The shifting weather: affinity, diversity, and the place of the author in six novels of the Depression era

Audrey May Heycox

University of Wollongong

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG
COPYRIGHT WARNING

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site. You are reminded of the following:

This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this work may be reproduced by any process, nor may any other exclusive right be exercised, without the permission of the author.

Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

Recommended Citation

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au
THE SHIFTING WEATHER

Affinity, Diversity, and the Place of the Author in Six Novels of the Depression Era.

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

MASTER OF ARTS (Honours)

from

THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

Audrey May Heycox B.A.(Hons)

Department of English

1989
CONTENTS

Acknowledgments iii
Precis iv
Editions Used v
Introduction 1

Chapter One 'Ideological Challenge':
Places three novels in the context of the Australian democratic tradition, and reveals that, for two of these authors, socialism represents an ideal rather than a political position.

Chapter Two 'Artistic Challenge':
Finds elements of modernism in the work of three Australian writers.

Chapter Three 'Existential Challenge':
The existential focus of this thesis now rests on the subjective experience of certain characters in novels by M. Barnard Eldershaw and Kylie Tennant.

Conclusion 182

Bibliography 187
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks go to my supervisors, William McGaw and James Wieland; to Bill for his input in the early stages of this work, and Jim for his close involvement with the final draft. To English Department staff members, Dorothy Jones, Ray Southall, Rod McConchie and Paul Sharrad for taking the time to discuss matters pertaining to this thesis; to my Post Graduate colleagues, Gwen and Michael for their moral support. And, finally, to my long-suffering husband, Clyde.

With a feeling of profound gratitude to my country for giving me this opportunity to learn, I submit this dissertation in the belief that there is room in the academic world for the writing of a lateral thinker who finds it impossible to take a narrow focus on life, or on the art which portrays it.

A.M.H.
In an analysis of six novels this dissertation looks at the way four authors reacted creatively to the challenge presented by the Great Depression and World War II. The features that these works have in common are numerous and significant from a literary viewpoint, and reflect their common genesis. Regardless of their affinities, however, we can appreciate that diversity of style and presentation which is to be expected from individual authors as a result of their personal and unique points of view. Furthermore, when we penetrate their surface preoccupation with social matters, and when we read these works from a perspective of world literature, as well as Australian literature, we find qualities of literariness and language that have largely gone unrecognised by critics of these novels.

At least three of the authors studied reveal a modernist sensibility which breaks with the traditional chronological forms of the novel, and questions the function of the artist in a troubled world. Another parallel feature to be found in the novels of this time is a moral and philosophical stance on matters of social justice from the broad perspective of international affairs, while they continue to carry the democratic banner of earlier Australian writers. The discussion focuses on the way the authors resolve the artistic problems raised by their socially critical stance by using the existential consciousness of their characters to portray coevally the problems of human existence and those of contemporary society.
THE NOVELS

Page numbers used in this thesis are from the following editions.


(With occasional reference to these other Tennant novels)


INTRODUCTION

Or seven stubborn words drawn close together
As a hewn charm against the shifting weather.
(Chris Wallace-Crabbe, 'A Wintry Manifesto').

If Australian writers of the thirties and forties did not fully exploit the Great Depression as subject matter, as has been the opinion of several literary historians,¹ it is because they saw the slump as symptomatic of a wider disorder in the Western world. However, it can be seen in the considerable amount of fiction that was produced that the unrest of the period was sufficient catalyst to unleash a surge of creativity. The Great Depression, its final years aggravated by the imminence of World War II, and the war itself with its blitz of the world's great cities, culminating in the destruction of Hiroshima, presented writers with a special impetus which cannot be contained in the notion of subject matter. Much of the fiction that was produced here in the thirties and forties was generated in a mood of disquietude caused by the anxieties of the age and a compulsion to confront them and explore them artistically. The mass unemployment and the following war, with its widespread disruption of life

¹. See Ian Reid, Fiction and the Great Depression: Australia and New Zealand 1930–1950, Melbourne, Edward Arnold, 1979. Reid cites Fred Alexander (Australia Since Federation, p.128); Geoffrey Serle (From Deserts the Prophets Come, p.1232); Stephen Murray-Smith, and Ian Turner (in Geoffrey Dutton, ed., The Literature of Australia, 1964 edition), as being amongst those who say that the Depression made no noticeable impact on Australian writers. Reid repudiates these statements by demonstrating the catalytic effect of the phenomenon on writers, both here and in New Zealand.
and property, were seen by many writers as evidence of grave flaws in the Western capitalist system, and the large number of novels that were produced reflects their concern with the problems of society and its individual members, and for the ultimate destiny of humanity as a whole.

This thesis examines six novels of the period 1930-1947 in which the moral dilemmas of capitalism and the artistic problems which a society in a state of crisis presents to the creative writer are held in tension. The novels to be discussed are Eleanor Dark's Waterway (1938), and The Little Company (1945); Kylie Tennant's The Battlers (1941), and Ride on Stranger (1943); M. Barnard Eldershaw's Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow (1947); and J.M.Harcourt's Upsurge (1934). Although my title specifies the Depression era, as Ian Reid reveals, depressed and depressing conditions applied in Australia at least up to 1950. Furthermore, the advent of World War II was crucial to the creative impetus of at least two of these novels, and links between the Depression and the war which followed are well established in all but Upsurge, the earliest of the six. I want to analyse the novels, both as fiction, and in the context of their authors' ideological and humanist convictions which led them to put contemporary events on a philosophical rather than a political plane. They reveal that the preachings of Christ and Karl Marx were basically of the same thrust. Both expounded ideals which, because of the nature of Man, are Utopian more than

1. Reid, Fiction and the Great Depression, Introduction.
they are practical.\(^1\)

My choice of texts was influenced by the fact that these novels, separately and collectively, capture the tenor of an era, one which saw Australian writers become aware of the social upheavals in countries geographically remote from Australia. They are of further interest because they reflect artistic developments in the modern novel.

In accord with David Carter, I recognise a tension in these novels between the creative imagination and a socially critical imperative. As Carter says: 'This ambivalent status is characteristic of documentary and socially critical fiction, which both claims and disclaims art in order to establish its own truth.'\(^2\)

Graham Hough writes of the moral and formal aspects of a literary work that:

\[
\text{They interpenetrate each other, modify each other, and ultimately become one because there is a current of energy between them. If the}
\]

1. cf. '...his radical sympathies with the oppressed and the underdog, and his tendency to identify "chosen people" and speak of "the redemption of humanity" as their task.' And also: 'It was easier for him to identify with the whole of humanity than with any artificially circumscribed political, social, or religious group.' This is Robert C. Solomon writing of Karl Marx as a young man in History and Human Nature, Brighton, The Harvester Press, 1980, p.312. Marx never lost his idealism. Years later, the Communist Manifesto was to say, 'in place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all' (p.54). Quoted in Solomon, p.338.

However, the tension we expect to find in a work of high moral content is compounded in *Tomorrow* and in *Company*, because the authors virtually step into their own novels in a manner that is in no way autobiographical. Prominent male characters, Knarf in *Tomorrow* and Gilbert Massey in *Company*, expound the thoughts and opinions of their creators, and are plainly meant to be their ambassadors.* To a lesser extent, we can locate ambassador characters in *Waterway* and *The Battlers*, as well.

The presence of the author raises the question of how these novels succeed as works of fiction (and I would suggest that they do succeed). A consolidation of the moral and formal requirements is achieved by a wholistic approach to characterisation. As Georg Lukács points out, "(t)he central aesthetic problem of realism is the adequate presentation of the complete human personality." 2 The characters must be presented both in their social existence and in their essence. These novels of the Depression era are realist novels; they are also novels which reflect the modern age of existential uncertainty. I would


* Although Knarf and Gilbert are writers, we cannot relate their lives to those of the real authors in the way we relate Stephen Dedalus to James Joyce or, in this study, Shannon Hicks of *Ride on Stranger* to Kylie Tennant.
hypothesise that the tension is resolved by my chosen authors in the way Lukács prescribes; the social, moral and existential aspects of fictional lives are combined in a way which meets the demands of the modern novel.

Another way that these realist novels work as fiction is in their language content. Graham Hough reminds us that formal structures are linguistic, they are composed of language, but, says Hough:

... language also signifies things, persons, actions, events, emotions, and the relations between them. This is social and moral material; and we cannot therefore give even a formal analysis of a work without considering the nature of this material. ¹

In all six novels we find, cleverly fastened into the plot, asides which may appear to the unobservant reader to be extraneous. But such episodes are a part of the moral and social content of the work, and must be seen in relation to the overall form. A dialogue between two characters (James Riddle and John Graham in *Upsurge*; Knarf and Ord in *Tomorrow* are two examples) analyses the state of contemporary society, usually in the context of world history. But, despite the philosophical asides in which they are involved, we discover the major characters in the light of their personal dramas, by the revelation of their inner lives. Others, Ord in *Tomorrow*, and John Graham in *Upsurge*, for example, are there solely to perform the role of interlocutor and we learn little about them beyond their occupations. But this, too, supports the view that the authors' mode of operation is to tailor their characters

according to their function in the plot.

To attain the required synthesis in a critical reading of these novels I approach them through analysis of character consciousness and by attention to language. Before enlarging on my critical method, however, I need to place the various concerns of this thesis in the context of my sub-title, 'Affinity, Diversity and the Place of the Author in Six Novels of the Depression Era.'

In the background of this study is the common catalyst of depression and war which triggered the writing of a group of novels in which many affinities are discernible. Such affinities are revealed in their authors' attitudes to the problems of capitalism; to what they see as the apathetic masses; and to a belief in the brotherhood of Man which transcends any religious or Marxist ideology. Collectively, they capture the spirit of anxiety which permeated the thirties into the war years, and show that such anxiety was spread throughout both city and countryside. Conversely, the value of these novels lies in the diverse way each author balances the contemporary social issues with modern developments in the novel. David Carter's point, that this very diversity in the novels of the Depression era should have prevented such collective labelling of these works as 'documentary realism' or 'that.. . which most clearly reflects the national life,' is well taken.¹

While these novels are unarguably Australian in terms of setting and social history, and lines can be established with the egalitarian thrust of Australian writing from ¹ Carter, in Hergenhan ed., p.374.
the eighteen-nineties, their authors wrote from a global, rather than from a self-consciously Australian stance. The concern for social justice in Australian fiction took on a broader perspective after the Spanish Civil War in 1936 when local writers were linked in their consternation with others of differing national and political backgrounds. As Bernard Bergonzi observes, speaking of British literature, 'accounts of the literature of the 1930s often stress the closeness of that literature to social questions.' He adds, 'I believe it is right to examine the closeness of literary and social interests at that time.'¹ The writers whose work I address here, while beginning to write their own versions of the modern novel, were nevertheless caught up in the same contemporary currents as writers everywhere. It is this intrusion of global events into the creative imagination of four Australian authors that informs the middle ground and an appropriate title for this study would may been 'The Anxious Object', the one used by Harold Rosenberg for his survey of modern art,² because these six novels are, indeed, anxious objects, generated in a time of anxiety by anxious minds.

Foregrounded in my thesis is a continuing awareness


of the way the aforementioned tension is made manifest, because it is inbuilt, in the characterisation. In these novels the authors use their characters in a special way; they cause them to do double duty, as it were, and function both ideologically and artistically. From the reader's point of view, the existential concerns may appear to vie for prominence with the larger issues out of which the authors cause certain of their characters to be politically conscious and articulate on their creators' behalf. While such characters are used by their authors to institute a dialogue with readers about contemporary events, at the same time, they epitomise the modernist mode of existential questioning and alienation in their private lives that we have come to associate with much of the fiction of this century. Most of what we learn about the characters' inner lives and about their social environment is the result of the authors' use of 'stream of consciousness', a modernist technique widely employed in these works. The characters in these Depression novels fall into several categories: those who are outsiders - not quite in the Neitzschean sense, for, while they are conscious of their separateness, they are active rather than passive observers; those who are society's uncomprehending victims; and those who, on their authors' behalf, address, not just social problems, but the fundamental questions of human

1. cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, Preface to The Will to Power III, (trans. Walter Kauffman and R.J. Hollingdale, New York, Vintage Books, 1968). "He that speaks here has, conversely, done nothing so far but to reflect; as a philosopher and solitary by instinct who has found his advantage in standing aside, outside..."
existence and individuality which have always been the central subjects for Dark, Barnard and Tennant.¹

The existence of the many affinities to be found in the texts lies in the fact of their common catalyst, one which has to do with external phenomena, that is, depression and war and their effects on society and on individuals. Although the anxiety generated at this time cannot be translated into a critical category, it is nonetheless the current which energises these works and brings them into the modern age. What propels this thesis is a conviction that the crisis in society brought about a parallel crisis in the writing careers of at least two of these authors and determined the shape of the novels produced at this time by all four. A state of tension is created between, on the one hand, a belief in the way the world should be - with a corresponding moral indignation regarding the way things are - and, on the other, a developing artistic talent that is being invaded from without, so that the creative sensibility is torn in two directions.

The New Criticism's assertion that the literary author is merely a persona or a mask has no place in this study,² nor does 'the death of the author' as implied by Roland Barthes. Even so, the authors are more than usually present in Tomorrow and Company, and only marginally less visible

1. I am writing of Barnard, rather than Barnard Eldershaw, for the reasons given on pages 88 and 89 (f/note) below.

in the others. This is not to confuse the author with the narrator in these novels; in *Tomorrow*, for example, the narrator tells us about Knarf.

Notwithstanding the remarks I have made earlier in this introduction, the primary aim of this thesis is not a study of the characterisation per se. My critical approach analyses character consciousness as a means, not as an end. A quotation from Joseph Hillis Miller, an American disciple of the Geneva 'consciousness critics', is a useful aid in describing my own critical stance:

> ...in literature every landscape is an interior landscape, just as each imaginary man or woman is also a figure in the writer's own private world of perception or memory, longing or fear.\(^1\)

In Miller's model, external reality in fictional form becomes a personal and subjective perception of that reality. The 'criticism of consciousness', which Miller follows, 'is a criticism of the author's experience conveyed in a text, and of his (sic) active consciousness at the moment of creation.'\(^2\) The criticism of consciousness (or genesis) is described by Sarah Lawall, who explains how: 'The idea of literary consciousness leads to an analysis of the works as a mental universe, a self-contained world where human experience takes shape as literature.'\(^3\) Lawall is describing the work of a group of French critics, sometimes called 'the Geneva School', who include, among


3. ibid.
others, Albert Béguin, Marcel Raymond and Georges Poulet. It is Poulet who is of particular interest, since it was his friendship with Joseph Hillis Miller which brought the Geneva School method of criticism from Europe to the Johns Hopkins University at Baltimore, in the nineteen-fifties, where Miller began to apply its methods to literature written in English.\(^1\) Miller, first, addressed the works of a single author, Charles Dickens; then the Romantic writers of the nineteenth century (who, says Lawall, wrote in 'a literary universe in which God is absent'), in *The Disappearance of God* (1963); then went on to discuss modern writers for whom God 'was not only absent, but dead', in *Poets of Reality* (1965).\(^2\)

Miller’s analysis of Dickens’s characters from within, a kind of psycho-analysis, reveals the scope of Dickens's fictional world. Of the Dickensian hero, as portrayed in such characters as Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, Pip, and Paul Dombey, Miller writes, 'each becomes aware of himself as isolated from all that is outside of himself. The Dickensian hero is separated from nature.'\(^3\) Miller also says that 'in *Great Expectations* Dickens's particular view of things is expressed with a concreteness and symbolic intensity he never surpassed'\(^4\)(My emphasis). Here, Miller

---

1. Currently, this critical method can be related to wide network of historicist, genetic, reader response and phenomenological criticism, as well as hermeneutics. See my bibliography for a list of related texts.

2. Miller's critical works are described by Lawall, p.196ff.


refers to Dickens's use of language and, since Miller was trained in the era of the New Criticism, he does not eschew the language of a text as a pathway to discovering the author's mental universe. For Miller, language is not the stumbling block it was for some Geneva school critics. For example, Jean Starabinski sees it as 'an impediment to direct vision because it throws a "veil" over reality.'

But for others, Lawall tells us, in its form as a work of art, it is the manifestation of the creative moment 'when experience ceases to be mute and takes on the appearance of words and the structure of words.'

When Miller writes of Dickens's detailed descriptions of his characters' environment, as he does, for example, when he draws attention to the Podsnaps' 'ugly, massive, impersonal, and impenetrable silverplate' in *Our Mutual Friend*, Lawall suggests that:

... (Miller) identifies a literary expression of a manner of seeing the world; he implies the Podsnap's relations with the world in which they live, and the vision in Dickens which allowed him to create such a picture.'

Dickens's insight and his exploration of character enabled him to see relationships between the external world and


2. Lawall, p.3. Elsewhere, Lawall points to the fact that Structuralism as a literary theory did not emerge until the 1960s and arrived by way of anthropology, sociology, psychology and linguistics, 'and hence follows the major works of our critics.' (But)'the similarities between structuralism in its many forms and the criticism of consciousness are not to be denied.' p.14.

states of being in a way which anticipates, among later writers, Virginia Woolf. For example, in the dinner party scene in *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs Ramsay sits at the head of 'an infinitely long table' and looks at the cutlery and 'the plates making white circles on it.' Woolf does not need to explain that Mrs Ramsay feels that her life is colourless and circumscribed, and seems to drag because it must revolve around mundane things which give no life to the soul. The physical description of her surroundings is all we need.

A use of language which symbolises a character's relation to his or her world is especially evident in Kylie Tennant's novels but it is noteworthy, also, in those of Eleanor Dark. The connection between language and state-of-being that Miller brings out in his study of Dickens is similar to remarks I make about language in this dissertation.

Language in the modern novel is metaphoric and symbolic.* David Lodge, discussing the modern tendency towards metaphor, writes:

Now, since modern fiction is generally regarded as having a Symbolist bias and as being in reaction against traditional realism, we should expect to find it tending toward the metaphoric pole of Jakobson's scheme. Intuition suggests this is true. No doubt a statistical analysis would reveal a higher incidence of metaphor in the work of James, Conrad, Forster and Ford than

---

* Though we cannot call Dickens a modern writer, we can say of him, as of Matthew Arnold, that he was 'pre-modern', that he was a sensitive Victorian who stood astride two worlds, looking backward at the simple faiths of the rural economy, and forward to the harsh realities of the industrial age.
Lodge notes also the 'metaphorical or quasi-metaphorical titles' of modern novels, naming *Heart of Darkness* and *To the Lighthouse* among others. Five of my novels have such titles. The realism implied in the remaining one, *The Battlers*, hides its philosophical/existential and ideological preoccupations.

The language of modern fiction, according to Lodge, is 'much concerned with consciousness, and also with the subconscious or unconscious workings of the human mind.' If consciousness critics' preoccupation with inner states of being and the language which reveals such states seems to beg a discussion of existentialism, it is because consciousness criticism has its roots in the existentialist philosophy of Husserl and Heidegger. But, Lawell stresses, 'the criticism of consciousness is not to be confused with existential philosophy. The best-known figures of existentialism are not literary critics.' Lawell continues, 'Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, Gabriel Marcel, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty share one other quality;


2. ibid.

