-Century English Literature 1901-1960* (1928), London, 1966, p. 33: In the 1930s H. G. Wells was 'a tireless advocate' of internationalism, which was 'regarded by fanatical leaders of self-glorifying nations as a criminal heresy, not as a noble ideal.'

135) The novels questioned the values of several of the characters who upheld institutionalised religion.[30] 'Be just,' the Reverend Johnson told the convicts, while at the same time his professed religion was complacently 'sheltering in the skirts of the society which meted out injustice' (*TTL*, p. 87), while the Reverend Marsden preached to the convicts, already debased and without hope, of 'a God armed with thunderbolts of punishment.' (*NB*, p. 264) The narrator in *The Timeless Land* ironically described the attitude of the Enlightenment mind, 'which, finding its activities incompatible with its faith', had gradually substituted for that faith 'a system of mechanical worship by which it was enabled to believe that it might simultaneously serve God and Mammon.' (*TTL*, p. 151) So Scott Laughlin, the socialist reformer and mentor of Gilbert and Marty, challenged the 'narrow religious dogma' (*TLC*, p. 239) and hypocrisy of the sanctimonious landlord, Walter Massey; 'I am at a loss to understand', Laughlin informed him,

> ... how you reconcile the religious principles, which I am told you profess, with responsibility for dwellings which are ... unfit for human habitation. (*TLC*, p. 87)

Gilbert's confused wife, Phyllis, berated him because he 'looked all the time for salvation through human effort, and not through the Grace of God.' (*TLC*, p. 174) Professor Channon opposed this view, believing that the leaders of organised religion had done humanity a disservice, stunting the individual's spiritual progress, 'leading him on fruitless quests for a peace which he had driven out of his own heart.' (*W*, p. 291) The human being, Dark had this character believe, thus conceived of divinity 'as apart from himself', so that 'he began to bow down in humiliation', and to develop 'an entirely vicious and harmful mistrust of and contempt for himself.' (*W*, p. 291) The religion which the Professor advocated was based on humanistic principles, on the individual's 'recognition of divinity within himself', and on being true to that self. He insisted that 'each man is his own accuser and his own judge.' (*W*, p. 290) Yet again humanity was determined to defeat its own

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[30] Cp. Wagar, *H. G. Wells, Journalism and Prophecy*, *op. cit.*, p. 283, in which Wells stated, '... the coming world state ... will be based upon a common world religion, very much simplified and universalised and better understood. This will not be Christianity nor Islam nor Buddhism nor any such specialised form of religion, but religion itself pure and undefiled, ... brotherhood, creative service, and self-forgetfulness.'
Cp. also Eggleston, *op. cit.*, p. 327: 'At the present bleak moment a miracle is needed to save humanity, and true miracles can only be achieved by a religious movement which can revolutionize human conduct.'

progress and Professor Channon condemned

> ... the perversity of man, endlessly trying to tear apart his own inviolable entity, and in his resulting agony staring wildly into a void in search of some other and more merciful judge than the one he is afraid to recognise within himself. (*W*, p. 295)

Because he was a practical idealist, the Professor maintained that the ethic which would enable individuals 'to live at peace' (*W*, p. 303) lay in humankind's acceptance of Christ as a human being. For while, as he said, the teaching and example of the Son of God would remain an idealistic abstraction, that of Christ the human being, and thus accessible model, would become 'practical and intimate and real, a not impossible standard of human behaviour and of human thought.' (*W*, p. 304)

After the Great War there had been a surge of interest in ideological politics, a British interest that could be seen

> ... as in some sense an attempt on the part of those whose values and mores had been destroyed by the war to identify with a definite and clear-cut political creed, an attempt to escape from the waste land of conflicting values, or of no values at all.[31]

In Australia in the 1930s and 1940s, although all the political parties had agreed on the need to defend the country against the Japanese, the political climate was a complex one. 'All kinds of thought', the fictional Gilbert decided, 'functioning in all kinds of different ways, would be needed for [the world's] regeneration' (*TLC*, p. 71), and, with the novelist using the Marxist journalist, Nick, to spark off ideological discussions, her characters questioned and qualified one another's creeds. 'No party has the monopoly of truth or virtue',[32] Dark had observed, and, as Marty's husband, Richard, admitted, '[W]e do all play our own tunes, ... even those of us who aren't fanatics.' (*TLC*, p. 147) With Marty's question to Nick, 'Why can't you admit that all people who want the right things are allies - even if they disagree about the details of methods (*TLC*. p. 81), Dark was suggesting that to