3. Lodge p.481.
they are not primarily concerned with literary theory.\textsuperscript{1}

A statement from René Wellek's account of "la critique de conscience" will be useful in my attempt to elucidate my approach to these Australian novels of the depression era and to define just what was the 'mental universe' of my authors. It has to do with the modern age, the seeds of which were sown, intellectually, with the Enlightenment and, socially, with the Industrial Revolution. Wellek says, 'Consciousness is an all-embracing spirit of the time.'\textsuperscript{2}

Well-educated, Dark, Barnard and Tennant had been exposed to a literary world in which authors confronted the frightening existential conundrums of an age when mankind had taken the responsibility for the world into its own hands, no longer able to attribute the human predicament on unseen personifications of Good and Evil. The title of my dissertation is taken from a poem in which Chris Wallace-Crabbe considers the consequences of the new humanism, which placed Man at the pinnacle of the universe.\textsuperscript{3} With a degree of sadness for the loss of the old myths and religions which promised an end to human suffering in some paradisiacal afterlife, he ponders on humanity's situation. While my authors could not, at this


2. Wellek, 'A Map...', p.18. Wellek is not referring to the Zeitgeist (which is faithfully captured in these works from a social and historical viewpoint); he is referring to a cultural age, and uses Romanticism as one example. It should be noted that Consciousness Criticism is not tied to an engagement with modern fiction. It may be applied with equal effectiveness to the Baroque, the Romantic, the Victorian or any other cultural period.

time, have read Wallace-Crabbe's poem, its themes are a commonplace in modern literature, having one of their earlier workings in the sense of bereavement which Matthew Arnold captures in 'Dover Beach'. Arnold's 'melancholy, long, withdrawing roar' may well have been in Chris Wallace-Crabbe's ear when he penned 'A Wintry Manifesto':

We dreamed, woke, doubted, wept for fading stars
And then projected brave new avatars,
Triumphs of reason. Yet a whole dimension
Had vanished from the chambers of the mind.

Such was the modern age which Australian authors who had matured beyond the colonial/nationalist questions were ready to confront in their novels. Like previous ages this one is reflected in the arts, historically as well as stylistically. This is why we find a fusion of two preoccupations in these novels. Behind the title of the poem lies the Communist Manifesto. This blueprint for revolution and reform is dated 1848, but its influence was strong in Australia in the Depression years.

The solutions being put forward by followers of the Marxist model for social organisation were a part of the contemporary intellectual scene. Yet, even then, writers of the intellectual level of those whose novels are listed here, could see that the kind of world envisaged by Marx and Engels was a romantic notion, one that overlooked the corrupting nature of power, and the fundamental urge of most individuals to strive upward, in one way or another. Furthermore, history had shown that the individual freedom dreamed of by these visionaries had been sacrificed on the altar of collectivism.
I suggest that the socialist theory which the authors allow some of their characters to propound in these novels is there in deference to the social and political climate in which they are set. The consideration and rejection of socialism as a cure for the world's ills is shown in my chapters to be a part of a general intellectual seeking of answers. Even Harcourt gives us both sides of the socialist coin, for the protagonists in *Upsurge* are not just the proletarian types we expect to find in a novel of socialist orientation, they include a chemist and a judge who present a balancing argument against socialism through their discourse.

Drusilla Modjeska believes that, at this time, women writers, those included here and others, such as Katharine Susannah Prichard and Jean Devanny, 'were politically active and angry.'¹ Modjeska's history of women writers in the turbulent years is a valuable contribution to the study of a group of writers who have been largely neglected by the academic establishment.² However, it is written from a feminist perspective which results in a particular reading of the works of these women. My thesis sees these authors' political ideology, and anger at the state of a male-dominated society as secondary to their anxiety for the fate of all humanity. It was an anxiety shared with many modernist writers of both genders, everywhere. Contemporary events cast a shadow over the future. Ideologically, Dark,


2. See pp.33-35 below.
Barnard (with Eldershaw), and Tennant shared with their Australian predecessors a belief in an egalitarian society, but their focus on social ills should not be seen as the sole aspect of the novels they wrote at this time. J.M. Harcourt's novel, which is consciously political, is included here because it shares many areas of affinity with those novels of Dark, Barnard Eldershaw and Kylie Tennant which are the focus of this study. In particular, the writing of *Upsurge* is directly attributable to the fact of the Depression, and represents a shift from the author's previous work. Furthermore, the inclusion of a male author saves this thesis from being a study of women writers, a situation which would have led me further into Modjeska's domain than I wished to venture. Nevertheless, one observation made by Modjeska is especially pertinent to this study:

> For Eleanor Dark and Marjorie Barnard, socialism seemed to contradict the individualist and humanist values they wanted to rediscover and reinstate. Nevertheless, for all these women (Modjeska includes K.S.Pritchard, Christina Stead) this was a period of crisis and was accompanied by substantial changes in their fiction. ¹

Socialism was a vexed question which they had to address before they could return to those 'individualist and human values.' It is my belief that changes had already begun to occur in Australian fiction in the thirties because of the exposure of our writers to world literature. As a result of the world crisis, the changes became more urgent to accommodate a specific discourse on the issues of the day; reactive, rather than active changes, as Modjeska suggests.

Also considered and rejected by these writers are Christianity and existentialism of the Sartrean kind, with its overtones of nihilism. Christianity, as practised in our century, has been tied to the capitalist establishment whose economic system helped produce the poverty and wars which occupied the writers of these decades. Nevertheless, with the exception of Tennant, where we find a Neitzschean element, the existential thrust of these works is closer to Kierkegaard's defence of the individual and free choice than to the hopelessness exhibited by some twentieth-century writers. Rather than nihilism, these authors affirm life, making a distinction between the life of the individual and that of the society in which they must live. Furthermore, their view of society incorporates the hope of some future resolution of mankind's problems, however distant. In Tomorrow, Marjorie Barnard forecasts that such wisdom will still be beyond human reach four centuries from now. In the meantime, in Wallace-Crabbe's words:

(We) learn to praise whatever is imperfect
As the true breeding-ground for honesty,
Finding our heroism in rejection
Of bland Utopias and of thieves' affection:
Our greatest joys to mark an outline truly
And know the piece of earth on which we stand.  

The continuing relevance of Tomorrow is noted elsewhere in this thesis. Similarly, when we read Eleanor Dark's novels from our place in time, her vision is remarkable. An early conservationist, in Waterway she anticipates Wallace-Crabbe's poem. Shortly before he drowns, Professor Channon is composing his book in his mind, thus, 'Mankind

1. 'A Wintry Manifesto'.
has only one wealth, the earth and its fulness; only one power, the power of his creative spirit' (304).

Prior to writing the novels listed here, Marjorie Barnard, Eleanor Dark, and J.M. Harcourt had exhibited in their fiction a move away from a parochial standpoint, seeking neither to promote the national peculiarities nor to apologise for them (but, of course, not avoiding them either). Evidence of a more universal approach than was commonly seen in Australian writing can be found in Barnard's anthology of short fiction, *The Persimmon Tree and Other Stories* (1943), and in Dark's *Prelude to Christopher* (1933), both of which have a pronounced psychological emphasis of a kind previously seen in the twenties, in the writing of Henry Handel Richardson and Martin Boyd, for example. The difference between these later works and novels such as *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* and *The Montforts* is that we find no 'transplanted European' or other colonial reminders in them.¹ A more profitable comparison can be made with the novels of Katharine Susannah Prichard whose works span the twenties and the Depression era. Prichard's *Working Bullocks* (1926) and *Coonardoo* (1929), while they have other qualities besides, can be said to be the precursors of the Australian psychological novel. They possess a truly Australian spirit, whereas in the 'Richard Mahony' trilogy, for example, an emigré psyche operates. Stephen Murray-Smith writes of Prichard:

Above all we owe to her that, in bringing a distinguished literary talent to bear on socially-relevant aspects of Australian life, she also brought a cultivated mind well-read in world literature and a determination ... not to humiliate literature to dogma.

Eleanor Dark, Marjorie Barnard and Kylie Tennant are other Australian writers who possessed 'a cultivated mind well-read in world literature,' and their work, too, reveals 'a determination ... not to humiliate literature to dogma.'

In addition to Barnard, Dark and Harcourt, this dissertation includes Kylie Tennant among writers who felt it imperative that their fictions engage with the social turmoil which surrounded them. The Depression is central to Tennant's first novels, *Tiburon* and *The Battlers*, and these works gave a human face to official facts and figures, but her preoccupation with the chaotic nature of human existence was in evidence from the beginning. The Depression did not cause Tennant to become a writer; it coincided with her beginnings as an author, and determined the direction of her first novels. For Harcourt, the Depression resulted in *Upsurge* which, like Tennant's novels, gave a fictional dimension to reports of human suffering. Harcourt did not begin his fiction writing career as a socialist-realist author. His first novel *The Pearlers*, 'shocked many readers (with its) 'modern' tendency of reflecting the sordid side of the human condition', a view of life perhaps explained by its author's having been a

As for Eleanor Dark, the Depression made its presence felt in the middle of her writing career and is featured in *Waterway* with a march of the unemployed through Macquarie Street. Like Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw, she was largely untouched by it on a personal level. For Dark and Barnard, it appears to be World War II which triggered an appraisal, from an historical perspective, of mankind's destiny, together with a self-conscious questioning regarding the role of the artist in a troubled world. I wish to stress in this thesis that the authors featured here wrote social novels at this time because contemporary events impinged on their minds and on their art. These six novels are at once social commentary and an exploration of the human condition.

The thirties can be viewed as a period of transition in Australia's literary history. Geoffrey Serle suggests that the decade saw 'a cultural coming of age'. The twenties had seen conflicting movements in the Australian novel. Nationalism was still an important consideration, as the writings of Vance and Nettie Palmer can testify. On the other hand, the displaced European, who had featured in early nineteenth-century writing, was to be found in local fiction following World War I, in the work of Henry


Handel Richardson, Martin Boyd, and Christina Stead. In society generally, the dwindling of the optimism that had followed Federation - into the old colonial mentality - was a phenomenon which historians attribute, at least partly, to the Great War. The myth that Gallipoli made Australia a nation has been exploded by Stephen Murray-Smith, who writes:

The brave concepts of Eutopia and Hy-Brasil which had sustained so many of our builders in the nineteenth century, from explorers and statesmen to shearsers and writers, vanished over-night. Australia shrank. Turkish bullets and German shrapnel killed brave men and braver visions.

It could be said that the Great War tightened again the apron strings which the nation, analogous to a teen-age child, had begun to loosen from 'the mother country'. As well, the Russian Revolution in 1917 caused a ripple of fear throughout the Western world and, consequently, anything which sounded remotely left-wing - even traditional Australian concepts of equality and independence - came to be seen, from the establishment's point of view, as tinged with 'Bolshevism'.

1. Judith Wright(p.xiv), cites Kol Blount in Seven Poor Men of Sydney.

2. Two historians who have recounted this shrinking of the Australian spirit following World War I, are: Richard White, Inventing Australia, North Sydney, George Allen and Unwin Australia Pty Ltd, 1981, p.130 ff, and: Russell Ward, A Nation for a Continent: The History of Australia 1901-1975, Richmond, Vic., Heinemann Australia Pty Ltd, Revised Edition, 1985. Ward notes, also, that, 'owing to the pre-war assisted immigration programme,' in 1920, the total population was 'more predominantly British by descent than it had been at Federation'(p.128).

3. Murray-Smith, p.427. The allusion is to Bernard O'Dowd's poem, 'The Bush'.

Then, in the thirties, the Great Depression and the Spanish War changed and broadened the thinking of a number of individuals, including writers, and a new maturity began to emerge. The events of the thirties brought other countries which were outside the British Empire, such as Spain and the United States,* into the consciousness of Australians so that we were no longer exiled Anglo-Celts or pugnacious nationalists, but citizens of a world society in peril of disintegration. The truth of Yeats's words 'things fall apart; the centre cannot hold' was felt by many to have caught up with the antipodes. Ian Turner's summation of Australia at the time of the Vietnam war describes an atmosphere which, in fact, was beginning to be felt in Australia as early as the thirties, when the Australian novel was cast into a new phase of its development:

Australia is no longer alone: the security and hope of isolation are gone, and with them the dream that, in the future Australia, the millenium will mould the perfect man. Social optimism is qualified by the anticipation of corruption and the fear of annihilation, and by a tragic vision of the individual condition.1

Such a view of society was the breeding ground for the modernist novel, here, as elsewhere.

The emergence of modernism in the Australian novel when it had almost run its course in Britain and elsewhere is not remarkable given Australia's distance from the


* The United States had been a late entrant in World War I. But now, because of the Wall Street Crash, it was thrust into Australia's news headlines.
origins of the movement and the more pressing need of Australian writers to establish their cultural identity. As well, the widespread conservatism in Australia in the twenties was reflected in the arts. Even 'the influential Sydney Bulletin's position changed from radical nationalism to conservative imperialism' following the Great War.¹

Another factor may have been a Norman Lindsay-led disapproval of modernist techniques and the anti-modernist influence of Vision magazine,² but there is no evidence to indicate that this affected fiction writers in the way it is said to have influenced the poets of this time.³ Julian Croft has located the modernist temperament in fiction prior to 1930 in Such is Life and in the 1920s novels of Chester Cobb,⁴ but it took the next decade to awaken the apocalyptic imagination that we associate with the movement.

The perceived breakdown in traditional social mores, due to growing industrialisation and technological change, to materialism and diminution of religious beliefs, and

1. Ward, Nation, p.127. See also, pp.24-25.

2. Paradoxically, Kenneth Slessor, one of the Vision school poets, went on to become 'the only genuine modernist poet that Australia has produced' in the (albeit guarded) opinion of Andrew Taylor. (Reading Australian Poetry, St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1987, p.53.)


4. Croft, p.413.
to the large scale social upheavals that result from war and depression, had caused writers in the Northern Hemisphere from the first decades of this century to express their fears for the future of civilisation. For Australian writers, such consciousness was triggered by the Depression and second world war, and directly influenced what they wrote in their novels. Dark and Barnard, especially, had already begun to reflect modernist trends in their writing styles, but now was added the kind of fears for the future of humanity such as can be found in Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and Yeats's poems 'The Second Coming' and those in *The Tower*. But, while such concerns are a common aspect of modernist texts, they are not in themselves indicative of modernism in a literary work. They may be incidental, or coincidental, even germinal to works which reflect their authors' struggle to express what has been called by many critics, from T.S.Eliot on, a new sensibility demanding new modes of expression.

Because of what Bradbury and McFarlane call the 'semantic instability' of the term Modernism, those who would discuss the subject make a distinction, albeit loosely, between two types of early twentieth-century writing, but the distinctions themselves often overlap. Bradbury and McFarlane use the term 'avant-garde' to describe the self-conscious innovators who felt the old literary conventions were inadequate to express current


anxieties, but, like Frank Kermode, they connect modernism with the apocalyptic imagination:

The crisis is a crisis of culture; it often involves an unhappy view of history - so that the Modernist writer is not simply the artist set free, but the artist under specific, apparently historical strain.  

While the historical imagination is evident in Tomorrow and in the two Dark novels assessed here, it must be said that Australian authors do not, as a rule, yield to hopelessness or inevitability of doom. Apocalypse may hover over the modern sensibility, as Frank Kermode notes, and one that is humanly induced eventuates in Tomorrow but, even here, the concluding note points to a future positive. It may be dependent on our learning to 'comprehend', to develop thought and purpose, as Dark posits in Company, or we may learn the way forward only through harsh experience, which is the wisdom Barnard seeks to convey in Tomorrow.

Modernism is not just about angst; it is about complexity. People long for the simple and predictable times they believe existed in the past, and authors reflect this yearning. The Industrial Revolution was responsible for the Utopian literature of nostalgia of the nineteenth century, such as William Morris's News From Nowhere and Samuel Butler's Erewhon. Among the moderns, Yeats and Eliot were two who saw in an imagined post-apocalyptic world a return to the values of the past. Frank Kermode reminds


us that the 'present' has always appeared crisis-ridden and the future threatening. Nevertheless, the novels regarded as most representative of modernism, Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* and Joyce's *Ulysses*, both conclude with an affirmation of life. In its refusal to abandon hope, twentieth-century literature does not differ from that of other ages. What is different about much of the fiction of the industrial age is not the uncertainty of the human condition - that has always been with us - but the individual's feeling of disease in a social environment that perplexes and rebuffs. Harry Munster, the central character in *Tomorrow*, and Phyllis in *Company* are typical of this type of individual. In the plots they are the foil and focus for those characters who are portrayed as intellectuals.

Neither Dark nor Barnard would have considered themselves to be in the vanguard of literary expression, even though they were involved in a conscious struggle to express what they saw as the problems of their times in the medium which they had made their own, that is, prose fiction. It cannot be said of my authors (as it can of *The Sociology of Literature*, London, Longman 1979, p.80.

1. Kermode (pp.93-94) writes: 'It seems to be a condition attached to the exercise of thinking about the future that one should assume one's own time to stand in an extraordinary relation to it. The time is not free, it is the slave of a mythical end.' Earlier in this work, Kermode reminds us that, since Biblical times, we have lived with the fear of Apocalypse, prophesied, failing to eventuate, then re-prophesied, for so long that it has ceased to become imminent and become immanent (p.6).

the 'Angry Penguins',\(^1\) perhaps) that they deliberately set out to invent a new literature. Rather it was that the narrative forms and chronological sequences normally used in fiction were inadequate to portray the sense of urgency which prevailed in the minds of these writers. For Eleanor Dark and Marjorie Barnard, portraying modern life was very much a problem of form. They employ such tenets of modernism as 'stream of consciousness' and retrospection. Past events coalesce with the present in narratives that move away from the traditional chronological sequence. The temporal is replaced by the spatial as the authors seek to record spontaneous impressions in a unified image of a character's inner existence. As Peter Faulkner explains, 'the reader is being asked not to follow a story but to discern a pattern.'\(^2\)

---

By far the largest group to be involved in the flowering of the Australian novel in the thirties were middle-class women writers. However widespread their consciousness of gloom, writers of the thirties were sustained by the knowledge that they were engaged in establishing the literature of a young country and breaking new ground in the production of the Australian novel:

1. *Angry Penguins* was a self-consciously modern poetry magazine published in Adelaide in the 1940s. It was truly 'avant-garde' - that experimentation with form for the sake of effect which, earlier, enraged Norman Lindsay, and subsequently triggered the 'Ern Malley Hoax' (see Croft in Hergenhan, ed., p.419).

Every new novel that appeared offered the excitement of making us feel, however diverse our tastes and aims, that we were all involved in adding to the foundations upon which would arise a vital and lasting literature. ¹

These were writers who were aware, not only of world affairs, but of literary trends in other parts of the world, and this gave added strength to their talents. Ian Turner has noted a 'third thread' in Australian writing between the wars (in addition to those named by Vincent Buckley as 'utopianism and vitalism').² Turner remarks:

...the adoption of a greater literary sophistication, a more esoteric language and frame of reference: a new interest in metaphysics, a personal imagery, a wide range of allusion, the assimilation of Mallarmé and Eliot and Joyce, of Nietzsche and Croce and Freud.³

Turner does not, however, offer the names of particular writers in whose work he could discern this 'third thread'. This thesis would fill the omission with the names of Dark and Barnard and Tennant (as well as K.S.Prichard and Stead).

While writers were engaged in the task of redefining Australians to themselves, ⁴ they were hampered by lack of encouragement from local publishing houses. The struggles of women authors to publish in the political and social


2. That is, literature with the Nationalist or Bush ethos, and the Romanticism of Norman Lindsay and his followers, whose apppeal, says Turner, was 'to the minority who could escape the constraints of social and moral obligation.'(Lit.of Aust., Dutton, ed., Revised edit.,p.47).

3. ibid.

4. Serle (p.39) writes: 'There is no doubt that many writers of the thirties saw their task as, not just to write poems and novels, but to help to build a new national culture and literature, to give Australians a cultural expression, to reveal Australians to themselves.'
climate of the times has been fully documented by Drusilla Modjeska.\(^1\) The perceived role of women in society and the saturation of the book market with cheap commercial literature, the growing popularity of radio and films were all obstacles for the serious writer. The frustrations which surrounded the desire of writers in general to be published in their own country have been outlined by Ian Reid.\(^2\) Reid tells how, with high tariffs causing a drastic reduction in the number of imported books, there was a fine opportunity for local firms to flourish. However, they were unwilling to take a chance on unknown authors, even some who had already been published overseas. The Australian reading public was partly to blame because of its reluctance to buy books written locally:

Booksellers, knowing prevailing attitudes, made little effort to display Australian books; librarians were accustomed to the remark, 'If it's Australian, I don't want it.'\(^3\)

As A.A. Phillips put it in 1950, when, in the words of Geoffrey Serle, he 'brilliantly redefined the Australian "inferiority complex" as the Cultural Cringe', this colonial attitude to culture, nursed by both the reading public and the academic community, continued to debase much of the writing by Australian authors long past the thirties.\(^4\) However, Phillips acknowledges that, 'by then 'the writer


had almost conquered colonialism.¹ This thesis agrees with Serle when he says that Australian writers were adopting a view of Australian life which placed it in world perspective. The plots in their novels of Australian society were underpinned by universal concerns about where the world was headed in the coming decades and the insecurity of the individual in social and intellectual environments that were constantly changing.

One reason for the lack of recognition that these novels have received is that they were out of print for a number of years. The release of Angus and Robertson's Sirius editions and the advent of the Virago press (a direct offshoot of the Women's Movement, formed to re-issue earlier fiction by women writers that had been allowed to go out of print after one issue) has done much to bring these novels to public attention. Televised mini series of others, such as Ride on Stranger and The Harp in the South, sparked re-publication in some cases. Harcourt's Upsurge (1934) has recently been rescued from oblivion with a Facsimile Edition from the University of Western Australia Press.

The work of Australian writers before nineteen-fifty has rarely been received as a harmonious amalgam of author, work and reader, or from an existential perspective.² Humphrey McQueen, one of the many historians who have had


at least as much to say about the literature of this period as literary critics, expresses his opinion of Eleanor Dark thus: 'Stylistically, her novels placed her in world company in the 1930s and far in advance of any of her resident authors.'

With this one exception, it seems that McQueen agrees with those who, following Patrick White, describe the novels of this period as dull, colourless, journalistic realism. John Docker traces the origins of this attitude to novels of Australian life to the anti-nationalist focus of two essays on the literature of the nineties by G.A. Wilkes and Vincent Buckley, essays which, he believes, influenced the choice of Australian texts in university courses for some time.

Docker also cites H. Heseltine, and it is this critic I want to quote here. His words are typical of the generalisations that have appeared in literary journals from time to time, which do not cite particular works, and thus, by implication, have denigrated the good with the mediocre:

The typical structure of the Australian novel between the wars points to an extensive rather than an intensive imagination. ... The saga, the picaresque, the documentary more often than not aim at a neutral manner, which deliberately avoids idiosyncrasy of syntax or diction, which is suspicious of a highly coloured tone or a richly wrought texture. It is, in effect, the


style of a deliberated realism, which tolerates the tactical metaphor but only rarely the larger strategies of a complex or sustained symbolism. It is remarkable for a singularly unrelenting earnestness (even when it is being funny) and a heavy reliance on action and dialogue as major methods of characterisation.

It is expected that most of Heseltine's allegations will be refuted by this dissertation. By 1981, in the Oxford History of Australian Literature, the authors of the novels surveyed in this thesis were still being under-valued by Adrian Mitchell. Tennant is a 'facile novelist' who cannot be taken seriously on an artistic level (p.129). Of Barnard Eldershaw and Dark, bracketed with Miles Franklin, Helen Simpson, and Brian Penton (although 'each [are] so different from the others'), Mitchell writes: 'They are all more responsive to landscape than to character, and to the typical rather than to the distinctive'(p.104). Harcourt does not rate a mention.

Rather than that they are second rate artists, it is likely that writers of the thirties and forties felt bound to address social conditions, both by virtue of their Australian literary heritage and their educated awareness of global issues. David Carter is the first critic to express an understanding of the way this socially critical imperative presented formal and artistic problems for these writers, problems which are still to be addressed


critically.¹ This thesis will demonstrate that characterisation is not confined to action and dialogue, as Heseltine states. The reader is allowed to enter the inner lives of the characters by means of both the narration and long stream of consciousness passages which include memory, thought, anguish, despair and every kind of human emotion.

Having discussed, at the start of this introduction, the need for a synthesis between the social/moral and formal aspects of these novels, it may now be necessary to assert a compatibility between realism and the modernist elements that I have found in most of these works. That the latter has rarely been recognised can perhaps be explained by a suggestion that modernism has not been expected in the work of these Australian authors (early categorised and accepted as something else), therefore, it has largely gone unnoticed. In Australia, in the thirties and forties, Dark, Barnard and Tennant were writing in an age when social realism proliferated, when movingly realistic portrayals of the Depression experience appeared (both in novels and short stories) in the fiction of John Morrison, Leonard Mann, Gavin Casey, Dal Stivens, Peter Cowan and Don Edwards. Therefore, theories of modernism have tended not to be applied to the works of this period. Frank Kermode believes that appreciation of twentieth-century modernism is 'heavily dependent on the extension

of modernist theory.¹

Realism, although it has been a word used dismissively by many critics of Australian literature, is something we expect in a modern novel if by realism we mean, in Lukác's words:

...a three-dimensionality, an all-roundness, that endows with independent life characters and human relations. It by no means involves a rejection of the emotional and intellectual dynamism which necessarily develops together with the modern world.²

Lukács alleges that many modern novels are at fault because, in them, the inner life is 'proceeding according to its own autonomous laws and as if its fulfilments and tragedies were growing ever more independent of the surrounding social environment.'³ It is then, he says, that literature becomes 'irrational'. While I support Lukác's brief for wholism in literature, and maintain that the novels studied here meet that criterion, I believe that the term 'realism' may be applied to the abstract no less effectively than to the concrete. That is, the life of the spirit may be more real to some characters than an alien, hostile reality.

Modernist writers, such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, have changed and broadened our ideas about realism. John Hall writes: 'what is finally impressive about the modernist novel is how "realistic" the modernist novel is,' - and, '(m)odernism has more in common with realism than is usually

2. Lukács, Studies, p.6.
The chapters in this dissertation relate to each other in an overall context which sees the years of depression and war as the catalyst for the works under scrutiny. The chapter divisions are primarily for convenience, but are also designed to draw attention to the common elements in the novels of four writers whose style and presentation otherwise show the diversity of personal experience and perception which the individual writer brings to his/her work. The first part of each chapter tracks the social and literary reasons for the particular aspects of the novels on which it focuses. This is followed by analysis of the characterisation and authorial presence in relation to the theme of the chapter. The relationship between author and created character, and between author and mode of expression, are essential to my critical approach, as outlined above.

This thesis is informed by the belief that the years of Depression and War presented Australian writers with a set of challenges, ideological, artistic and humanist. The form and content of the novels studied here reveal how those challenges were met by three women authors, and one male author. Chapter one recognises that a faithful literary rendition of the times could not avoid a degree of engagement with the socialist theories then being

1. Hall, The Sociology..., pp.76-77. See Chapter 4, 'The novel, realism and modernism.'
expounded by left-wing intellectuals, as well as by members of the Communist Party. Conversely, a concern for social equality is not a new phenomenon amongst Australian writers, reaching a peak in the nationalist literature of the 1890s. Depression fiction is seen also as a continuing part of the Australian democratic tradition.

Chapter two highlights those sections of the novels in which their authors express the difficulties involved in encompassing the subject matter of the modern age in the traditional novel form; and their sense of the duty their vocation brings upon them to establish, by their art, a dialogue with their countrymen and women regarding the social chaos which surrounds them.

Chapter three posits that, notwithstanding the above remarks, it is ultimately the human condition that is the province of the novelist; and, while external factors may determine a human's equilibrium to a large degree, it is in the character's innate disposition and in interpersonal relationships that his/her happiness is made or unmade.

My thesis argues that these novels are fiction, no matter what their preoccupations. As such, they should be judged by critics using the criteria we attach to the novel form in literature: characterisation, plot, realism (in the sense of verisimilitude), and not least, the kind of representation of human experience with which readers can identify and measure against their own existence, long after the publication date.

Note on References: Second and subsequent references to books employ a shortened form of the title. I have given a page reference for journal articles which exceed four pages in length.
CHAPTER ONE

Ideological Challenge

And cause I have to sorrow, in a land so young and fair,
To see upon those faces stamped the marks of Want and Care;¹

If we date the Post-colonial period of Australian literary history from the eighteen-nineties (about the time Lawson put his concern for the poverty of many city dwellers into poetry), only forty to fifty years had elapsed when the novels of the Depression era were produced. Therefore, it seems appropriate to begin a study of these works by placing them in the context of the literature that preceded them, and this has been done in a general way in my Introduction. This chapter considers how the ideological concerns of three novels, Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow, Upsurge and The Battlers, 'fit' the Australian democratic tradition, and how they diverge from it. It then seeks to assess the weight of their ideological content in relation to the philosophical position of the authors and to the formal aspects of the novels, with a view to a synthetical reading.

Revolution hovers over the plot of Upsurge, and that of Tomorrow, as it does over Lawson's poem; while the unemployed itinerants in Kylie Tennant's The Battlers, like those in her first novel, Tiburon, feebly tilt at windmills

in a quixotic way that is foredoomed to failure. Although diverse in structure and point of view, these novels have in common a background presence of social unrest due to unemployment, and incidents in the plots which are the direct result of political activism. All three contain characters who preach resistance against authority and the prevailing laws, and yet others who respond with a balancing argument. In this chapter, three writers confront the social ills of their age by considering the efficacy of socialism as a means of solving what they believe are problems caused by Western capitalism. It is suggested that, where the plots feature such episodes as rallies, strikes and riots, these phenomena are included as verisimilitude to the contemporary situation as the authors perceive it, and do not represent an advocacy on their part for direct action as the path to a better society. *Upsurge*, however, merits special attention on this point.

Although J.M.Harcourt was sometime president of the Revolutionary Writers League, and did himself designate *Upsurge* as a socialist realist novel, the climactic uprising denoted by the title must be seen as a warning, and not as a threat or a recommendation. In *Upsurge*, Marxist analysis of the political and social situations of the time does not control the plot to the exclusion of those aspects of human life which are central to the existence of the characters as they are portrayed. Personal relationships, questions of moral integrity, and the journey

of the inner life, are all matters which are taken into account by Harcourt, just as they are in the novels of his fellow member of the RWL, Katharine Susannah Prichard. Other aspects of Harcourt's novel are at least as important as its ideological underpinning. *Upsurge* invites, amongst other things, a psychological study of its characters.

Undoubtedly work, in the sense of occupation as well as remuneration, is a vital part of human existence. In both novel and short story Depression fiction demonstrates that employment is as much a psychological as a physical necessity. But unemployment is not the only cause of dissent in fiction that features a background of the class struggle. Conditions pertaining to the gaining of a living wage and concern for overall social justice are central, and not only the prerogative of socialist authors.

In *Tomorrow* and in *Battlers*, socialist ideology remains a small part of those novels' major focus, its exposition confined to minor characters; although, in *Tomorrow*, it is used by the author to bring about the revolution and so make her point about a post-revolutionary society. But the political dissent which leads to the revolution and its aftermath are part of the wider philosophical questioning on which the whole work is structured. The inner section contains as many arguments which are in the realm of political philosophy, between educated characters such as the Professor and the Ramsays, as it does incitement to insurrection by activists like Sid Warren. Similarly, in *Battlers*, the fruit-pickers' strike, like the fire at the cannery, are episodes in a novel of episodes, befitting
the theme of a group of itinerants wandering through South-Western New South Wales in 1939, picking up seasonal work when it is available, work often exploitative of casual labour. And, because Depression conditions for receiving unemployment relief still applied, and they were resented, attempts to organise the drifters are presented by Tennant as authentic background, rather than from any particular motive on her part, just as they are in her earlier novel, *Tiburon*. Xavier Pons has recognised the fact that:

In refusing to make political comments on the situation of her characters (Tennant) is prompted not only by an aesthetic desire to avoid didacticism but also by metaphysical reasons involving her general outlook on life, as we can guess from her characters' attitudes and opinions.²

While Kylie Tennant's reason for eschewing the didactic approach reflects her metaphysical bent, Barnard's stems from her moral philosophy.³

Barnard could perhaps be called a Morris socialist, that is, after the manner of William Morris who took a moral stance on social ills in his fiction. Stephen Ingle describes three basic ways in which writers criticise their social system.⁴ First, realist writing in which descriptions of the poor are designed to gain sympathy from middle-class

---


3. We now know that Marjorie Barnard was the sole author *Tomorrow*; see p. 88 below.

readers and those in authority. Secondly, what Ingle calls 'the moralist tradition', in which writers emphasise the moral implications of the social divisions within the capitalist system. The third is in the realm of political science, which sees poverty as the result of bad management on the part of leaders. It is into the second category that writers like Barnard, Dark and Tennant fall. Ingle places Morris in the forefront of the moralist authors of his day, and Malcolm Bradbury sees Morris standing astride the two separate tendencies which were beginning to replace 'the old literary-cultural critique of the romantic artists,' one a positivist (usually socialist) critique and the other towards a heightened aestheticism.\(^1\) My authors, at that time leaning to the left though not committed socialists, can also be considered in this light. Charles Russell sums it up when he writes, 'on the basis of the presumed autonomy of the aesthetic realm is built an ideal of the artist's essential social mission.'\(^2\)

We cannot bracket the novels addressed in this chapter within a genre; as stated above, the reasons for the inclusion of political action in each vary. Nevertheless, they vary within a recognised Australian literary tradition, one which is grounded in our social history. Donald Horne reflects on the phenomenon in an article titled 'The Metaphor of Leftness':


There were dreams of something called 'socialism', which it was unscientific to define, but which was inevitable. It was inevitable because, as inequality and crises increased, situations would emerge in which the 'working class', which was taken to possess semi-magical properties, would establish a classless society which would then establish a heaven on earth.¹

Donald Horne is describing a vision that existed in Australia (and elsewhere) until post-war reconstruction and advancing technology brought unprecedented prosperity to the worker and new problems for society to grapple with. But, until then, the prevailing situation was one brought about by the Industrial Revolution and its result, whereby a few men became very wealthy from the sweated labour of the masses. The ideology behind the dream of an equal distribution of wealth is associated with Karl Marx who, as Horne explains, 'was right in his diagnosis ... (it was) in his solutions he proved to be wrong.'² (For it was in the capitalist countries that the workers eventually prospered.) In fact, there is a point of view which avers that a classless society is Utopian in the sense of being impractical or unworkable.³ The disadvantages of a perceived social Utopia are demonstrated in the post-revolutionary society of Tomorrow.

The dream of a social Utopia appears in much of the


2. ibid.

3. Kingsley Davis and Wilfred E.Moore ('Some principles of stratafication', American Sociological Review, No.10, April 1945, 242-249), believe that social inequality must exist in all societies with a complex division of labour in order to assure that important and necessary tasks are performed efficiently.
literature produced in Australia from early settlement, reaching a peak in the eighteen-nineties where it was tied to the nationalist stance of Henry Lawson, Joseph Furphy and William Lane.\(^1\) Later, it came to be related to international socialist ideology, but, first and foremost, it was born of a peculiarly Australian vision, one shared by such statesmen as Henry Parkes, J.D. Lang and W.C. Wentworth.\(^2\) Caught up in the spirit of such slogans as the Great Australian Dream and Australia Felix, they pictured a nation free of the injustices of old world class and privilege, and shared the belief that a unique opportunity existed in a new land to bring about this felicitous state. Writers and poets such as Mary Gilmore, Bernard O'Dowd, Frank Wilmot (writing as Furnley Maurice), and Vance Palmer carried the dream through the first decades of this century. As T. Inglis Moore describes it:

> An egalitarian, classless and democratic society was to dispense social justice for all. The common man was at long last to come into his own. With every opportunity of realizing his potentialities, he would soar to the highest achievements in knowledge and power, in literature and the arts. In the great southern continent a commonwealth of happiness was to be established on earth, to serve as an inspiration to the rest of the benighted world.\(^3\)

By implication this passage throws up many 'isms'; utopianism, nationalism, and socialism, all of which can


mean different things to different people. For the purpose of this chapter, it was the promise implied in the spirit of social justice that continued to drive the worker, and nourish socialist doctrine through the following decades, up to the time these novels were written.

The word 'socialism' may represent a political goal or simply a philosophy of equality. In this study it is the authors' attitude to socialism that is the subject of discussion. We should note in passing, though, that not all those writers designated 'radical nationalists' were socialists, nor, for that matter, were all nationalists radical; they included conservative middle-class men pushing for Federation, and bohemians and other free-thinking intellectuals.¹ But, because nationalism reached a peak in the eighteen-nineties with the writers of the Bulletin, and that decade saw a major depression, strikes and drought, and also the birth of the Australian Labor Party, we associate the nineties with the beginnings of the class struggle in Australia and in Australian literature.² It was a struggle still alive in the prosperous twenties when Katharine Prichard wrote Working Bullocks.

It is with the strong sentiments of this tradition as their heritage that Harcourt, Tennant, and Barnard, from their several philosophical viewpoints, have produced the novels explored in this chapter. For, as Ian Reid has remarked, 'the Depression was less a generator of new

1. See R. White, Inventing Australia, Chapter 6.
currents of belief than a strong conductor of old ones. Of these authors we can say: Harcourt was a professed socialist, Tennant cared about people and saw the problems of society as inimical to individual happiness, and Barnard's social conscience was encompassed in the much larger issues concerning life that have teased the minds of philosophers from the time of the ancient Greeks.

---

The socialist ideology which J.M. Harcourt hoped to propogate with *Upsurge*, his novel of Perth in the Depression, became submerged in the furore which followed its publication. Ironically, it was not the communist orientation of the novel which fell foul of the authorities, but the (for then) overt descriptions of the lack of sexual inhibitions in that city's 'respectable' citizens. Because the work focuses on the middle class, rather than the proletariat, its place in Australia's literary history lies in a direction other than that envisaged by its author - that is, a novel which would be in the vanguard of socialist realism in Australia. The book was seen by the reading public to be an expose of contemporary sexual morality rather that the inspiration to the proletariat that Harcourt intended.

The uprising which gives Harcourt's novel its title begins as a minor grievance caused by official attitudes

1. Reid, *Fiction and the Great Depression*, p.50.
3. ibid.
to unsanitary conditions in the relief camp where Peter Groom, left penniless by his long-suffering wife, is sent to earn his dole. As the protesting mass converges on the Treasury it snowballs to gather in most of the political activists and unemployed people of the city. The march, 'with the red flags over all, and kindled eyes all blazing bright with revolution's heat' is a re-working of the one predicted four decades earlier by Henry Lawson.¹ Baton-wielding mounted police both cause and quell the riot which ensues. The episode is the climax of the novel, the atmosphere having been built up by two previous incidents: a deputation to the Premier on behalf of the unemployed, and a shop-workers strike against a cut in their already low wages. The uprising is indicative of the general unrest of the wider world, as the epilogue states. Yet, finally, it appears incidental to the plot which Harcourt has wrought.