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[31] R. Plant, 'Social Thought', in C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson (eds.), *The Twentieth-Century Mind: History, Ideas and Literature in Britain, Vol. II, 1918-1945,* London, 1972, p. 85.
[32] Dark, 'Political Parties', *op. cit.*

separate human beings into incompatible groups with opposing attitudes could only contribute to global unrest, with various nations ever trying to enforce their own systems on others.

Nick was not only a rebel but also 'a hopeless dogmatist' (*TLC* , p. 81), whose belief in 'the unassailability of his formulae', although giving him 'a kind of rigid strength', was also a weakness. For, as Marty saw it, his inflexibility was unresponsive to changing needs, to 'a shifting world-scene, where conditions altered overnight.' (*TLC*, p. 49) For all his 'dangerous flavour of bigotry', however, Nick was practical, both 'a condemner of complacency, a voice crying indefatigably in the wilderness of political inertia' (*TLC*, p. 33), and a man of action who, whether handing our pamphlets or in the role of 'a soap-box orator' (*TLC*, p. 71), dared 'to apply his theory to life, ... to present his faith as something that might, and must be practised as well as professed.' Marty, 'hearing him exhort the incurious to ask, hearing him urge the heedless to wake up' (*TLC*, p. 33), was forced to respect him.

Like Nick, the liberal Richard also clung fast to his own creed, with a romantic faith in the possibility of 'a world governed by high ideals, of human beings living at peace with one another.' (*TLC*, p. 74) The tolerant Marty - like Dark herself - in the face of 'their inflexible loyalty to their own ideas', became 'a kind of liaison-officer, seeing the valuable qualities of each - struggling to make an alliance where they would have nothing but a watchful, friendly truce.' (*TLC*, p. 81) The practical Nick rejected Richard's beliefs as a 'sort of mystical *laissez-faire* ! Leave it all to the individual', insisting that the limitations of his middle-class mind had rendered Richard 'not only blind, but deaf and practically half-witted as well.' (*TLC*, p. 308)

When younger, Marty had shared Richard's romantic, idealistic expectations of human beings, being 'content to see salvation in human goodness without examining those influences which so often turned human goodness bad.' (*TLC*, p. 80) As she matured, however, she leavened romantic ideals with a measure of practicality in a society which was riddled with 'unemployment, slums, exploitation, markets, undernourishment, venereal disease, war.' (*TLC*, p. 74) 'It's a habit of mind', she said of liberalism, 'and you don't discard it overnight' (*TLC*, p. 82), yet it was the doubt of its adequacy to deal with the destructive policies of Fascism which

led thinkers like Gilbert and Marty to see liberal democracy as 'a fraying rope, snapping strand by strand as they all hung on it over a precipice' (*TLC*, p. 104), and to look to socialism to provide a solution.[33]

It has been said that 'the less man clogs the free play of his mind with political doctrine and dogma, the better for his thinking'.[34] Dark echoed this maxim when she had Marty accuse Nick of having 'placed Marx and Lenin where [their father, Walter Massey] had placed the Bible' (*TLC* p. 33), and she accused the party leaders of stifling the individual mind by forcing their ideas on to their disciples, thus cramping their intelligence and limiting their thinking.[35] She contended that Nick 'never had an original idea in his life' (*TLC*, p. 148), and that his conversation was 'really a series of recitations from *das Kapital* and the *Communist Manifesto*. (*TLC*, p. 148)[36] Richard agreed, arguing that too many communists accepted the 'Word of Marx' (p. 307),[37] while Gilbert complained that ideological over-emphasis was the besetting sin of many communists.[38] He objected to their labouring of the obvious as,