The plot of the novel is unconvincing. It details the infatuation of a middle-aged magistrate for a young shop girl who has come before him charged under an archaic law of indecency; and the privations suffered by an affluent member of Perth society, Peter Groom, when he no longer has money at his disposal. The girl, Theodora Ludden who, until her conviction and fine, worked at the Brazilian consulate, now sells hosiery in Kronen's department store. Her friendship with Groom and with Steven Riley, a member of the Communist Party (who also appears before magistrate

¹ See Lawson's poem, 'Faces in the Street'.
Riddle), links the middle-class characters to the class struggle which is ostensibly the central concern of the novel. But events as delineated are at odds with the author's claim that this is a novel of realism. The poetic justice which falls upon Paul Kronen after his dismissal of Ethel Rumble, with its horrific consequences, is a romantic notion and hardly likely to occur in real life; and the downfall of Kronen's Emporium, following the shop-workers strike, suggests wishful thinking on the part of the writer.

The title of *Upsurge* is designed to direct the reader's focus to the novel's climactic riot. An alternative title pointing instead to the development of the character, Peter Groom, would place the uprising of the workers in the context of his 'enlightenment' regarding his place in society as one of the 'idle rich'. Groom can be seen to represent the hope of the socialist author to convert at least some of his middle-class readers. The point to be made about *Upsurge* as a novel of social (and socialist) orientation is that the immorality of its characters (or 'indecency' as the sexual episodes featured in it were labelled at the time of the book's banning) is a microcosm for the far greater immorality of a society where the wealthy play and indulge themselves while the unemployed sink into greater and greater misery, to the point of murder/suicide.

Harcourt's characters are, however, worthy of consideration, perhaps because their creator's efforts to present them as unworthy specimens of humanity fails.
Paul Kronen is as selfish and unpleasant as he is meant to be in the schema of the novel but, because Harcourt allows the reader to enter the minds of James Riddle and Peter Groom, we cannot help but see events from their point of view. Groom (who, it is stated fourteen times throughout the novel, is a 'young idler') is more spoilt than degenerate. He has enough sense to place his money under his wife's control when he loses a thousand pounds in an impulsive business venture, and the narrative moves Groom towards a developing moral conscience. Later, when he borrows small amounts from his friends, the debt weighs on his conscience until he can repay the loans by selling his personal possessions. In the relief camp he readily sides with his fellow workers and finds a certain affinity with them in their struggle. When he is jailed for his part in the riot and his wife decides, against her mother's advice, to return to him, the reader feels that he will be a reformed character henceforth and no longer idle his life away.

The author's contempt for an unemployed person with private means is ironically contrasted with his picture of the mass of unemployed with no means at all. In the philosophy of the work ethic there is something evil about unemployment whatever the cause and, clearly, Harcourt supports the Marxist view of a just distribution of wealth where neither the idle rich nor the unemployed poor would exist. It is the great gulf between the lifestyles of those who want and those who have more than they need that Harcourt wished to draw to the attention of his readers.
While Groom is the character who changes and develops, it is James Riddle around whom Harcourt builds the theme of the novel, which asserts the moral laxity of the ruling class. Yet he is not presented in an entirely unsympathetic light. James Riddle is a magistrate who seeks to administer the law with justice. He is an avid reader of poetry and philosophy, and his discussions with his chemist friend, John Graham, equally well-read but in sympathy with the communist cause, give Harcourt the opportunity to instigate an ideological dialogue. Riddle is able to engage in theoretical debate without bias, admitting that those he jailed for creating a disturbance may have right on their side but that justice, like religion, 'must be subservient to the ends of civilisation and the well-being of the state.' He adds:

The windows of my court-room are plain, but some of those in the supreme court are of stained glass and depict Justice with her eyes bandaged, with a sword in one hand and scales in the other. And above the altars of some of our churches Christ hangs on a cross. If the church taught and practised the precepts of Christ, my friend, it would not be long before it ceased to exist in any form recognizable as a church. And if magistrates and judges dispensed justice as you and a few other dreamers understand it, our civilisation would topple about our ears like a house of cards. (p.67)

Here, Harcourt draws our attention to a paradox. In the much vaunted free enterprise of the capitalist system, justice and the wishes of the individual must be subservient to the well-being of the state. We have noted (Footnote p.15) that the communist Manifesto upholds the freedom of the individual but, as Barnard shows so clearly, in the post-revolutionary world of Tomorrow, the state takes
precedence over the individual there, in just the same way. Although individual freedom looms large among the themes of *Tomorrow*, in *Upsurge* there is evidence that Harcourt agrees with the magistrate and, again paradoxically, with Riddle's friend and ideological opponent, John Graham, a chemist who is also a 'fellow-traveller', as the intellectual allies of the Communist Party were called.\(^1\) Graham has this to say:

> The fundamental structure of society is about to change, and with it all the moral and intellectual and emotional values that are based upon it. Individual men and women are cells in the larger organism of society, Peter, and they are undergoing psychological modification preparatory to the change. ... The modern decay of manners and morals, and the crisis with its train of bankruptcies and unemployment and social unrest, are simply different phases of the same process. (pp.197-98)

Those whose interest in socialism was moral and philosophic saw change as an inevitable corollary to the flaws in the capitalist system, though not something that would occur through an uprising of the workers, as in the Russia of 1917. 'Every stage, moreover, of the tactic of revolution as Marxism conceives it', wrote Harold Laski in the nineteen-twenties, 'is dubious in the modern time.'\(^2\) That Harcourt arranged for his uprising to fail proves that, like Barnard and Dark, he prepared to write his novel advocating change by a thorough self-education in the social

1. In 'The Banning of Upsurge', Harcourt recalls: 'I, like so many in those days, was a 'fellow-traveller.' This brings Harcourt closer in outlook to the other authors studied here than Nile's introduction leads us to believe.

issues. In each of these novels activists, such as Nick in *the Little Company*, and Sid Warren in *Tomorrow*, are shown to be single-minded, unenlightened, and dogmatic (although it suits Barnard's purpose to allow Warren to succeed in his planned uprising).

In another instance of Harcourt's using characters to establish ideological dialogue Riddle comes face to face, in Theodora's flat, with Steven Riley, the communist he had previously sentenced to six weeks in prison. Their conversation is somewhat bitter to begin with. However, 'as they argued, their consciousness of enmity, of their positions in the opposed forces of the class-war, seemed to fall from them. They argued as equals' (p.152). As had the chemist, John Graham, Riley accuses Riddle of being blind to the signs of change which portend the imminence of the revolution. But James Riddle is secure in the system which has made him and which he helps to maintain. He is portrayed as aesthetically discriminating, cultured, fastidious, and emotional. In his dealings with Theodora he is generous and gallant. Altogether James Riddle is presented as a man to be admired, a man with a conscience who, following the indecency case, travels to the beach to check the scene for himself.

More than once the author gives both sides of the argument, an indication that Harcourt, while highlighting social wrongs, appears to be not totally convinced that socialism provides clear-cut solutions. Jack Beasley points out that the chief function of socialist realist writing
is 'the creation of typical working class characters, of proletariat heroes.'

But such characters are peripheral in *Upsurge* where the focus is on those of the privileged classes. Those who would overturn the status quo, such as Steven Riley and Olive Curnow, are quickly dispensed with and sent to gaol. We learn nothing of Olive Curnow, except than she is a forceful and persuasive speaker. Riley is shown to be belligerent and a user of obscene language, and committed to the Cause to the point of asceticism. But they are failures as heroes; each show of rebellion proves the impotence of those who would challenge the power of the establishment.

Theodora is portrayed as calm and confident, but easily persuaded in matters of alcohol and sex. James Riddle feels that her personality eludes him and it eludes the reader also. She is never fully delineated, and 'only her sensuality seemed real.' Theodora's function in the novel is to provide the link between the establishment and the workers via her friendship with Riley and her affair with Riddle. Uneducated on a cultural level, she helps her communist friends yet regards them with an instinctive disquiet. She tells Riddle: 'it's as though they were on the other side of everything' (53). One wonders whether Harcourt harboured ambivalent feelings toward communism. Apologists for religion (and Harcourt, through Riddle, raises the point that communism may have ceased to be a political philosophy and become a religion) do not usually overtly express their doubts. Ideology is a subject for

debate in this work, as it is in the other novels included in this study.

Harcourt's use of language is chiefly functional and descriptive and without metaphor. However, his descriptions are evocative and give readers a clear picture of such things as hot city streets, the magistrates court and Theodora's flat. The language of the various characters' dialogue is faithful to their stations in life, which adds to the novel's credibility. *Upsurge* is included here because of its consideration of socialism as a solution to society's problems and its correspondences with certain aspects of the other novels. It comes under the general umbrella of the thesis with the suggestion that the Depression years were the catalyst for its creation, as does its theme of social injustice as seen through the eyes of its characters. *Upsurge* also raises the point, considered in *The Little Company* and *Tomorrow*, that the apathy of the masses makes it impossible for social change to be introduced by peaceful means:

"They'll only act when they're carried away. They don't think; they don't even try to think. Oh! Marx realized that! But they haven't even any imagination. Half of them can't visualize anything better than they have now. 'Workers of the world, unite!'" he quoted ironically. "'You've nothing to lose but your chains...' Half of them don't know they're wearing chains till somebody jerks them! Then they forget again. Like cattle in a branding yard! They bellow and struggle while they are being branded, then they forget." (p.170)

Amongst the politically conscious novels written in the Depression years Harcourt's novel stands apart. In its attempt to be primarily a socialist realist work it
is ahead of its time. It anticipates the work of such writers as John Morrison, Judah Waten and Frank Hardy. Harcourt's contemporaries, Jean Devanny and Katharine Prichard cannot be bracketed with him as socialist realist writers. Jean Devanny, although a communist, is now considered to be a feminist writer in the first instance. Her political novel, *Sugar Heaven*, has as its focus the raising of women's political consciousness, rather than revolution. In Katharine Prichard's socialist novels of the twenties and thirties, *Working Bullocks* and *Intimate Strangers*, the socialist political point, although prominent, is subordinate to the plot and the personal lives of her characters. As it does in Devanny's novel, the major theme of *Intimate Strangers* has a feminist underpinning. *Upsurge* is of interest because of its history, and because of its place in the literature of an era. This has been recounted by Richard A. Nile in an introduction to the 1986 facsimile edition and by Harcourt himself. As Nile explains, 'Upsurge was banned during a period of severe repression of all sorts of literature.' The obstacles that censorship and reluctant publishers presented to Australian authors, especially left-wing authors, who sought to speak to their contemporaries of

1. Jack Beasley (Red Letter Days: notes from inside an era, Sydney, Australasian Book Society, 1979, p.171 ff.) queries the validity of the term 'socialist realism', both from a Russian perspective and in relation to its place in the world of the creative arts.


3. ibid.

4. Harcourt, 'The Banning of Upsurge'. 
the social issues of the times, continued through the fifties. Such attitudes were directly responsible for the founding of the Australasian Book Society which was to become embroiled in the anti-communist ferment of the Cold War years.¹

---

To understand Kylie Tennant's view of socialism we need to look at The Battlers in the context of others of her novels. Characters who are active socialists appear in Tiburon as well; and Foveaux is laden with social satire. However, other aspects of human existence concern her more than politics. And in all her works her interest in the dispossessed or 'unsuccessful' members of society is aroused for their own sake (and the sake of their real life counterparts) rather than to make political capital out of their plight. Kylie Tennant was not, herself, a socialist.² Like her character, Shannon Hicks in Ride on Stranger, Tennant, throughout her own life, had the capacity to hold herself mentally outside and independent of ideologies and religious dogma while often assisting in the efforts of those who were involved with them. The chief concern of Kylie Tennant, the motivating force behind her writing, and the subject of all her novels is, simply, people.

I have borne the reputation of being an observer of human behaviour, a binocular naturalist objectively recording wild life in human form.³

1. See Beasley's Red Letter Days, passim.
When Tennant sketches in the environment of her characters, whether it be rural or urban, she does so with an attention to detail which overlooks nothing, least of all its human inhabitants. It follows that the settings of a Tennant novel may appear to be irritatingly overcrowded. She has been criticised for painting too broad a canvas, peopled with too many colourful figures so that the central characters seem to be lost in the mosaic.¹

In an article written more than thirty years ago, Dorothy Auchterlonie says 'Tennant's characters are the background and the background is the book.'² While the central character is easily discernible it is true that we are given more than a passing description of the problems, aspirations and so forth, of a good many others with whom the main characters interact throughout the narrative. This tendency in Tennant's writing, however, should not be seen as a flaw but rather as an indication of her realisation that the capacity for suffering, happiness or foolhardiness is innate in every human being and all are worthy of her attention in passing.

There is a universality in Tennant's focus on humanity; she draws no heroes in the sense of derring-do (although the battle for survival in the face of adversity carries a traditional Australian kind of heroism). She portrays the lowliest of her characters with tolerance and sympathy,


H.M.Greens A History of Australian Literature, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1961, Vol.II, p.1011), has written: 'Tennant's novels cannot be said to have a framework at all, and this constitutes her great defect as a novelist.'

even, one suspects, admiration. As explorations of the life experience from the subjective point of view of the characters, these novels are truly representative of their period in Australia's literary and social history. Tennant's characters work through their personal exigencies, doubts, hopes, and fears against a backdrop of the larger national upheavals of depression and war.

The Reverend Postlewaite, Snow Grimshaw and Dancy Smith, in fact all those whose background Tennant gives us among the battlers on the outback track, have a common bond in that they have suffered in the past because their individuality resisted the moulding of their lives by others. The social and political elements in Tennant's writing are embedded in her concern for the way society puts pressure on the individual. Her descriptions often meld the physical and mental landscapes of her characters (those 'vagabonds, failures and criminals about whom (she) habitually wrote with affection'), whose intrinsic value Tennant upholds in a symbolic description of the briar rose:

The briar is always on the point of being declared noxious, a ruin of fields, a home for pests, the refuge of rabbits and small birds, its thorns sheltering other lives than its own. The briar that travels the roads and leaps the ditches to prowl in a farmers field and spread itself under his very nose uncaring, is the battler's flower, and its smell is the best in the world, if you except bacon cooking over a fire of black cypress boughs (229).

Excepting that Tennant allows herself to be carried away

1. Introduction to 1976 edition of Battlers.
by the 'romance of the swag', in the final clause, this passage is a prime example of her interesting use of landscape to make her point about people. Such a talent, together with a Dickensian skill in overdrawing the 'wags', make Kylie Tennant's novels deserving of a higher ranking than they are usually accorded.¹

The Battlers has been received by some writers as the definitive Depression novel, but one in the realm of journalistic realism rather than creative fiction.² This view is reinforced by the fidelity to detail which is characteristic of Tennant's work, in this case a fidelity assured when the author prepared her ground by camping and travelling with the people for whom the novel is titled. But if she writes with authority she writes, firstly, with imagination. An analogy can be drawn between The Battlers and The Grapes of Wrath.³ Like Tennant, John Steinbeck gathered his material first hand by trekking with the dispossessed, in this case from Oklahoma to California, and, like The Battlers his novel:

1. H.M. Green (History), has also made the comparison between Tennant's characterisation and that of Charles Dickens (Vol. II, p.1011).

2. See Judy Mackinolty, ed., The Wasted Years, Sydney, George Allen & Unwin, 1981, where historian, Mackinolty, writes: 'Some few unemployed women took to the track (in the Depression) as Kylie Tennant has depicted in The Battlers' (p.103).

3. The analogy has been made by both T.Inglis Moore, 'The Tragi-Comedies Of Kylie Tennant', Southerly, No. 1, 1957, 324-333; and by H.M. Green, History, Vol. II, p.1012.
... did not have a chance of being accepted and read or evaluated as fiction. From the very beginning it was taken as substantial fact and its merits debated as a document rather than a novel.  

Twenty years after its release that injustice was corrected when Peter Lisca published his critique of Steinbeck's body of work. Lisca shows that *The Grapes of Wrath* is an intricately wrought and finely executed masterpiece, with a pattern of symbolism derived from the many biblical references to grapes.

The pattern of symbolism we can discern in *The Battlers* is of the universal stream which holds all life in its flow regardless of personal effort. That human effort is, by and large, pointless is a philosophy built into many of Tennant's novels. Here it is articulated by the Reverend Harry Postlewaite, spiritual guardian of the battlers, a heretic in the eyes of the church. When expelled he takes what he sees as a 'roving commission in hell,' where he preaches that:

'The heart of the universe is good and wise and loving,' ... 'and the blood of the universe, the whole stream and current of life, flows into that sacred heart, flows toward eternal Love. Evil, then, is the human will breasting against the great current...' (*The Battlers* p.211)

Despite the textual evidence to the contrary, and criticism by Margaret Dick and Xavier Pons which reveals the existential and metaphysical bent of Tennant's writing, the documentary label is still being applied to *The Battlers* in the eighties. Brian Matthews refers to George Orwell's

phrase, 'a kind of semi-sociological literary criticism' in his article dealing with Orwell's review of The Battlers. Like Orwell's, Matthews' argument is weighted towards 'the broader social and political context' of the book, bracketing it with Orwell's Down and Out in Paris and London and Jack London's People of the Abyss, two works which are documentary, albeit reported in narrative mode. The Battlers was never intended to be other than fiction. The battle for survival as portrayed by Tennant is informed as much by the peculiar traits of the protagonists as they, themselves, are shaped by their circumstances. No matter how close to a real life situation these circumstances may be, the personal idiosyncrasies which give life to the novel are the product of the author's fertile imagination.

Kylie Tennant has reported that her appearance among the travellers gave rise to astonishment because 'there were no women on the roads during the Depression.' Yet women make up half the numbers in The Battlers, chiefly because the characters in it are an amalgam of the travelling unemployed single males and the itinerant families who traditionally, and still do, follow seasonal work, such as fruit picking and pea picking around the countryside. Without Dancy, Dora Phipps or Mrs Tyrell

1. See Footnote 2, p.60 above.
3. An autobiographical novel which describes seasonal workers is Eve Langley's The Pea Pickers, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1942.
the book would lose much of its colour and warmth. The ingenuity and homemaking qualities displayed by Tennant's imaginary women of the track give a dimension to the novel which the stark truth of the situation would lack. Furthermore, the peripheral characters of Mrs Postlewaite and Mrs Snow Grimshaw have important catalytic roles in the plot.

It is plain that Kylie Tennant was dubious that social theory could lead to social change (who would listen?). Her weapon against social wrongs is to use shock tactics by describing them in lurid detail. ('I was interested in forcing my readers to see the seamier side of our society in the form of fiction.'\(^1\)) Unlike occasions when, in the role of observer/narrator, Tennant describes bureaucracy, organisations, and sometimes whole communities, in highly descriptive and richly satiric prose, personal hardships, whether from social or environmental sources, are revealed from the subjective viewpoints of the characters. And the seamy side of life is more likely to be found in the city than in the outback. For example, Bramley Cornish has always been mentally, as well as physically, uncomfortable in the slum suburb where he grew up. In the Depression years the only work he can get is to collect the rents of the oppressed people in his neighbourhood. Inside the houses, for him, 'the running sores of Foveaux were always unwrapped.'

All day long he moved in the sour stench of misery, the dirt, the sweaty, clammy nastiness of diseased people and decayed houses. Sometimes

---

he felt as though he was putting his hand on slime. His gorge rose with it. (Foveaux p.391)

There is no doubt that Tennant considered life away from the cities healthier; it is a wisdom frequently restated in The Battlers. But without regular food and shelter, no matter how insalubrious, illness sometimes results from cold and malnutrition:

They were all roadsick, and that was the truth; overcome with that craving for shelter that sooner or later grips all tramps.

... The four grew leaner and hungrier looking; and they watched Snow with a helpless dependence. He set traps; but even the rabbits seemed to have died of starvation. (The Battlers, pp.56-57)

Tennant may ridicule human pretensions but she never ridicules suffering. She could empathise with slum dweller and outback bagmen equally. But balanced against the hardships of life on the track is the feeling that its adherents are free; cold and hunger are only occasional tribulations. In between there is food and warmth and companionship. With luck, bureaucracy, in the form of the police, need only be confronted on dole day.

In the Depression years it was mandatory for single unemployed males to keep moving from town to town in order to receive dole or sustenance vouchers.¹ The Government in

1. c.f. The Little Company, p.126:

There was still an army of unemployed though. Many of them were on the road, but you didn't notice them much because the police kept them moving. Draw your dole in this town this week, by by next week you must be many miles away - or no dole. Unemployed people get talking when they settle down together, and that's bad; they get thinking, even, and that's worse.
its wisdom decided that if such people stayed too long in one place they might organise themselves into a position of some influence.¹ (This is exactly what Burning Angus attempts to do in *The Battlers* when he instigates the Bagmen's Union according to Labour(sic) Party regulations.)²

Tennant concedes with sympathy that the police who have the task of moving people on and out of their towns are forced to take the role of the enemy (23), but here she gives the bagmen's view:

> For all the police care, we can die on the road; yes, and we do die on the road - of starvation, and cold, and despair. If it wasn't for the help of other men and women, who've got nearly as little as we have, there'd be more notices of old men - unidentified, destitute, died of malnutrition ... *(The Battlers* p.147)

It sometimes appears that Tennant cannot make up her mind whether her travellers are fortunate to be away from the city, and the interference of the authorities and other assorted 'do gooders'; or unfortunate because they are the dregs of a society that has no place for them. Perhaps the explanation is that Tennant was, herself, a free spirit who resisted the attempts of society to mould her for its own end.³

In *Tiburón*, Constable Scorby, while officious on the job, nevertheless thinks deeply about the situation of the itinerants. Through a long conversation between Scorby


2. In fact, there did exist during the Depression the Unemployed Worker's Movement which came 'from the left-wing and (which was) comparatively viable.' See Nadia Wheatley, 'The Disinherited of the Earth', in Mackinolty, ed., *The Wasted Years*, p.28.


---


² In fact, there did exist during the Depression the Unemployed Worker's Movement which came 'from the left-wing and (which was) comparatively viable.' See Nadia Wheatley, 'The Disinherited of the Earth', in Mackinolty, ed., *The Wasted Years*, p.28.

³ Tennant, *The Missing Heir*, p.45 and *passim*. 
and Rev. Sorrel, Tennant airs her own ambivalence. If she has little faith in social theory she appears not to be wholly convinced that religious dogma offers much hope for improvement in the lot of those she writes about. In Battlers we feel that Harry Postlewaite is speaking for the author when he expresses his belief that 'Someone' holds us all, even the battlers, in his Divine care. But when Mr Sorrel says as much to Scorby he protests:

Divine care, ... How can an intelligent man actually postulate such a thing when you look at this ... this tangle of incoherent lives fulfilling no high purpose. They have no will, no choice of their own, but to exist, and they are governed in that undesirable existence by one ultimate value - food. Go they must where they get their food, or where their mating and breeding lead then. And this hopeless, inarticulate and confused tangle of people is, you say, the subject of Divine care?

(Tiburon p.390)

Thus, the author admits the discrepancy between theology and social reality. God is dead for these people, and they are not given even the Nietzschian comfort of deciding their own destiny. Nor, in this scenario, is there any factor determining their lives other than purely animal needs.

Ironically, there IS something in the lives of many of the itinerants to which they cling as if to the Rock of Ages. It is called Labour Principles. The 'cockies' to whom the local police sergeant sends the drifters at shearing or harvest time will often attempt to pay under-award wages. If the work is refused on these grounds it is within the sergeant's power to withhold dole payments. Hence, the quixotic notion of Denny the Magsman, secretary
Of the Tiburon Rural Workers and Unemployed Industrial Committee, to declare 'black' the local police station for refusing dole to some of their number. The incongruity of the words 'Unemployed' and 'Industrial' in tandem is Tennant's way of stressing the impotence of these men whom their real union, the A.W.U., has abandoned. 'The weakness of the whole Labour Movement is that it only concerns itself with the man in a job,' cries Burning Angus. (Battlers, p. 279)

That the strikers in both novels fail to achieve anything is part of the general thrust of Tennant's writing which sees all human endeavour as futile, a point noted by most critics of her works. But only Margaret Dick has related such a view to existentialism. It is likely that Tennant was not consciously an existentialist, rather it is the recurring motif of the universal stream that reflects what really informed Tennant's writing. As the Apostle says to Dancy:

> If you can just remember that fretting and willing and worrying and planning are just a waste of time. Try to trust life. I know it hasn't given you much reason to trust it, but go with it, not against it. (Battlers, p. 225)

The farmers whom the battlers meet along the track are often poorer and more discouraged than the travellers. We are reminded of Tennant's view of the futility of human

1. In Tomorrow we read that 'Organised Labour watched (relief work) anxiously lest standards - the last poor crumbling standards - be brought down by the use of the unemployed.' (117)

2. In fact, according to Wheatley, 'the NSW unemployed did force the House of Have to listen to the House of Want', The Wasted Years, p. 38.
effort when Dancy is moved to think: 'You could work and work and be no better off after years of struggle than if you had sat in the shade' (Battlers p. 386). But defeatism is rare among Tennant's characters. As the farmer's wife explains to Dancy it takes hard times to bring out the best in people. Struggle may be futile but Tennant lauds the people of the inland for their resilience, and their survival instincts.

Many people who would not normally steal were forced to do so in the Depression. Furthermore, 'they regarded such thefts as a necessity, even a right rather than as something immoral.'

1 Tennant equates Snow Grimshaw's sheep stealing skill with that of an artist. What is more, she shows it to be as natural as an aborigine killing a kangaroo. To Snow's mind 'there had always been something contemptible about buying mutton when it was walking about in the paddocks all around him' (Battlers p. 2). And when he removes the door of a deserted church to cover his wagon that, too, is a necessity.

The stealing, the drinking, the fighting, even Dick Tyrell's assault of his father, are all portrayed by Tennant as normal and natural consequences of their circumstances. Tennant observes her 'sinners' and misfits with a Christlike compassion. If there is a hell it is here and now and not always of her characters' own making. But heaven, too, is glimpsed occasionally, as when Dancy is lifted out of herself by the sight of a hillside abloom with purple flowers. The atmosphere, the tone, the mood (the feeling)

1. Wheatley, The Wasted Years, p. 36.
of a Tennant novel is always of light, never of darkness. Critics have had difficulty reconciling this fact with her belief in the futility of human striving. However, it is precisely this tension that explains the lack of any political leaning in Tennant's work.

Xavier Pons has rightly noted that the socialism of The Battlers lies, as William Lane expressed it, in 'just being mates.' Links between what Pons describes as 'the Australian or Lawson /Furphy tradition' and The Battlers make up the thrust of his article. He compares elements of the novel with quotations from the writings of Lawson and Furphy. Two points which Pons locates in the novel are pertinent to my thesis: the myth that the outback Australian is the 'real Australian'; and the truism, expressed by Snow Grimshaw, that 'a country shaped people ... more than they shaped the country'(207).

The resilience and resourcefulness of the outback Australian is legend, and something Tennant concedes:

Any invader would have a hard time with the real Australians, who were so dark brown they might well be black, and so tough they might as well be leather ... They would hold out as the blacks still held out in the desert and barrens ... Even after the city-people had been poisoned off or bombed out, the travellers would be going from one camp to the next... (Battlers p.207)

1. See T. Inglis Moore, 'The Tragi-Comedies of Kylie Tennant', and Dorothy Auchterlonie, 'The Novels of Kylie Tennant'.

We are given a very similar scenario by Marjorie Barnard.\(^1\) As Pons says, 'Australian nationalism is characterised by the fear of the Asiatic races,'\(^2\) and Barnard takes up this fear when designing the fictional collapse of twentieth-century capitalism in Australia.\(^*\) However, for Kylie Tennant, apocalyptic events may come and go, and individual suffering may be endured, but the life force, if uncorrupted by the unnatural life of the cities, remains unquenchable. From each of the three women writers studied here there is an implicit admission that the glory of mankind lies not in the things he instigates, but in something eternal which all his fumbling cannot spoil: that is, the human spirit.

---

Marjorie Barnard's consideration of socialism as an instrument of change is an intellectual one as it appears in Tomorrow. Change there must be, if only in society's attitude to the mechanics of production. Depression is a natural and recurring feature of the capitalist system:

> The capitalist system gets itself into knots now and then. Sort of indigestion. Overproduced. Something has to go and it's the weak link that busts. That weak link has always been labour. (Tomorrow p.119)

These words are spoken by Peter Hally, a returned veteran soldier turned sailor, then adventurer. He is described as a truly free man who fancied himself a philosopher,

1. cf. Tomorrow, where the 'real' Australians still wander around the outback six hundred years after the destruction of the Eastern cities and an Asian takeover of the country (pp.6-7).


* See p.94 below.
so that his indictment of capitalism is apolitical, and his instruction of Harry Munster in the tenets of trade unionism is in the cause of education, not socialism.

The action of *Tomorrow* ranges through the thirties into the years of World War II. Barnard's attitude to ways of curing social ills is, like the world she describes in this novel, in a state of flux. This is, perhaps, because she endeavoured to keep her mind open to the ideas of others, to give all sides a hearing in a search for answers that went unsatisfied. Knarf calls the thirties 'the fateful decade ... the last chance before the cataclysm':

> Those were the years when the margin between cause and effect in the international and social field narrowed to vanishing point - one of the really tragic periods of history, in a way more tragic than what came after, because there was an appearance of choice about it. (p.135)

Unlike Kylie Tennant, who floated free of ideology and dogma, Barnard, at that time, was groping about for the solutions she felt must be there. Through her narrator she speaks frustratedly of 'books that instructed the intellectuals and provided them with ammunition in the battle of wits, but went no further'(135).

Most of Barnard's dialectic comes through Knarf or through Harry's stream of consciousness. Whatever happened to Harry he 'would still go on believing in the form of society that had rejected him.' He represents those individuals, victims of their social system, who are unable to think, much less act; who, moulded from childhood in the edict of God, King and Country, are totally incapable of being disloyal to it. Not only Harry, but 'the whole
great lower middle class plumped for a continuance of things as they were' (p.136). Here Barnard is in accord with Eleanor Dark in her disgust of the passivity of the masses who 'prefer a familiar disaster to an unknown remedy.' Hence the proliferation of the communist bogey as a means of promoting civil obedience.  

In one of the many switches of the narrative back to the twenty-fourth century, Knarf, reflecting on the events in the Russia of 1917, is moved to say that the Russian people 'had reached the point of creative desperation.' Revolution here is seen not as apocalypse and destruction, but, in the Marxist model, as cataclysm and rebirth. But communism ultimately failed, as Knarf explains, because 'it postulated a law and tried to nail human nature to it' (p.137).

Barnard uses the Sydney Domain on a Sunday to acquaint her readers with the differing views on the social crisis. With war threatening, speakers expound various causes of (and solutions to) contemporary problems. Some say 'we must fight', and others that 'fighting demands a tremendous cost and solves nothing.' There are those who say it is all in the stars or turn the upheaval into religious prophecy. Added to these are communists preaching revolution. The characters involved in the intellectual

sparring are Bowie of the Peace Party, his lieutenant, Paula Ramsey, and the Professor (whose origin and ideological position are vaguely defined),¹ and, on the other side, are taxi-driver, Sid Warren, a member of the Communist Party, and Harry's daughter, Ruth Munster, who hides Sid's 'sedition literature' from the police in the way Theodora does for Steven Riley in Upsurge. (The affinities between the novels of the Depression are both major and minor.)

As well as filtering her social philosophy through Knarf, Marjorie Barnard expresses her views of war through Bowie. However, there is no place for a Peace Party in twentieth-century Australia after war breaks out. Bowie is gaoled for two years as a conscientious objector. (A similar fate befalls Tennant's David Aumbrey in Tell Morning This.) Paula had been willing to assist Bowie in his efforts to raise public consciousness of the futility of war, to watch him 'boring a small neat, hole in the raving darkness of the world' (146). She is Olaf Ramsay's daughter, so her awareness of social wrongs is assured; nevertheless, she still nurses from her mother 'her belief in a private life and individual salvation' (353). This is not the first time the possibility of the individual finding personal stability, despite all the rage that surrounds her/him, is mooted in Tomorrow. An astrologer in the Domain demands of his listeners an explanation for all the fuss and

¹ The Professor may be added to the number of literary 'outsiders' which this thesis locates in these novels. 'He was the eternal onlooker, apprehending everything, doing nothing' (387).
anxiety. 'For Man, fate was fixed, but for the individual there were back ways and secret passages'(145). An ordered and orderly life was all Barnard had known. It would be inconceivable to her, as it would be to Eleanor Dark, that the correction of social wrongs could be inimical to its continuance, as a violent disruption of their social milieu would certainly be.

Nevertheless, Drusilla Modjeska has stated that: 'by the end of the thirties Eleanor Dark, Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw, as well as younger women like Dymphna Cusack and Kylie Tennant, had moved closer to the Communist writers in an alliance that was built on the pressing needs of the moment.' But there is no evidence in the fiction of Dark, Tennant or Barnard that their consideration of socialism was more than tentative. Could Barnard have been describing herself when she writes of Mrs Ramsay that: 'Although she had dutifully read all the publications of the Left Book Club, she had never found really satisfying, categorical answers'(296)?

It is clear the author wavered toward socialism in her desperate concern for the problems of her society. Mrs Ramsay tells the Professor: '"I've come to the point now when I would accept 'even socialism if I believed it would help. Anything would be better than this war''(298). This leads to a reply, the essence of which is central to the thrust of the entire novel, both in the contemporary


* Readings of both The Little Company and Waterway reveal Dark's familiarity with orderly, cultured middle-class existence.
section and that of the projected future:

Socialism isn't a panacea and it isn't enough. There is no solution of world problems or rather, of the problem of living in the world, but I believe that there is a working hypothesis and that it lies in a paradox. In a word, that we must always work in opposite directions in order to attain a balanced result. What I mean is this. Internationalism is a natural corollary of socialism. National socialism is an obvious contradiction in terms... Socialism is in its essence international, the Brotherhood of Man.

(p.289)

The above is a philosophical consideration of socialism such as was being debated among academics and intellectuals after World War I in many countries, including the wealthy United States of America. In Australia, the implementation of socialist ideals was a major cause of disagreement between the political parties. The Country party wanted for its members a share of the wealth generated in the cities. Labor believed the workers would receive a just share if production and commerce were socialised, but the men of the party were divided on how it could be achieved; and then there were the communists. Manning Clark tells us:

From the beginning of the Russian Revolution in November, 1917 until 1920 the radicals, the militants and the doctrinaire socialists continued their uneasy association with the Labor party, or joined more extreme movements such as the Victorian Socialist party. With the formation of the Australian Communist party in October 1920 these groups finally broke with the Australian Labor party...

As it was in the USA, socialism for our authors was

1. The Socialism of Our Times (Laidler and Thomas eds., 1929) contains the views of thirty-four prominent thinkers at an American Symposium. Most favour socialism, but not necessarily after the model proposed by Marx and Engels.

something to be tested against the ideal (beyond humanism; beyond Christianity) of the brotherhood of Man. In *Waterway* Eleanor Dark calls it the 'universal religion'. And in *Battlers*, Harry Postlewaite says, 'I have preached the brotherhood of man ... as long as I can remember' (109).

It is the ideal articulated by all who seek social justice for its own sake; an ideal that is the essence of Christ's teaching, but not often, as numerous authors have noted, the practice of Christianity. Neither has it been the achievement of governments.

Because the ideal society was then, as ever, beyond human reach when Barnard was writing *Tomorrow*, she carries the hypothesis of a communist revolution through to its culmination with a view to testing its possible consequences against all she knew and all she had read. The revolutions of recent history, in Russia and in Spain, are recounted by Knarf as he seeks to place world history in the perspective of humanity's onward march toward wisdom. It is clear Barnard feared such developments could eventuate in her own country. Revolution spells destruction, even if renewal does follow; the good is swept away with the bad. In the novel the communist uprising follows some time after the war. The wartime fears of Sydney's residents...
are turned into actual happenings in the plot and Sydney is bombed by the Japanese.¹ In the aftermath the stage is set for civil war when the Right wing is stronger than the ruling Labor government, and it forms an alliance with Japan, as well as America and Britain, against the Russians. Thus the novel anticipates the Cold War of the fifties.

The question of Barnard's prophetic powers centres on her projection into the twenty-fourth century but her visions are uncannily accurate for today. For example, 'There was a Labour Government in office, but as usual the margin of political power was with the monied interests' (363). And as we see in the far-off world of the future a repeat of the mistakes made in Australian society before the 1930s Depression, we recognise in the words, 'whenever the material side of life outstrips the spiritual we are in trouble' (223), a resemblance to the technological plenty of today.

The revolt of the masses, orchestrated by Sid Warren, is intended to prevent Sydney falling into the hands of the Power brokers who operate outside the Government, and who have amassed an armada of ships outside Sydney heads ready to take over the country. As in the Russia of 1917, in Barnard's fictional post-war Sydney 'there was a programme to meet the emergency. There was a man to implement the programme' (137):²


2. The revolt and sacking of Sydney's cultural institutions was carried out by Sid Warren and the communists, not the Peace Party, as Modjeska (accidently?) states in Exiles at Home, p.246.
...we can destroy the city. It's Sydney they want. It's rich, it's the key. We've been its slaves. It was never our city until now. Now it is our city, we can seize it and all its fascist works and destroy it. (p.375)

The destroyers, led by Sid Warren, systematically sack the G.P.O., Sydney University, the Art Gallery and the State Library, where a few non-aligned book-lovers die trying to save the books. All communication and transport centres are immobilised, trains, motor vehicles and petrol pumps commandeered for the mass evacuation west of the mountains. Here, ostensibly, a new kind of society is formed, although the author does not take up its story until four centuries have passed. Nor does she detail the Asian invasion which has caused these Australians of the future to be smaller, of oriental appearance, and speak a different language. (Barnard's society of the future is addressed in the following chapters.)

Marjorie Barnard denies that she ever belonged to a political party, despite statements to the contrary.\(^1\) Her interest was in the philosophy of politics, in the processes of capitalism and materialism and the backlashes of revolt and socialism. All are phenomena in mankind's evolution. Averse to materialism as a measure of progress, her concept was of a step by step advancement toward universal wisdom, with society shedding the old and dead skins like a snake, but remembering that a snake always retains the essential and real part of itself as it as

---

it moves on. This theme recurs throughout both sections of *Tomorrow*.

The half-evolved must ever live in an approximation. The sliding answer lay somewhere in the middle register of the everlasting phase rule - Utopia was a scientific possibility. Somewhere across the impenetrable marshes, the Right Answer marched parallel to the struggling column of humanity. (p. 239)

It was the 'scientific possibility of Utopia' that drove authors like William Lane and J.M. Harcourt, and it was this that helped sustain the tortured intellect of Marjorie Barnard when she thought civilisation was crumbling around her. Throughout World War II, when Barnard was an active member of the Peace Pledge Union, she wrote for its newsletter, also a pamphlet protesting the war, which was confiscated by the censors.¹ Such activity was to have direct consequences on Barnard's writing as Modjeska discovered:

> She had moved from an aesthetic that denied any connection between literature and politics to an insistance on pacifism and its relation to her writing, and from seeing herself as a passive receptacle of creativity, to a consciousness of the writer as social critic...²

It is the writer as social critic that has underlined the argument in this chapter. I have focussed on three novels that reveal their 'authors' concern for contemporary and future society, and of the wider consequences of depression and war when the individual is the least considered by the bureaucrats. The chapter reveals how the creative imagination was preoccupied at this time with a serious consideration of the ideals, if not the practice.