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33 See Buckridge, *The Scandalous Penton, op. cit.*, pp. 237-38. In 1943 Brian Penton, in the *Daily Telegraph*, conducted a symposium concerned with the problem of how the Allies should deal with Germany and Japan after the war, and Dark was one of the essayists. She wrote that she saw the Fascist leaders as 'merely the more conspicuous carriers of a disease fatal to mankind' and claimed that 'they must be destroyed or isolated', adding , 'beyond that I feel no interest in their fate." '

34 The historian, Lewis Namier, quoted in Plant, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

35 See Giuffre, *op. cit.*, p. 87: Eric Dark stated, ' ... if I had joined the Communist Party, I would have been out of it in a week, because you've got to think exactly as they say, and I've always thought as I felt.'

36 See Walker, *Dream and Disillusion, op. cit.*, p. 130. There is an interesting parallel here: 'Nettie Palmer was quick to point out that [her brother] Esmonde was in danger of finding ready-made answers to social problems in Marxism.'
See also J. Wells, 'The Writers League: a study in literary and working-class politics', *Meanjin*, Vol. 46, 1987, p. 533: In the 1930s the writer, Mervyn Skipper, observed of the Communist party of Australia that members 'appear to be incapable of independent thinking. Marx seems to have filled the world with more parrots to the yard than there are in a square mile of tropical jungle'.

37 See Beasley, *op. cit.*, p. 177, wherein it was reported that J. B. Miles, chief executive officer of the Communist Party of Australia, pronounced that 'Eleanor Dark ... revealed her unsympathetic view of the party through her character, Nick.'
See also C. Ferrier (ed.), *Point of Departure, the Autobiography of Jean Devanny*, St. Lucia, 1986, p. 286. Devanny reported a conversation with 'Leader' (J. B. Miles): of Eleanor Dark he said, 'It's easy to see by her book, *The Little Company*, that *that* one doesn't ever intend to get into the struggle.'

38 See J. Wells, ' "Red Witches": Perceptions of communist women writers', in Dever, *Wallflowers and Witches, op. cit.*, p. 154. Pertinent to this was a contemporary comment made by one communist writer of another. 'Frank Dalby Davison ... mocked [Jean] Devanny's political commitment in a letter to Nettie Palmer in 1939: "I am very fond of Jean but she annoys me to the point of hysteria. Her unfailing rejoinder: 'But you see, dear, that's not correct thinking.' And this talk that you have only to read Karl Marx to the wild man of Borneo to make him fit for citizenship in modern society! Very like religious fundamentalists." '

determined to air their opinions, they sounded like 'bad amateur actors, mouthing and over-playing, insulting the mother-wit of their audience.' (*TLC*, p. 309) Dark projected a picture of a worthy social reformer when she had Marty contrast these inflexible attitudes with that of their childhood mentor, Scott Laughlin, a man of vision whose 'interests were enormously wide and varied.' (*TLC*, p. 210) As Marty pointed out, 'There wasn't any of the narrowness of fanaticism in him. And he didn't dramatise his faiths, or himself for holding them.' (*TLC*, p. 210) A practical idealist 'whose convictions had been his life' (*TLC*, p. 202), Laughlin s power to improve social conditions was frustrated when short-sighted leaders imprisoned him as a traitor[39] during the Great War because he challenged the status quo in the newspaper which he edited.

'What would be born out of the ultimate encounter? What idea would win the last, inevitable showdown?' (*TLC*, p. 251), Gilbert wondered. Although the novels did not answer the question, the reality was that, although for a brief period immediately after the Second World War it seemed that postwar reconstruction would be conducted along progressive lines,[40] the Right wrested the initiative from the Left. Thus, as Hobsbawm put it, 'capitalism and liberal democracy were to make a triumphant comeback'[41] and then disintegrate into the general passivity and conservatism of the 1950s.