2. ibid.
of socialism. It stresses that the pursuit of such ideals is itself a literary function as much as an ideological one, and therefore, these novels take their place as a part of the Australian democratic tradition in literature. However, for these authors - and here one must include Eleanor Dark - it is a tradition changed and modified by an awareness of living in the modern age, and all that this implies, socially and artistically. Dark, too, gives a voice to socialist characters. Her two novels, Waterway and The Little Company, have been included in the following chapter because Dark is the author who most overtly connects the problems of her age with the problems of writing about them, a situation more applicable to a study of modernist features in the Australian novels of the period. Other modernist features, such as ambiguity and the alienated outsider, denote certain affinities between Dark's novels and Tennant's Ride on Stranger, and with Tomorrow, where Barnard, too, makes mention of the formal difficulties of portraying modern life. These matters are the focus of my next chapter.
CHAPTER TWO

Artistic Challenge

The forms betray us. In times of struggle and becoming, the words are released, the forms break of their own inadequacy. Literature ceases to be an art with canons, it becomes a hungry mouth.

*Tomorrow and Tommorrow and Tomorrow* p.80.

Amidst the abundance of social fiction which grew out of the Depression and War years in Australia, there were several novels of modernist orientation the identity of which may be obscured by the widely held belief that most novels of this period belong in the genre of social realism. While concern for contemporary society appears to be the motivating force behind their creation, a point I addressed at length in the previous chapter, their authors' belief that war and depression are symptoms of a world capitalist system in a state of crisis led to a self-conscious consideration of the place of the artist and the function of literature in a chaotic society, and the creation of characters who reflect this tension.

The preoccupations of at least four Australian novels, namely, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, *The Little Company*, *Waterway*, and *Ride on Stranger* reveal the kind of acute awareness of their times that we find in the work of certain writers in Britain and Europe from about 1910, writers like Yeats, Pound and Eliot who were apprehensive about modern life. In fiction we find characters who experience lack of direction, fragmentation and perplexity,
and who relay their author's view of a world that has lost its way. We recall characters such as Lily Briscoe in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*; Kafka's Joseph K. in *The Trial*, Samuel Beckett's tramps and Joyce's Stephen Dedalus; all are characters in whose lives perplexing conditions prevail. Although they are portrayed in widely different situations, they all seek coherence. Many of the characters in these Australian novels suffer such spiritual homelessness, together with a feeling that society is not so much hostile as unreasonable, and that life is unable to be trusted.

The difference between the Australian versions of the modern novel, written at this time, and those of Joyce or Woolf, for example, is that the local product addresses directly those larger issues which provide the external complications to their characters' existence. There are two broad types of 'modern' characters in these Australian novels of the Depression; those who are conscious of their ability to see and question popular and/or bureaucratic assumptions, and those who are the bewildered victims of the social conditions which result from depression and war. Such emphasis on social problems should not, however, be taken as an indication that these are primarily social realist works. John Hall makes an important point when he reminds us that 'modernist novels represent a considerable artistic achievement from which a social referent can be drawn,' and, also, that 'the belief that realism somehow tells the truth is simplistic.'

In each of these four novels we find one or more of the preoccupations that Bradbury and McFarlane say are indicative of modernism in literature: 'with the complexities of its own form (Tomorrow, Company); the representation of inward states of consciousness (all); a sense of nihilistic disorder behind the ordered surface of life and reality (Strange); and the freeing of narrative art from the determination of an onerous plot' (Tomorrow, Company). In addition, Waterway contains many examples of the modernist consciousness of life's ambiguities, such as has been located in the works of Conrad, Musil, Kafka, and Mann by Franz Kuna.

This chapter suggests that the special problems of being an artist in an 'uncomfortable' world loomed large in the minds of Eleanor Dark and Marjorie Barnard. To analyse contemporary events within the formal considerations of the text presented a problem which is explicitly expressed in Tomorrow and Company. It is what Barnard means, in the quotation used at the start of this chapter, when she writes, 'the forms betray us.' A story with a beginning, middle and end would no longer suffice, hence the experimental forms of Tomorrow and Company; and the Joycean compression of time in Waterway. However, Tennant's modernist sensibility is employed in ways other than with formal issues. But if she was not strictly a modernist writer in her form of expression she nonetheless displayed

1. Bradbury and McFarlane, Modernism, p.393.

all the attitudes of imaginative unease and alienation in her characters that we associate with the modernist period. Margaret Dick has observed that 'without massacre of sense or syntax (Tennant) has given expression to an essentially modern sensibility, a fact that has been obscured for some by a mistaken identification of modernity with violent technical experiment ...'.

Technical experiment for its own sake (called avant-garde for the purpose of this thesis*) is absent in all of these works. Even Tomorrow, the most experimental in form, has its shape dictated by its central theme, which is the growth of human wisdom through time. The modernist elements that we find in these works, condensation of chronological time; stream of consciousness; the alienation of characters; are held in tandem with a serious engagement with the causes of those external events which impinge on the daily lives and existential consciousness of their characters. If this engagement, at times, appears to overshadow the plot, it is because these particular works grew out of their authors' pressing need to portray their age in fiction; to analyse it, find reasons, offer solutions and sound warnings. As middle-class women, they had been cushioned from the worst effects of the Depression, but other kinds of repression touched them, political unrest and censorship at home, and Fascism and civil war abroad.²


2. Modjeska, Exiles at Home, pp.12-13. Not the least form of repression, Modjeska suggests, was to be found in gender relationships.

* See pages 26 and 29 of my Introduction.
In *Waterway*, *Tomorrow* and *Company*, the main characters also belong to the middle class, although the proletarian heroes, standard of the socialist realist authors, are also given a hearing. But it is the writers, the professors, the doctor and the archaeologist through whom the philosophical, moral and ideological discourse that reflects the thoughts and feelings of their authors is filtered. Conversely, the characters who represent those most affected by the social disruption of war and depression, who may be inarticulate and bewildered by events over which they feel they have no control, are revealed by the stream of consciousness method and, in this way, they, too, provide an avenue through which the authors' opinions may be relayed to readers. However, all of this social emphasis should not stand in the way of seeing these works as modernist novels. Generally, Barnard and Dark succeed in achieving a balance between social questions and existential questioning.

In *Ride on Stranger*, Tennant's method is to probe social matters and existential peculiarities through the creation of a character who, although from poor beginnings, stands apart intellectually from those with whom she interacts. Shannon Hicks, the 'Stranger' of the novel's title is conscious of her separateness in the way of the archetypal 'outsider', in that she experiences a feeling of belonging nowhere. Characters who suffer from varying degrees of alienation from their social environment are discussed in this chapter and the next. The concept of
the outsider may be applied to Ren and Bowie in *Tomorrow*, and Jack Saunders in *Waterway*. There is a major difference, however, between the outsiders in European works by writers like Kafka and Camus, for example, and their Australian counterparts, whose despair is shown to be transient. In much modern fiction, the outsider may be bitterly alienated, or caught in a situation fraught with bewilderment and terror, or possess a sense of unreality or indifference.¹

The comparative 'newness' of Australian society presages hope for the future; and, for our authors, the Depression and two world wars were seen, not as an indication of 'the End' but as an aberration, even a learning experience from which humanity would emerge sadder but wiser.

Nevertheless, we cannot doubt that Eleanor Dark and Marjorie Barnard, almost as much as their novels, were wrought by the exigencies of the times. Both saw the widespread upheaval as a crucial episode in the continuing saga of mankind's inhabitation of the earth, but one which needed to be understood lest all the pain and hardship be for nothing. Like her character, Gilbert Massey, Dark was, at the time of writing, completely immersed in 'this straining, unceasing effort towards comprehension'(*Company* p.318), and Barnard in *Tomorrow*, sought to understand the present by placing contemporary events in their historical context, in a way that reminds us of Eliot and Yeats.

In their discussion of the nature of modernism, Bradbury


* 'Wrought' in both senses; i.e. as in 'worked', as well as in 'wrung' or 'overwrought'. 
and McFarlane write of 'the contemporary sense of participating in a profound transition' which propelled Woolf, Lawrence and other early modern writers:

...The historicist feeling that we live in novel times, that contemporary history is the source of our significance, that we are derivatives not of the past but of the surrounding and enfolding environment or scenario.

Australian writers of the Depression and war years felt this acute sense of living in a crisis period, but, for them, contemporary history was an inextricable part of a human history that was not relegated to the past but was constantly with us. Eleanor Dark puts this feeling into words in the final paragraphs of The Little Company:

Nothing that happened in this world-storm could convert the mad succession of days and nights into a "present". They were suspended in history, born of the past, a threat or a promise to the future, mere whirling events at which human beings, whirling with them, clutched in the hope that they would fall into place some day, somehow, and form a pattern for rational existence. (The Little Company p.318)

In Company Dark transfers her own preoccupations to several of her characters. Gilbert Massey is, like Dark, an author who is feeling the strain of the current situation:

What brain can carry the load of present day suffering and not go more slowly, more stumblingly, more uncertainly? ... For if you're to describe and record humanity you must first feel it. (p.63)

So much does Gilbert agonise over the problems of society that he suffers 'writer's block', a major theme of the novel, a direct result of its author's suffering a similar malady. In an interview with Jean Devanny, one of the few personal

1. Bradbury and McFarlane, Modernism, p.33.
records of Dark's experiences as a writer, she tells how she made many abortive attempts at the novel over three years (after 1940) until 'eventually (she) did get onto a book, something featuring the reactions of a group of people to the war. Dark was referring to The Little Company.¹

Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow was another novel which grew out of its author's need to express her consternation in her writing. Although published under the name of the writing partnership, M.Barnard Eldershaw, Marjorie Barnard explains that, at the time of writing Tomorrow, she was separated from her co-author Flora Eldershaw 'by war and geography' and that, as Barnard recalls, 'she did not feel the same compulsion as I did to write it.'² It is apparent that it was not only the writing careers of the Barnard-Eldershaw partnership that was curtailed by the war, but also the direction in which that writing was headed. Tomorrow was the fifth novel published under the joint pen-name, but it was unlike any that had preceded it. Of the others, A House is Built (1929) (which shared with K.S. Prichard's Coonardoo the Bulletin prize for the best novel submitted in 1928), Green Memory (1931), The Glasshouse (1936), and Plague with Laurel (1937), the first two are set in earlier centuries.³

1. See Jean Devanny, Bird of Paradise, Sydney, Frank Johnston, 1945, p.252. Cited in A.Grove Day, Eleanor Dark, pp.15-16. Day found that 'Eleanor Dark belongs to no literary clubs or circles ... she makes no public appearances and shuns interviews. She has written no autobiography; she knows of no collection of her letters or papers.'


3. The duo were also historians and literary critics.
House is Built, is a family saga, detailing the life of a Sydney waterfront merchant and his family. Characterisation is strong, and the family tensions which the plot carries to another generation, are portrayed with a fine understanding of human nature. This quality possessed by the Barnard Eldershaw partnership is evident in the exploration of the human condition in each of the other novels, which exhibit a wide diversity of plots and settings.

In addition, Marjorie Barnard published a collection of short fiction under her own name. Had not war intervened in Barnard's and Eldershaw's fiction-writing, we would undoubtedly have seen further development of the kind of inner exploration to be found in the modernist short story The Persimmon Tree. This story, whose contrasting images holds the narrative in a poignant juxtaposition of the pregnant Spring of Nature and the Winterly barren lives of two spinsters, alone and separate, caused H.M. Green to say of Barnard, '[(s)he is ... one of the few who stand for art as contrasted with mere capable appropriate expression. ... Marjorie Barnard contributes here something that is new in Australian fiction.]

Barnard may not have thought of herself as a modernist writer. Humphrey McQueen (in his book on modernism in the

1. Wilde, Hooton and Andrews (in The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature, Melbourne, O.U.P., 1985), say 'it seems likely that the lion's share of the writing fell to Barnard but that Eldershaw played an important role in the conceptual ... stages'(233).


3. H.M. Green, History, p.1166.
arts, in Australia) quotes her as saying, after reading
*The Waste Land*, that she 'belonged with the Georgians'.
Virginia Woolf, in her famous essay on modernism, wrote
that 'about December, 1910, human character changed' and
'human relationships shifted.' It is possible that
Barnard's artistic sensibility was closer to that of Woolf
than to Eliot's in his highly complex and allusive poem.

Barnard tells how, in the thirties, her 'nineteenth-
century liberalism' was inadequate to accommodate the threat
of a second world war which was 'inexorably advancing' upon
the nation. The 'grief and anger' suffered by the author
resulted in the writing of *Tomorrow*:

> I transmuted my doubts from the intellectual to
> the creative sphere and I found a quite illogical
> release in stating the whole problem as I saw
> it in a novel instead of in an ideology,
> creatively, instead of politically.

The result is a complex work which, from an historical
perspective, embraces philosophy, Utopian and anti-Utopian
scenarios, and apocalyptic vision. First published in 1947
after heavy cuts by the Government Censor, it was re-issued
by the Virago Press in 1983, after being out of print for
many years. The same year the novel received the Patrick

1. Humphrey McQueen, *The Black Swan of Trespass*, Sydney,

2. Virginia Woolf, 'Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown', *Collected
Bradbury quotes from Woolf's essay when he places the
beginning of modernism in England at about 1910, 'the
year of a new king.' (*The Social Context of Modern...*, p.85)

3. Barnard, 'How 'Tomorrow and Tomorrow' Came to be Written'.
White Literary Award which is given to a distinguished writer whose work has not received deserved recognition.¹

In the novels of these women writers, social protest is couched in moral and intellectual terms rather than Marxist or socialist dogma, although left-wing characters may be present and articulate, as they were in the real life social situations that are being explored by the authors. But, while social changes are seen to be necessary, involvement by the masses, for these authors, means that the people should become informed about the issues. Active participation in change need not mean violent upheavals. It is interesting to compare Australian modernist authors with those of the Anglo-European scene who, according to Charles Russell, resisted change:

... the political positions of many modernist writers have been generally conservative, if not reactionary. Both modernist and avant-garde writers criticize the bourgeois society of which they are a part, but modernists as a group tend to dismiss the idea that further social and political change would benefit their interests. Each step into the unknown future would increase their separation from the ethical, aesthetic, and spiritual values of the classical culture upon which the tradition of serious art is based. Nor have they been able to find in the proletariat which Marxists champion and the avant-garde frequently courts, an aesthetic sensibility that would give them cause to hope. In essence, modernists prize order - both aesthetic and political.²

¹ First published by Georgian House, Melbourne, 1947, with one 'Tomorrow' dropped from the title (without the authors' permission) because the full title would not fit the spine of the book. See Anne Chisholm's Introduction to the Virago edition, which restored all cuts as well as the original title. The republication fulfilled a wish long held by Marjorie Barnard, who was then eighty-six years old.

² Charles Russell, Poets, Prophets..., p.10.
Such an art-centred view of the world cannot be attributed to our authors; the pressure of social problems on their art has already been noted. However, we may take a salient point from this quotation for each of the novels mentioned above. In *The Little Company*, Dark shows her impatience with the proletariat who have never learned to 'think', not even about the arts in which many profess an interest, let alone the propaganda they are fed by the wartime authorities. In *Waterway*, she does not even find an aesthetic sensibility in the privileged. A major theme of this work is that an aesthetic sensibility is central to an orderly existence and mental equilibrium. What Patrick White complained of in 1958 regarding 'the Great Australian Emptiness, in which the mind is the least of possessions, in which the rich man is the important man ...', was noted by Eleanor Dark twenty years earlier in *Waterway*. What she applies to a handful of characters in the novel can be taken as a microcosm of Dark's opinion of Australian society as a whole. Barnard, too, had no faith in social and political change. In *Tomorrow* she demonstrates her belief that the problems of humanity are more complex than are explained ideologically.

In *Stranger*, when Shannon Hicks volunteers to assist her friends at the Proletarian Club, her involvement is shown to be compassionate, rather than political, as are most of her involvements. She, too, is seeking answers and considering proposed solutions. Disillusion inevitably

1. Patrick White, *The Prodigal Son*. 
overtakes her, and we must view such episodes in the light of what we know of the author. We do not find a resistance to change, such as Russell describes, in these writers. Instead, they harbour a doubt that humans are capable of achieving it. The affinity between these four novels is to be found in their authors' creating their characters to be the focal point of their analysis of contemporary social problems; their diversity is found in the way each applies her creative talents to the fictional explorations of the phenomena.

-0-

Of the early edition of Tomorrow, J.D.B. Miller wrote:

Tomorrow and Tomorrow ... is a hard book to write about because one is never quite sure whether the authors expect their anticipation of social and political events to be regarded as accurate prognostication or not ... 1

Forty years on, and Tomorrow is still a hard book to write about; not for the reasons given by Miller, for we now know that Barnard disclaimed any prophetic powers, 2 but because, by its nature, the novel is difficult to categorise. Barnard shared with modernist writers 'their quality of sustaining each work with a structure appropriate only to that work'. 3 And what was appropriate for Barnard's purpose appears to be an amalgam of different genres and a bold experiment with form.


2. Barnard, 'How 'Tomorrow and Tomorrow' Came to be Written'.

Tomorrow is two novels in one, the plots separated by four hundred years, but bound to each other by reason of their being separate links in the chain of humanity's evolution. In the science fiction society of the twenty-fourth century Knarf reads aloud to his friend, Ord, his just completed history of the destruction of civilisation in twentieth-century Sydney. Knarf's book concentrates on the thirties up to the mid-forties, in a review of history which is faithful to fact up to 1945 when it dissolves into speculation. World War III follows almost immediately as Knarf telescopes time and brings the events of the twentieth century, War-Depression-War, to what seems to be their inexorable conclusion. The climax shows Sydney bombed, burning, and uninhabitable as a result of a long-simmering communist revolution which follows the bombing of Sydney. Sometime after this - the text does not specify - Australia is invaded and annexed by an unnamed enemy of Asian origin.*

The significance of this segment is threefold. The apocalyptic climax anticipates the fears of the nuclear age which was just beginning at the time of writing. The Asian invasion reiterates an old and ongoing fear, one which was expressed in literature as early as the 1880s and 90s in such titles as White or Yellow (William Lane, 1888) and The Yellow Wave: A Romance of the Asiatic Invasion of

* The people who lived in the twentieth century Knarf calls 'the Australians' or 'Second People'. The aborigines whom they disinherit were the First. Those who occupy the land in the twenty-fourth century are smaller, of oriental appearance, and speak a different language.
Australia (Kenneth Mackay, 1895); \(^1\) kept alive by *The Bulletin*; \(^2\) and revitalised by the second World War threat from the Japanese. Thirdly, there is a correlation with other novels in which the establishment of a new order occurs after a clean sweep of the old. William Morris' new society in *News From Nowhere* begins 'on the Morrow of the Revolution'; and in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, the World State comes into being after a cataclysmic 'nine years war'. *Tomorrow* has some affinity with both of these works. In its pastoral setting and unpolluted beauty, the Tenth Commune, home of the characters in the frame novel, is reminiscent of *News From Nowhere*. However, descriptions of such places as The Centre, the various Bureaus, and the Director of Vocations; and details of a life where people are graded and regimented, change the mood to one of warning, such as may be found in *Brave New World*.

The ideal society cannot be established without cost, and the author's doubts that a different type of system could be the panacea to humanity's ills is evident. The novel's anti-materialism and its brief that quality of life is founded in the natural order, not the manufactured and artificial, are two further points that *Tomorrow* has in common with the utopian/dystopian works of Morris and Huxley. Morris's fear that the industrial revolution would vitiate life in Britain led him to locate his ideal society of the


future in a romanticised vision of the past; and the 'spend, not mend' edict that Huxley targets in his satire is echoed in *Tomorrow* when Knarf recalls that the Australians of the twentieth century 'strove enormously for the thing they called profit.' Because of this:

...their houses were choked with useless objects and meaningless ornament, their shops with wasteful luxuries. Yet men were hungry. There was always too much and too little, never enough. (p.11)

At the time of writing *Tomorrow*, Barnard was reading Huxley's *Ends and Means* and the influence of this work can be seen in the novel. She was seeking non-violent answers to the problems of capitalism. She had been wont to think of herself as a 'nineteenth century liberal', but in the crisis year of 1941 Barnard tells how she found this comfortable philosophy inadequate:

I read and pondered and could find nothing between Christian pacifism and communism that offered me the intellectual support I needed to face the ominous future. To be eclectic in a vacuum was no help at all.2

Barnard's need to work through her anxieties resulted in a novel that is, in its intellectual scope, a large novel in the way that *Such is Life* is a large novel. Sprung from a well-read mind, one charged, as Joseph Furphy's was, with moral indignation, in this case, was added the impetus of a need to understand the reasons behind society's predicaments, to find possible explanations. In later years Barnard was to say:


2. Barnard, 'How 'Tomorrow and Tomorrow Came to be Written'.
It was a sincere book, the one I cared about most ... It wasn't communication that concerned me. You want to say something because you want to say it; you don't necessarily want to say it to someone. It's between you and it.¹

However, we should weigh these words against the author's earlier statement, regarding her urge to state the problem creatively, in a novel.² A novel implies readers, and such readers would be closer to Barnard's own intellectual sphere than would the recipients of the ideological pamphlets she wrote for the Peace Pledge Union.

Tomorrow deals with themes of justice, and agonises over the destiny of mankind and of Everyman (and woman), inescapably a part of that destiny, but alone in his/her personal state. It portrays the fragmentation of the individual lives that are inevitably caught up in a society's disintegration. It goes so far as to demonstrate that every kind of calamity is possible in a world without any direction but the pursuit of material gain. Tomorrow remains startlingly relevant despite Barnard's claim in later years that '(her) approach to (her) times was emotional and imaginative.'³ In this generative state of mind the author proposes a scenario for Australia's distant future, and from this standpoint has her narrator relate the history of her times out of the accumulated wisdom of four centuries.

3. Barnard, 'How'Tomorrow and Tomorrow' Came to be Written'.

* See quotation, p.90 above.
**Tomorrow** is about two stages in Man's evolution as he constantly aspires towards happiness, individually and collectively. Here, Barnard anticipates the words of Aldous Huxley, which we find in a new foreword added to the 1946 edition of *Brave New World*, where he writes of the 'conscious and intelligent pursuit of Man’s Final End.' At this stage of his career Huxley is more optimistic than he was when he wrote the novel. He states that he would now offer the savage a third alternative: 'between the utopian and primitive horns of his dilemma would lie the possibility of sanity.' Huxley envisages a cooperative society, 'a kind a Higher Utilitarianism' where each thought and action would be determined by its effect on humanity in total. Barnard's novel was written before Huxley put down this idea, yet the thrust of *Tomorrow* lies in a similar direction. The many philosophical asides in both sections of *Tomorrow* show that the question of 'Man's Final End' also teased the mind of this author, and the movement of the narrative, always towards a future which transcends the mistakes of the past, is what gives the work its title.¹ The twenty-four hour span of the frame novel moves from one dawn to the next. The symbolic use of dawn, the new beginning, the birth of tomorrow, reveals how the structure of the text is carefully planned to maximise the overriding theme.

1. The words 'tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow' first appear in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, 5.v, and then in *Brave New World* (circa p.115). A reading of the two passages shows that, while Huxley may have been inspired by Shakespeare, Barnard took her inspiration from Huxley.
In relating the genesis of Knarf's book, the author devises one of the many intermediums which hold the two sections of the narrative together. Seven years previously Ord had invited Knarf to accompany him to the city built one the site where Sydney once stood. Ord, an archaeologist, had recently seen unearthed a statue from the frieze of the old Anzac memorial. The statue - called The Brooding Anzac - fires Knarf's imagination:

He was at once irrationally convinced that this stone figure had survived holocaust and time, not by chance, but because of some inherent quality in itself. The stone was charged with life. Just as its substance was harder and more enduring than the flesh of man whose likeness it held, so too the spirit that had been in him, dogged, enduring, obstinate, unfailing, was transmitted unchanged into stone. ... This was the thing itself, the surviving principle of man, grasped by the sculptor and set down in stone. ... This brooding, unheroic figure was immortal man. Knarf had one of those moments when his mind made what seemed to him a direct contact with reality. (p.15)

The humanist orientation of this passage can be traced back to Protagoras's third century B.C. statement, 'Of all things the measure is man'. Unequivocally, the importance of the unimportant man (and woman) is absolute if humanity is to endure. He is 'the things that are and things that are not', as Protagoras asserts. Great men rest on the shoulders of many lesser men. If they succumb, if the spirit buckles, the great ones fall. This is the wisdom that webs together the many facets of Tomorrow. It is what the Anzac statue means to Knarf, four centuries into the future. Knarf recreates 'the brooding unheroic figure' in the character of Harry Munster, making him the personification of all the unearthed statue stands for.
At the time the statue was erected the Anzac stood, in the eyes of Australian officialdom (and most of the public), for all that was brave and fine in Australian manhood. From the pacifist point of view, the statue stands for the expendable 'little' man who was readily sacrificed on the altar of imperialist wars, one who did not know he was being sacrificed by those in power. On Anzac Day, 1935, Harry Munster, unemployed, watches the march through the city. All that the Anzac story stands for, past and present, revolves through his mind. Like many hundreds of returned servicemen he is proud of his war service and, in retrospect, thinks fondly of army life. The emotions which the ceremony generates in the crowd, as the bereft assure themselves for another year that sacrifice is a noble and uplifting experience, Harry finds contagious. Barnard's view of blind patriotism recalls certain lines from Mary Gilmore's poem, 'The Woman of Five Fields' ("I loved my sons' she said 'yet heart elate,/I gave them all to the land"). What Gilmore and Barnard give us is the other side of war which shows, not the glory, but the futility and shocking waste of a country's chief resource, its youth.

Later, in the Domain, Harry hears an alternative view of war from a man named Bowmaker, better known as Bowie, spokesman for the Peace Party which advocates a solution of the world's problems by non-violent means. Bowie speaks

1. See Mary Gilmore, The Passionate Heart and other poems, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, Sirius Paperbacks, 1979, p.85.
for Marjorie Barnard, a pacifist and member of the Peace Pledge Union during the war years. Bowie's view of war, its causes and results, shocks Harry and disturbs him. Previously, during a spell of relief work Harry had been instructed in the tenets of trade unionism. Having been, prior to the Depression, a struggling poultry farmer, his eyes were opened when the Depression was placed in the context of Power, Monopoly and the Class Struggle. Now, because of Bowie, one of his remaining props, his pride in his war service, is undermined. He had been told by the papers, by the churches and by public opinion that it was a just and holy war; now he faces the fact that he was wrong to fight; this marks a further step in the dismantling of Harry's self-esteem.

In Australia at that time unemployed diggers, as depicted by Harry in *Tomorrow*, were placed in an awkward position by those in power. Richard White tells us:

...conservatives were depicting communists, and radicals generally, as foreign, subversive and unAustralian, contrasting their stereotype of the scruffy, fanatical ... bomb-throwing 'Bolshie' with the right-thinking Anzac hero.\(^1\)

This, says White, 'effectively divided the working class into the deserving (the loyal returning heroes) and the undeserving (the bulk of the working class, including many ex-servicemen, who rejected the empty gesture of putting the digger on a pedestal).'\(^2\) But, through all Harry's confused suffering, 'he could still say, no matter what he lacked, "I'm no Red"'(107).


2. ibid.
The same day Harry meets Olaf Ramsay, philanthropist, who finds him a job driving a delivery truck. When his nerves fail him in traffic, Olaf gives Harry a position as lift-driver in one of his stores. From then Harry's life plateaus. Stagnation and boredom, and a sterile marriage are relieved by a liaison with one of the shop girls. Gwen Leslie, like Harry, is just human flotsam. The store becomes a microcosm for the changes the war brings to Sydney; the reader sees them through Harry's eyes as he stands at the door of his lift. Here, Knarf (or Barnard) ends Harry's story, except to mention that he is killed by a bomb on his way to Gwen's apartment. Harry's function in the larger work is to represent the relationship between the 'little' man and his social system.* He can also be seen as the hub of a wheel to which all the characters who people the inner novel are directly, or indirectly connected.

Harry's daughter, Ruth Munster, is friendly with taxi-driver, Sid Warren, a communist, (which allows scope for more discussions, more proposed solutions). There is Olaf Ramsay, who, in his dying delirium, confronts God and demands answers, to no avail.** There is Paula Ramsay, working with Bowie and the Professor to denounce the folly of war, while Sid and his friends ignore the war and plan

* This chapter refers to Harry as his character functions in the formal concerns of the novel. His existential view of life is analysed further in the following chapter.

** The segment in which the philanthropist confronts God, who progressively resembles, H.G.Wells, Bernard Shaw, and Winston Churchill with a Hitler moustache, is one of (continued..)
the revolution.

As presented to the reader, Harry is a veteran of World War I, a victim of the Depression, an impotent observer of World War II and, finally, a casualty of the invasion of Sydney. From the point of view of Harry's inner life, the reader shares his tribulations. In the frame novel, on the other hand, Harry is viewed through the clinical eye of Ord, as a subject for analysis:

This man, Harry Munster, he's the eternal *homo tragicus*, man caught in a trap and knowing it, futile awareness, false dawn of rebellion. There must be many like that before there can be any action, inevitable wastage. The straw that shows how the tide flows has no influence on the tide. Little Man, Everyman, dust in history. Dust like stars, stars like dust. He does not matter, but if he does not matter, nothing matters. (p.81)

Again we find the powerful sense of history that, for Knarf, emanated from the Anzac statue; and in these words, too, 'the surviving principle of man' is paramount. The title 'Everyman' is not bestowed on Harry loosely. Like the original Everyman in the early sixteenth century Morality Play, Harry, on his journey to rendezvous with Death, has been deserted by Fellowship, Kindred (he is retrenched by his brother-in-law); Worldly Goods; and Beauty. He is assisted by the Good Deeds of Olaf Ramsay and Gwen Leslie.

from previous page:--

the highlights of the novel. So, too, is the episode in which Archie Castles, R.A.A.F., steals an airforce plane to fly himself home from England because Australia is in danger; but there is no room in this thesis to discuss them fully. Barnard may be touching on the subject of Divine determinism in the one, and on the question of Australia's place in the European war in the other, but the tragi-comic detailing 'lifts' these sections of the novel out of realism into the realm of pure imaginative fiction.
If the inner novel were all there is of *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* (as it is from Knarf's and Ord's standpoint; it even has its own title, *Little World Left Behind*), and if that were the work being interpreted here, we would have to explore the existential, rather than the socio/philosophic aspects of Harry's life that Knarf highlights in his conversations with Ord. The character of Harry Munster has two functions for the real author, however. He is the pivot around which she builds her other characters who, in turn, furnish the opportunity for the kinds of dialectic that she needed in order to explore the contingencies of her world; to help her understand what was happening. It was a time 'when there were still few Australian historians and almost no political scientists or sociologists, and when newspaper comment was of an abysmal quality.'¹ Barnard was already an established fiction writer; the challenge lay in incorporating her social analysis, her moral and intellectual rejection of capitalist principles into her art.

Harry's second function, and the primary one in an artistic sense, was to be the central character in a fictional work which details one man's disillusion, unhappiness and frustrations, and, finally, his acceptance of his lot in life. Had Barnard been satisfied to produce the inner novel alone, it would have been a creditable work in its own right; although one which, no doubt, would have been placed in the 'social realist' pigeon-hole with

¹ Geoffrey Serle, *From Deserts...*, p.123.
those of her contemporaries. However, Barnard's modernist sensibility and her learning gave her the mental facilities to say the things she wanted to say regarding her society within a markedly more complex novel. One of these factors was an acute sense of history, a result of her academic background in the discipline. The original critical reviews of *Tomorrow* centred around its prognosis for the future and paid no attention to the novel's artistic merit.¹

---

The historical imagination that we have located in *Tomorrow and Tomorrow* also permeates Eleanor Dark's novel, *The Little Company*. Where Marjorie Barnard writes of 'man's successive skins', Dark portrays an image of humanity as a chain of generations, each repeating the mistakes of the one before. Set in Sydney in World War II, *The Little Company* seeks, through the various points of view of members of the ostensibly conservative Massey family, to explain the 'real' causes behind the global war in which the country is embroiled, as opposed to those put forward by the wartime propaganda machine.

Contemporary events weigh heavily on the mind of the central character, Gilbert Massey, an author, who is suffering from creative paralysis, a condition which aggravates, and is exacerbated by his domestic problems. Gilbert's relationship with his family forms a plot within

---


which the major theme can be posited. It is that artists have a place, even a duty, in a troubled world, but creativity cannot flourish in a world bent on its own destruction:

Why write about it? Generation after generation, he thought angrily, century after century, we reproduce endlessly the same old drama and the same old leading actors. It's as if the plot had been worked out at the beginning of time, and performed with minor variations ever since; as if the same old programme that announced the cast of characters B.C., still serves, two thousand years later. Human History, a comedy-drama in five million acts! Characters in order of their appearance - the Inert Onlooker, the Reactionary, the Revolutionary Idealist. (p.289)

We have met Gilbert's perennial characters in *Tomorrow*, and they appear in several of the other novels listed in this dissertation. Through their stated convictions the author can institute a philosophical and/or ideological dialogue with his/her readers. It is part of the value of these novels, and, paradoxically, one of the reasons for their neglect by the establishment. For some, characterisation is lost to view in the social commentary it contains.

However, before the idealist and the revolutionary can be given a voice in *Company*, the spirit of impotence - similar to that found in T.S.Eliot's *The Hollow Men* - must be overcome. Bradbury and McFarlane's view that 'the modernist writer is not simply the artist set free, but the artist under specific, apparently historical strain,' is worth reiterating.¹ It is on record that such a strain

afflicted Eleanor Dark, and brought with it a stasis which becomes manifest in the novel as the source of Gilbert's frustration.\textsuperscript{1} The foregrounded writer's block, and the domestic stresses of the family are a platform devised by the author from which she can focus on the inner lives of several characters as they seek to apprehend their own situations and that of the wider world in the throes of war.

'The characterisation echoes the attitude of fumbling despair,' notes A. Grove Day, in his critique of this novel.\textsuperscript{2} Dark's personal concern with the larger issues, which both inhibits and propels her desire to write, is reproduced here in her fictional author, who finds:

Characters and "situations" which he would once have regarded as mere fictional material could no longer be regarded as such when they had become manifestations of a social disorder. Somewhere behind the description of a collapsing business, a society hostess, a broken marriage, a tubercular child, a swagman waltzing Matilda along the outback roads, he recognised a common truth which must be captured and expressed.\textsuperscript{3}

In this passage Dark reveals the essence of authorial involvement in these Depression novels. They were involved, both as writers and as human beings, and the resulting tension presents a challenge for readers and literary critics.

A. Grove Day finds that 'the main interest of The Little Company lies in its relation to the development of its author, and in its contribution to her comments on the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1} Jean Devanny, \textit{Bird of Paradise}, p.252.
  \item \textsuperscript{2} A. Grove Day, \textit{Eleanor Dark}, p.120.
\end{itemize}
art and craft of authorship; and it is true that the novel contains a cameo description, which expresses great emotive power, of the pains of a writer who is unable to write (161). However, there is more to Dark's novel than this. A closer reading reveals that its importance goes beyond the Dark canon wherein Day makes his comparisons. Its use of modernist writing techniques gives it a place in any discussion of the development of Australian writing and, furthermore, its central concerns are disconcertingly relevant today. 'After years out of print and out of fashion, things have swung around,' writes Drusilla Modjeska in an introduction to the new Virago edition: 'Now (Dark's) past fits our present.'

The modernist bent of *The Little Company* went unrecognised at the time of its release. A.Grove Day's chapter on the novel contains four excerpts from American reviews (mostly favourable), and one from the Red Page of the Sydney Bulletin (which is negative). This suggests that Dark made more impact, at that time, in the United States than in her own country, and that she was, indeed, one of Modjeska's 'Exiles at Home'. Although Day feels that 'almost all the characters (in this novel) are failures, victims of social paralysis, and hence the reader can expect little action, even of an indecisive kind,'


2. See Drusilla Modjeska's comprehensive Introduction to the Virago edition (1985), where, through historical and biographical stages, she places *The Little Company* in the context of its times and ours.

John T. Frederick of the Chicago Sun, whom Day quotes, has praised 'the true vitality of the people of Mrs Dark's book.' Frederick adds:

They are real, not with a mere superficial accuracy of detail, but in their own natures as human beings. They have been so fully matured and integrated in the writer's mind that they become not really like people you know - the distinction is important - but people you do know in their own right, as are the characters of all really good fiction.1

But believable as the characters are, this is not a character study in the usual sense of being a study of the human psyche. While character consciousness is Dark's mode of expression, it is used chiefly for the dissemination of ideas. She allows her major characters much introspection as they try to make their adult lives fit into minds moulded (for good or ill) in their childhood, but the introspection is utilised less for their self development than it could be. Instead, all cogitations, even personal ones, are considered in relation to the world at large.

Gilbert has been unable to write since his last novel four years previously, a condition he blames variously on the world situation and on his own failures in personal relationships. The 'immobility of the creative mind' is a symptom of 'a crumbling civilisation', and Gilbert sees 'the multiplication of his own failure all over the world' as 'no small and unimportant matter'(15). Much later, following a less than satisfactory love affair and the death of a wayward daughter, when his wife becomes suicidal on learning of his infidelity, he sees the problems in

his personal relationships as 'not so much failures in living' as 'the ingredients of failure' in himself as a writer(281). Thus, we see how the separate aspects of a human life are, for a writer, inseparable.

The Little Company is a depressing novel because its emphasis on humanity as a whole is allowed to outweigh its concern for the existence of the individual, unlike Tomorrow which exhibits similar preoccupations, but not at the expense of character development. That is to say, Dark's characters in this novel are relatively static. The awakened awareness of the larger issues in Gilbert, his sister Marty and his brother Nick does not cause them to grow in a personal way. Their unusual perception is the key issue here. Dark writes with seeming disgust of the 'millions of human minds huddling like sheep waiting to be told which way to go'(142). Very few are able to really see through the propaganda of the establishment, and those who do are seen as radical, or worse, as Reds, by the 'good and decent' citizens who do what is expected of them, as we have noted earlier in reference to other novels in this study.

A predominant theme in The Little Company is Dark's censure of the unthinking masses. It is not that people, en masse or individually, are bad. The world is in a parlous state simply because people are not taught to think. Dark uses Marty, as well as Gilbert, to get her message across to her readers, leaving us in no doubt that this is meant to be a didactic novel. Marty sums it all up in her mind:
Pleasant people, kindly people, tending their gardens, caring conscientiously for their children, going soberly to and fro between home and office, playing golf on Sundays, giving each other tea-parties, bridge-parties - organising bazaars for charity - undoubtedly pleasant people. Going to concerts, subscribing to lending libraries, visiting art shows. People honestly, yes, quite honestly - looking for culture and feeling about for enlargement of their minds. ... She knew they believed that the books they brought home from their libraries, the symphonies to which they listened, the pictures they stared at, would, without effort to themselves, make them all that they desired to be. ... Let us "do", they said; let us "go", let us "make", let us "look", "listen", "read". But let us "think"? Oh, no; oh, dear me, no! For who knows where thinking, once begun, will end? May it not sweep you out of your pleasant life into one hard and unfamiliar? ... May it not suggest, and finally prove (as it had proved to herself and her brothers) that you had won your own serenity at the cost of someone else's? (p.97-98)

It is easy to imagine that the description of the discomfort brought about by full awareness of the issues (which Dark could not have avoided given her background) is the reflection of personal experience. Therefore, the characters are divided up into those who think and those who don't, and even Nick is suspect. An overt communist, he is accused by Marty of being like a gramophone record, because all his utterances have been filtered through Marxist dogma.