Freedom was a concept which pervaded Dark's novels, and a word which resonated like a drum beat throughout. In the First Settlement, the newly-landed convicts were gripped by 'a dumb, obstinate determination to be free', so that they constantly wandered into the bush and just as constantly were recaptured. It was 'as if some instinct against which neither fear nor reason could prevail drove them from one insane and foredoomed attempt to another.' (*TTL*, p. 421) Governor Phillip marvelled,

> How precious a thing it must be, how cherished a

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[39] Cp. Ibsen, *An Enemy of the People, op. cit.*, Act 1, Scene 2, p. 33. When the Mayor objected to Thomas Stockmann's accusation that the town's so-called medicinal baths were polluted, he shouted, 'A man who can throw that kind of insinuation around is nothing but a traitor to society!'

[40] D. Modjeska, 'Introduction', *The Little Company* (1945), London, 1985, p. xiii.

[41] Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

> conception, how deeply-rooted a need, that men should strive and dare for it so madly!' (*TTL*, p. 214)

Freedom from want and freedom from fear[42] must form the basis of any society in which human beings can assert their individuality and develop their full potential, and the 'bright beacon-light of liberty' (*ST*, p. 365) is an ideal which, as Governor King observed, 'draws men toward it despite reason - warning - punishment.' (*ST*, p. 377)

Tom Paine wrote in *Common Sense,* with its defiant challenge to the ruling class:

> Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Asia and Africa have long expelled her. Europe regards her as a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. (*ST*, pp. 229)

Dark's rebel, Finn, who paid dearly for trying to instil Paine's beliefs into the convicts, was a practical idealist who knew that human beings exist in relation to others, that 'even freedom could lose its value in solitude.' (*NB,* p. 175) He dreamt of 'liberty which could strike shackles not only from his own feet, but from the feet of all men everywhere.' (*ST*, p. 296) Under Paine's 'perilous influence' (*ST,* p. 48), and putting theory into practice, Finn died 'spending his last breath in the pursuit of freedom.' (*NB*, p. 186)

Yet Dark suggested that at the current stage of social evolution the ideal of complete freedom and independence was unattainable, that there could only be an ordered liberty, a freedom with responsibility, in which the gratification of individual desires must be curbed by conscience and discrimination, and by the attitudes of others. There was available to the individual, however, Dark contended in the novels, the 'one freedom of the spirit which no outer forces can dismay' (*W*, p. 148), the right to be true to one's own conscience and personal ideals. 'Is not the reconciliation of differences a problem to be resolved by the individual's conscience and goodwill?' the fictional Mark Harvey asked (*NB*, p. 152), and the behaviour of Dark's adventurous characters answered his question. Susan lived her life 'in accordance with some rules which, rightly or wrongly, she believed to be

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[42] Penton, *Advance Australia - Where?, op. cit.*, p. 163: ' ... freedom from want and freedom from fear - the two basic yearnings of humanity'.

fair' (*RC*, p. 42); Lesley 'had enough intelligence and enough moral stamina to rely upon herself' (*W*, p. 256); Win a rebel against the complacency of life as lived by the wealthy social set, had an 'I'm-boss-in-my-own-mind attitude' (*W*, p. 88); and Marty's 'honesty was to herself and her own standards.' (*TLC*, p. 226)

This essential freedom to be true to oneself could best be implemented in a flexible society, and the novels indicated that any new society must be governed by the concept of flexibility. There is an Asian proverb which states, 'The tree that bends bears the fruit,'[43] and indeed one of the most significant achievements of human evolution is the move from a primitive rigidity toward flexibility of imagination and action.[44] Oliver foresaw a time when people would 'look back incredulously at a strange period in history when man had made laws and allowed them to bully him.' (*SaS*, p. 33) He was 'coldly aware how few and how simple are man's needs for well-being and fulfilment in his rich and fruitful world' (*W*, p. 172), yet officialdom constantly complicated matters and hindered human creativity and progress by setting up rigid social ideals as 'great images' to be 'worshipped by man who made them, by man whom they now enslave.' These ingrained habits had become

> ... [c]hains now so vast and so heavy, so tangled into inextricable confusion that he lay beneath them, crushed and gasping, powerless to free himself. (*SaS*, p. 33)

The fiction suggested that, while retaining necessarily a certain structural pattern, society must make traditions and conventions more flexible, thus allowing each human being the freedom to act with personal integrity rather than being blindly obedient to inflexible laws. This notion was perhaps best expressed in the thoughts of Gilbert's young son, Pete, who, after the subsidence of family turmoil, found himself in a more felicitous state:

> Life had begun again in a new routine which was orderly enough to make him feel secure, and flexible enough to allow for the impulses of the moment. (*TLC*, p. 311)

Oliver, too, believed that the time must come when human beings would be able to say, 'I am the master of my laws and not their slave.' (*SS*, p. 34) Dark portrayed the dangers of inflexibility with people like Walter Massey, who, still

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[43] Quoted in Clurman, *Ibsen, op. cit.*, p. 83

[44] Lifton, *The Protean Self, op. cit.*, p. 13.

cherishing, stubbornly and uncompromisingly, the old 'narrow standards and conceptions' (*TLC*, p. 51), had reduced his children's lives 'to a rigid pattern which [they] felt must be false because [they] couldn't move, stretch, breathe in it.' (*TLC*, p. 124) She contrasted him to Roger, whose opinions 'blended with but did not dominate the incredibly diverse sets of ideas which other voices had expressed.' (*W*, p. 199)

Even in the first difficult years of the penal settlement Governor Phillip was shown to appreciate the need for flexibility. 'The sharp outline of accepted standards was already wavering', and he decided that he must 're-draw it, black, clearer, more uncompromising than ever'(*TTL*, p. 81), before being forced to admit that for these transplanted beings there was 'the necessity to adjust, to compromise.' (*TTL*., p. 134) This was an ongoing adjustment, for later the fictional Marty commented that, in the early decades of the twentieth century in which she was growing up, the social conventions of Europe had 'necessarily suffered change and dilution in a community still in the throes of shaping itself to a new environment.' (*TLC*, p. 39)

While there surely was a need for order and reasonableness, society was apt to assume an inflexible set of patterns which the people did not know how to outgrow,[45] and, apropos of this, the narrator in *Lantana Lane* contended that 'such wise and illustrious folk as statesmen ... found that it was easier to let customs alone than to alter them.' (*LL*, p. 26) Dark pointed out that, instead of being a static structure, society was a developing process, for 'conditions change, and the needs and capacities of people are different.' (*TLC*, p. 148) People must, if necessary, compromise in both societal and individual activities, a not impossible task, for human beings are capable of making 'even the most complicated adjustments.' (*LL*, p. 71)

The writer continually stressed the dangers of rigidity, 'the stagnation which is followed by decay.' (*PC*, p. 13)[46] In a healthy society, tension was a necessary component which contributed to the growth of both the individual and the community, and Dark presented an interesting example when she

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[45] See Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

[46] Cp. Carter, 'Barnard Eldershaw, Utopia and the Literary Intellectual', *op. cit.*, p. 184. In Barnard Eldershaw's *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, the twenty-fourth century utopia was a static technocracy in which monotony prevailed and individual freedom was frustrated.

had the character, Margery, wife of the war-damaged Colin, wonder 'whether a world of peace-loving men would really be the Utopia of the future' (*RC*, p. 198), arguing, instead, that the tension between the sexes might be beneficent. Margery wondered whether depriving the male of 'his primeval urge to kill' might not be just as harmful as taking away his propagating power. For if 'peace, toil, construction and stability' were implicit in the female's creative drive, then 'surely man's destructive instinct must imply strife and friction', together with 'change [and] mobility'. She continued with her compromise recipe for a saner society:

> You could argue then, that a civilisation reared on the feminine ideal would remain entirely static, while one reared on the masculine ideal could not endure at all. (*RC*, p. 199)

The utopian genre has always played its part as a minor strand of Australian literature,[47] most clearly expressed, perhaps, in William Lane's novel, *The Workingman's Paradise* (1892), which offered socialism as an alternative to his dystopian portrayal of Sydney during the years 1888-1889.[48]An idealistic yearning for the perfect society 'whose every member lived in comfort and contentment' (*W*, p. 72) also haunted Dark's novels.[49] Yet, even if it were possible to attain this utopia, she showed how human beings, themselves, would constantly block their chances of doing so. *Prelude for Christopher* had the colonists destroying and deserting their model colony, while, in *Sun Across the Sky,* the property developer, Gormley, despoiled the natural community of Murragoonda, originally an Aboriginal campsite, and later a secluded, serene hamlet where the residents, as he jeered, had 'never a shop or a car or a picture theatre to wake the dull vegetation of their lives.' (*SaS,* p. 6) The convict, Finn, had a dream of establishing a haven for fugitives, 'a small number of persons settled in some sequestered part of the earth' (*ST*, p. 389), where they could 'share the

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[47] See Buckley, 'Utopianism and Vitalism in Australian Literature', *op. cit.*, pp. 39-51.

[48]See also R. Gollan, 'American Populism and Australian Utopianism', *Labour History*, No. 9, November, 1965, pp. 15-21. When it became obvious in the depressed 1890s that socialism was not part of the Labour party's immediate programme, Lane established his own utopian colonies in Paraguay - 'New Australia' and 'Cosme' - both of which failed.

[49] See P. Buckridge, 'The Penton Scandal: Rhetoric and Lifestyle in the Career of an Australian Intellectual', *Southerly*, p. 35: It is interesting to read that, in his journalism, Penton pointed out 'the dangers of all forms of utopian idealism.'

freedom and the possessions with which a new life was being built' (*NB*, p. 69), but this dream foundered when the pathetic felon, Dan Driver, turned informer and defeated Finn's plan to free his fellow-convicts.

During the years of terrible crises Australian utopian literature was unable to offer any feasible plan for an ideal society.[50]Dark believed, however, that real social integration and progress could be achieved by human beings, and so, in 1959, in a calmer generation, she published *Lantana Lane*, in which a community of small farmers, with its 'cosy, family atmosphere' (*LL*, p. 10), would seem to come nearest to a blueprint for an idealistic yet entirely practical society. Lying 'round the corner from the world with not even a signpost to betray [its] whereabouts' (*LL*, p. 234), the farming community of pleasingly imprecise location in *Lantana Lane* had Edenic overtones, with echoes of a little boy's 'faint, Arcadian piping.' (*LL*, p. 253) Here the residents might seem to have achieved the ideal society.

In the 'Lane', each farmer owned his own block of land so that property was not concentrated in the hands of a few. Maintaining a last stand in the face of industrialism, the farmers were individualists engaged in genuine activity, in work for which they felt responsible, and which gave human purpose and meaning to their lives. In a world ruled by intellect they exercised their feelings as, bound to their community by a code of conduct and a structure of ideas, they bowed to 'an unwritten law which ordains that when anyone suffers misfortune or disaster ... the neighbours rally round.' (*LL*, p. 48) They retained their 'perverse and tiresome independence' (*LL*, p. 143), while at the same time, with a 'commendable spirit of duty and communal self-help' (*LL*. p. 236), they practised the kind of intelligent, active co-operation which discouraged any kind of manipulation. This was best demonstrated in the sketch where the residents combined to remove a fallen tree which blocked their road to the outside world, showing how communal effort was able to remove obstacles to modest progress. As the narrator pointed out, 'by their own united and courageous efforts, they had triumphed.' (*LL*, p. 244)

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[50]See also Carter, 'Barnard Eldershaw, Utopia and the Literary Intellectual', *op. cit.*, pp. 184 and 186: In *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* nostalgic memories of the failed, rural co-operative communities which were founded in the Australian inland by the few twentieth century survivors of the catastrophe associated that more humane world, rather than the twenty-fourth century static technocracy, with utopia.

The 'Lane' farmers were adept at preserving the necessary human values, for they believed that 'in order to become civilised, one must, first of all, remain human':

> And being human ... has at least something to do with treading on earth, getting sweaty, seeing the sun rise, making things grow, having animals around, using one's muscles, taking one's time, getting on with one's neighbours and feeling no need of tranquillising pills. (*LL*, p. 252)

They knew well 'how unnecessary organisation is when the common need is understood by all' (*LL*, p. 238), and this was well proven by their tolerant attitude toward preserving strict boundaries between neighbouring farms - 'It's no skin off our nose if the line's a yard or ten yards out' (*LL*, p. 248) - and by the flexible arrangements made for collecting their meat from the store on 'meat-day.' (*LL*, p. 71) So they accepted the fact that 'the art of living is the art of continual little adjustments', that although 'perfect theory' may be quite proper, 'it must submit to being fiddled with in practice, lest society become a strait-jacket.' (*LL*, p. 251)[51] The narrator had earlier assured us that

> ...human beings reveal their more amiable aspects, retain their good humour, and keep their affairs coasting along not too badly when engaged with others in a loose, flexible, slapdash and not particularly efficient system of their own devising; but immediately begin to betray extreme prickliness, asperity, mistrust and jealousy of their rights - to say nothing of a really distressing solemnity - upon finding themselves strait-jacketed in a tight, unyielding Organisation. (*LL*, p. 80)

The community, however, seemed to be doomed, as huge corporations busily did their best to ruin the small-farmers, even as a government department threatened to invade it with a motorway.

In discussing Australia's need to use use brains and energy in order to protect herself and to develop as a nation, A. J. Marshall warned that if the country were to survive 'she [would] have to wake out of her sun-sodden

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[51] Cp. Barnard Eldershaw, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow, op. cit.*, p. 226, where Knarf said, 'Liberty is the plastic flexibility which prevents life from becoming a strait-jacket.'

trance.'[52] Dark, however, was always more hopeful, always aware of the good qualities in Australians:

> They would be amazingly easy-going, amazingly good tempered - up to a point; beyond that point, ruthless and indomitable. (*SaS*, p. 30)

Admitting that the Australian temperament 'preferred the easy and exhilarating joys of the body to the difficult and elusive joys of the mind' (*W*, p. 115) in an environment which shouted of 'physical joy and health,' Dark had Dr. Oliver Denning decide that 'if man's first duty is to be a good animal', then no time would be wasted 'if we devote a few generations to it.' (*W*, p. 116) Such seeming hedonism was seen as a foundation for better things to come:

> Before the seed can germinate ... the soil must be prepared and here was the preparation going on. ... What exotic and unique and gorgeous blossoming might it not produce - in time. (*W*, pp. 115-16)

A healthy society, however, must be possessed of 'administrative wisdom' (*NB*, p. 152). There must be no place for dogmatic politicians with mediocre minds, for, as Dark had history's William Wentworth tell the fictional Mark Harvey in the early days of the settlement, the welfare of any society

> ... must be left to those whose education, property and attainments qualify them for the task to expound policies which would be beneficial to all. (*NB*, p. 153)

Again I have chosen to emphasise Dark's role as social reformer as she drew attention to the inadequacy of capitalism as a social system, and castigated the people for holding back their own progress by obeying its laws without question. She denounced the authorities' arrogance in denying freedom of speech to those thinkers who demonstrated the merits of alternative systems, and questioned their wisdom in discouraging any move toward internationalism although obviously nationalism was one of the chief instigators of war.

The novelist's vision of a reformed society did not postulate socialism

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[52] A. J. Marshall, *Australia Limited*, Sydney, 1943, p. 17.

as an ideal or automatic policy, as her characters' spirited arguments about flaws in the system made clear. She proposed, however, that if society were to change and humanity were to progress, individuals must not depend 'on the slowing impetus of old ideas and the fading influence of old convictions.' (*TLC*, p. 20) With Oliver Denning's opinion that human beings must not necessarily break their chains, 'but patiently unravel them, knowing knowledge to be a greater thing than force' (*SaS*, p. 33), she suggested that change must be gradual, not revolutionary. In embracing other aesthetic and ethical values, the people need not arbitrarily replace existing ones, but, 'yielding quietly here and there' (*SaS*, p. 33), find ways of complementing them.

Dark stressed the practical necessity of selecting tolerant leaders of wide vision. Then, working with them, she indicated, the people must exercise their own consciences by putting in place practical rules which were based on the premise that it is better to share than to compete, and flexible enough to allow a comfortable interaction between the individual and the community. Thus, by establishing a humane society in which they were able to develop their potential, the people must surely improve the human condition and add to the stature of humanity. In all her works, Dark's message was that human beings have the capacity not only to survive, but to grow better, and so increase their chances of finding mental health, happiness, and joy in life.