A brief description of the plot is necessary, here, if only to demonstrate that plot was not Dark's first consideration in this work. As in Barnard's novel, a chronological sequence was inappropriate to her investigation of contemporary issues while an historical underpinning was essential. So, where Barnard works from an imaginary future, Dark, in Company, makes the past the explanation for the incidents and the psychological

* See p.117, below.
conditions of her characters' present, as well as for their views of the world.

The *Little Company* opens with a family gathering which follows the funeral of the parsimonious and puritanical Walter Massey, a father who has left bitter memories with his children, as well as with his sister, Beatrice. But the most lasting and damaging impression has been on Phyllis, the daughter of his housekeeper (later to become Gilbert's wife), for impressionable Phyllis carries his narrow view of goodness into her marriage and parenthood. Underlying everything in this novel is Dark's belief that the ally of social evils is the unquestioning, unenlightened mind of the ordinary person. The sad irony which attended the young Masseys' life with their father is revealed by the pictures which hung on the living-room wall, pictures which depict innocence, gaity and plenty. Years later Gilbert notices them with intense disgust for the false picture they present of life:

Remembering how far from gay his own youth had been, he felt suddenly bitter towards a parent who could enshrine this synthetic frolicking on walls within which his own children's exuberance was so unmercifully subdued. (p.122)

However, as children, Gilbert and Marty were exposed to the enlightened thinking of their neighbour, Scott Laughlin, whose disapproval of their father as a pious hypocrite (because he is the uncaring landlord of a row of slum houses) was matched by Walter Massey's disdain of him. Nevertheless, by their friendship with Laughlin and his daughter, Janet, Gilbert and Marty are able to learn much about the wider world from which they have been shielded.
Laughlin's tuition of them includes creative writing, a passion which they carry into adulthood.

In the chronology of the novel Scott Laughlin belongs in the past, and readers know him only through Gilbert's reminiscences and later conversations between Gilbert and Elsa Kay. Nevertheless, he is pivotal to the plot and, finally, responsible for Gilbert's salvation. Laughlin is a radical journalist, a left-liberal intellectual. His influence has stayed with Gilbert throughout his life, but, in a strange twist, Scott Laughlin has also made a lasting impression on Elsa's life, although she never met him. Throughout her childhood Elsa is filled with nostalgic stories of Scott, the husband her mother had deserted to marry Elsa's father; and of Janet, her half-sister, who died before she was born. She grows up feeling inferior to Janet and obsessed with the personality of her mother's first husband. So, in a cleverly devised strategem, Dark causes a personality long dead to come to the aid of her characters in their present predicament, through his existence in their memory.

Gilbert meets Elsa for the first time at the Writer's Guild. The brief affair which follows inevitably fails because of their widely different temperaments. What is important is that Elsa tells Gilbert that she plans to write a biographical novel based on the life of Scott Laughlin. Gilbert realises that not only is he much better equipped to write Laughlin's story, but that he actually has the novel half-written in the many scraps of paper accumulated in his desk drawers. In this way his writer's
drought is broken about the same time as the natural drought is broken. (A drought did actually grip New South Wales in 1942, exacerbating wartime stress, the symbolic effects of which Dark incorporates into the plot.)

Of the static characters in this novel Phyllis, whom the author takes pains to tell us is undeveloped, is, perhaps, the most interesting, if only because she is held in such contempt by her creator. Phyllis is described in words which simmer with derision, showing her to be a hopeless muddler who is blind to her own limitations in the domestic arts, but who refuses to be released from such tasks because of her strong sense of wifely duty. Drusilla Modjeska, writing from a feminist viewpoint, suggests that Dark is 'tough on Phyllis' because she allows herself to be 'domesticated like a cat', as Dark puts it in the novel. Modjeska sees Dark, in all her novels, as 'tough on women who conform, who accept the values of capitalism and patriarchy, who cannot lift themselves out of the domestic mire or fantasies of romance.' A blow for feminism may be what Dark is striking, but Marty's view of her younger brother, Nick, shows Dark is equally as hard on her male characters if they allow their minds to be influenced without question.

1. Modjeska, Introduction to The Little Company, Virago edition. On this point, there is a correlation with Tomorrow where various downtrodden women are to be found, whose existence and awareness of things is little more than that of animals. Both of these writers show their impatience with women who make domesticity their whole life, although Barnard's tone is one of compassion; and Tennant, too, describes them, but with satire. However, in their novels, the younger, single women carry the hopes of their authors, as these are portrayed as intelligent, aware and actively concerned with the issues.
The problems of existence suffered by Dark's characters are integrated with those of humanity at large. Like Gilbert and Elsa, Marty is suffering from an inspirational drought. Hers is broken when she meets yet another childhood neighbour, one who was, and still is, poor. Now the mother of a large number of young children, Sally Dodd inspires Marty to begin the novel whose theme has been going around in her mind for some time. In the encounter with Sally she finds the focus for her story about a woman whose 'little life appeared as dominated by remote political forces in which, irritably and impatiently, she proclaimed herself not a bit interested' (252). Despite the lack of character development, *The Little Company* does not lack unity. The thoughts of the writer characters all run in a similar direction, one in which the author's own thoughts were centred. That is, how to awaken the masses out of their apathy, and a concern for the place of the artist in a troubled world. Oddly, World War II which was the catalyst for this novel, is shown to be little more than an annoyance as it affects the life of Sydney, and not as discomforting as the drought. Rather it was the political reasons behind the war which propelled this work, clearly a vehicle for its author's ideas.

---

Eleanor Dark's engagement with the problems of capitalist society was evident in her earlier novel *Waterway* (1938), but at that stage of her development as a writer she did not allow her central concerns to swamp character and plot as she does in *The Little Company*. The Depression
has not been ignored in this work; there is a march through
the city by the unemployed, and the contrast between the
'haves' and 'have-nots' is illustrated in the unemployed
and bitter character of Jack Saunders. A threatening second
world war is noted when Professor Channon's newspaper
carries the headlines, 'Failure of Peace Talks'.

*Waterway* is a psychological novel of human conflict;
its ideological underpinning is anti-materialist and
conservationist. Its central theme is the conflict among
the middle classes between those who are cultured and
creative and those whose lives are dedicated to the
acquisition of money and material possessions. The daughters
of Professor Channon, himself an alternative thinker, at
odds with the University establishment from which he has
resigned, are Winifred, who is married to Arthur Sellman
and Lesley, younger and single. Both women are put in a
position where they must choose between the security of
money and position or the richness of intellectual and
cultural pursuits with a compatible partner. Thus, Dark
introduces the kind of ambiguity of life's choices that
we find in much modernist fiction.

In this novel Dark solves her formal problems by
compressing all the action into one day, which begins at
sunrise and ends at sunset. In the intervening hours all
the threads of the past lives of the characters are revealed
to the reader through access to their memory and stream
of consciousness, in a narrative strategy which may owe
something to Joyce's *Ulysses*. When we remember Dark's
intellectual background the use of such a literary form
may not be coincidental.¹ Rut, although the technique is a prominent feature of this work, and it departs from a straight chronological sequence and asks many metaphysical questions, it differs from the modernist novel in its climax and dénouement, its neat and tidy ending and in the way it disposes of the obstacles to the happiness of its favoured characters. However, these specific features may be seen in the light of 'sustaining each work with a structure appropriate only to that work,' the modernist criterion which we applied to *Tomorrow* (p.93, above).

The plot is framed between the dawn and dusk observations of Dr. Oliver Denning, a character who first appeared in an earlier Dark novel *Sun Across the Sky*. Denning has come to live at Watson's Bay with his second wife, Lois, who is a vague and impractical artist, but she is the anodyne Denning needs to heal the inner scars left by his first marriage. His outer scars, the legacy of a fire in the previous novel, do not bother him at all.* Also in the household is Lois's young daughter, Chloe Marshall, who takes upon herself the day-to-day running

1. Dark was the daughter of Labor politician, Dowell O'Reilly, who introduced the first bill for Women's Suffrage into the New South Wales Legislative Assembly. 'She grew up in an intellectual and political household', writes Modjeska in her foreword to *The Little Company.*

* As Denning is just the type of thinking, caring character required for Dark's purposes in *Waterway*, it seems reasonable that she should decide to re-use him in this way, although *Waterway* is not a sequel in the accepted sense.
of the house. During an early morning call Dr. Denning looks over Port Jackson, where he contemplates the changes which have occurred during European occupation of the area. Dark's brief reference to early settlement in Waterway was to lead, in the forties, to her best known work, the trilogy, *The Timeless Land*.

The waterway and the boats which arrive and depart on it, within view of those who reside in the area, form a significant backdrop to the human drama which is played out on its shores. In the climax the harbour becomes central to the action with the sinking of a ferry carrying a number of the characters, the details of which were based on an historical event, as Dark explains in an author's note.¹

In addition to his thoughts on such subjects as the history of Sydney and social theory, many of Oliver Denning's musings revolve around his neighbours. There is Arthur Sellman whose wife, Winifred, is friendly with her next-door neighbour, Ian Harnet, a widower with two small sons. Also in the Sellman household is their blind daughter, Brenda aged six, and Arthur's sister, Lorna Sellman, in her late twenties. Lorna would like to marry Sim Hegarty, a wealthy young man-about-town who once almost proposed to her, but who is now interested in Lesley Channon, Winifred's sister. Lesley must choose between

¹. The passenger ferry, *Greycliffe*, was rammed and sunk in Sydney Harbour on November 3, 1927, with the loss of forty lives, many of them children. In the text (p.138) there is reference to the wreck of the *Dunbar*, a sailing vessel wrecked near the Gap in 1857. When viewing the wreck, Jack Saunders has a premonition of the disaster to come.
Sim and Roger Blair, a writer and socialist who moves in the same circles, and who has a light, bantering friendship with Sim Hegarty, despite the polarity of their outlook on life. On this day it is the wedding of George Hegarty, Sim's brother, who controls the family business. Their mother is the widowed Lady Hegarty whose rags to riches marriage to the boys' father has not blinded her to life's true values. And, living in a shack down by the Cove, there is Jack Saunders, who shares his birthday with Sim Hegarty. They were boyhood playmates until, on their twelfth birthday, the difference in their backgrounds caused a rift in the relationship.

In a thesis which focuses on characterisation, it is necessary to list all of the above; necessary also to say that such a cast of characters and situations could provide all the ingredients for a pulp Romance in the hands of a writer of lesser talent. That the novel does not descend to this level is testimony to Dark's understanding of human emotions and her sense of the fitness of things. Her sense of fitness does not allow the unhappiness that Winifred suffers as a result of her intolerably incompatible relationship with her husband to continue indefinitely, even if she cannot so easily reconcile the two sides of society they represent. Arthur is shown to be a chauvinist and a philistine, who represents the values of society in general, while Winifred upholds the non-materialist view. A business man with an eye for a sound investment, Arthur is incapable of understanding his wife's accusation that he 'isn't doing anything with
his money.'

The following dialogue demonstrates the unbridgeable gulf between the thinking of the two and symbolises the divisions in general between the two types of characters depicted in *Waterway*. The conversation occurs when Winifred tries to persuade Arthur to buy a hundred acres of timbered country whose trees she knows are threatened:

"Buy it? Good God, what would I do with a hundred acres of bush? Have some sense, Win."

"But it's the trees." She had been almost incoherent, in that impetuous way which he had liked at first ... "They're white gums - oreades - a hundred and fifty feet high. You must know the kind I mean - the straight, slender ones with trunks like silver...."

He had listened then, thinking there might conceivably be a glimmering of sense behind all this, and he had said:

"Timber eh? But what about access? And I'd have to find out what market there was for it on a big scale ..."

She had looked at him so incredulously that he had asked irritably:

"What's the matter now?"

And it had transpired that stray timber-getters were already felling the trees for pit-props, and she had wanted him to buy the land - to save them! To save a patch of trees - not even specimen trees, mind you, oaks and elms or maples or good imported trees of that kind, but just plain, ordinary gum trees. Simply to leave them standing there where perhaps twenty people might see them in a year! ... (p.19) *

When, later, Winifred asks Arthur whether it would matter if he lost money in the publishing of the poetry of an unknown writer, whose work has been rejected by the established publishing houses, the reader can recognise his perplexity because its forecasts the materialist views of today. Furthermore, Arthur's attitude to women who 'mix

* In addition, this passage reveals that Eleanor Dark's outspoken liberalism covered many facets of society, including conservation when public awareness of its desirability was almost non-existent.
(themselves) up in things outside their own sphere,' and his unfavourable comparison of Winifred with his sister, Lorna, whose days are spent shopping for clothes or at the beauty parlour, reflects Dark's incipient feminism, which was to culminate in the character of Phyllis in Company.

Winifred's affection for Ian Harnet, who works in a shipping office, is a combination of the growing rift with Arthur and a motherly desire to help with the raising of Ian's young sons, who happily include small, blind Brenda in their play. From Winifred's point of view, Arthur is obtuse in his lack of perception, whereas Ian, although no intellectual, 'had a warm and intimate appreciation of life as a whole. He could meet you, instantly, in realms which, for Arthur, existed not at all' (24). Nevertheless, Arthur has his own concept of the fitness of things and it does not include divorce. Moreover, Winifred knows that should she instigate grounds she would lose the custody of Brenda. The 'either/or' tension in every situation described in Waterway represents a modernist awareness that life is essentially paradoxical and complex.

The human conflicts on which the novel rests are brought into relief when Ian Harnet, Professor Channon and Jack Saunders all consult Oliver Denning in his morning surgery. Ian Harnet suffers from stress related neuralgia, and the doctor, aware of Ian's love for Winifred, knows it is not in his power to provide the cure. The Professor, dying of cancer, tells Denning that he needs at least six months to produce his book in which he will expound his
belief that 'nothing on earth can save mankind but the universal acceptance of a religion'(135). But it must be a universal religion in which there is no place for racism and exclusionist dogma.

"It's a theory now, in the infancy of mankind - but it will be a fact, it must be. Everything points to it. We've destroyed distance already - that's the beginning of the end of race. These insanities we're going through - these insane outbursts of racial hatred and jealousy - they're only instinctive gestures of fright from minds without vision or serenity. From minds incapable of grasping the universal religion." (p.136)

The universal religion which upholds the brotherhood of all humanity is also obvious in Kylie Tennant's view of life as depicted in her writing and of that expounded by Marjorie Barnard in Tomorrow when she mourns the wars propagated by those who profess to follow the Prince of Peace. This attitude, which underpins much of the fiction that deals with social inequality, is also to be found in the work of Henry Lawson and Joseph Furphy, and is frequently used to underpin idealist arguments for socialism, as noted in my previous chapter.

Following the Professor, Dr Denning receives a visit from Jack Saunders who has injured his hand while climbing a cliff from the Gap. Oliver Denning thinks, 'Here's a robust young giant with a sore hand that will heal up in a week or two, but the old man with the incurable cancer is the one who carries hope and inspiration with him'(137). But Jack is capable of thinking on his own account, and it is here Dark disproves Humphrey McQueen's assertion that 'she had difficulty in writing successfully of people
other than the middle classes'.

Jack's point of view is portrayed with fidelity and sympathy. He is an outsider, looking in. Because he lives among the middle-class residents of the Cove, but is not one of them, his bitterness at having no employment is sharpened by his environment. His appearance in a doctor's rooms for the first time in his life is a direct result of the resentment aroused in him by memories evoked on his joint birthday with Sim Hegarty. It has caused him to slip on a rock face he has been climbing all his life. Jack is the way life has made him. His soiled and shabby clothes cause feelings of inferiority in the clean and orderly surroundings of the doctor's surgery. As Denning takes leave of the Professor, Jack, watching them, 'felt here some freemasonry from which he knew himself debarred as from all the other good things of life.'

And Jack (or perhaps Dark, herself) wonders 'what had Sim (his boyhood playmate) done that all his life the way should have stretched before him so broad and straight and smooth? That the money he hadn't earned should clear it of obstacles, smooth it into comfort, adorn it with beauty' (58)? The mental discomfort of possessing a social conscience that Dark exhibits in The Little Company was beginning to make itself felt here, and is personified in the character of Lesley Channon.

The gap in comprehension between those who have plenty and those who want is highlighted when Lesley tells Roger

1. Humphrey McQueen, 'The Novels of Eleanor Dark'.
that she cannot really understand the problems of the unemployed who are gathering in front of Parliament House, much as she wants to, because she has never personally experienced want.¹ 'And you can't get there, because even if you were utterly destitute you'd still have - resources - in yourself...' (250). This, then, is the nucleus of the problem, and not just money or the lack of it. And this is the reverse side of the ideological argument put forward by socialists. People are not born equally equipped with inner resources, or their lives are such that they never acquire them. Some, like Arthur, may never understand the things it is necessary to understand, and will succumb to life despite all the advantages. Others, like Jack, will rise above their background through sheer abundance of the life force. The novel works on many levels and touches many genres, as does *Tomorrow*. In it, Dark has met the challenge of accommodating social criticism with the demands of the modern novel, without abnegating the writer's true subject, which is human life.

The friction between the characters in *Waterway* is Dark's way of revealing the many facets and contradictions inherent in human existence. Lesley loves Sim, but admits to herself that marriage to him would be unwise, and she scarcely needs Roger to remind her of it when he suggests that she marry him, instead. Roger has turned his back on academic life in order to spread the gospel of a free

¹. For a discussion on the qualification of a middle-class author to write about poverty, see John Hall, *The Sociology of Literature*, pp. 26-27 and passim.
and independent nation. He seeks to cure his fellow Australians of an 'emigré psychology' with the help of his publication, 'Free Voice'. Only from the point of view that this is a new country with the opportunity of a fresh start can be solved all those social problems which have their origin in the Old World. This establishes a link between Waterway and the nationalist ethos described in my first chapter.

Sim Hegarty, as a boy, had tried to share his birthday presents with Jack when he learned that Jack had received only a pocket knife. He had cried out about the unfairness of life:

But at twelve one is being, quite helplessly, moulded by one's environment. The acceptance had begun on that morning when he had first realised that there was something to accept, and by his thirteenth birthday he had become already philosophical about it. (p.71)

In this way are the young socialised into the values of their society. As an adult, though, Sim is able to debate the issues of wealth and poverty with Roger Blair without rancour. His chief worry is to make Lesley see his view point. He confides his anguish to his mother:

"She thinks I'm a useless sort of person. Worse than useless. Vicious. Because I have money. How the devil can I help it? If we shut down Hegarty's to-morrow three thousand people would be out of jobs. She can't see...." (p.159-60)

The above quotation contains the paradox of industrial capitalism; it provides work and relative security for the many, but generates wealth for the few. Dark demonstrates that truth often wears two faces, which, Janus-like, look in opposite directions. Sim is a good man; Lesley
concedes that she may well make him miserable if she marries him, when Roger points out to her that Arthur would have made a much better husband had Winifred been a conventional Society wife. In fact we find the tension of ambiguity attends most situations in Waterway.

These are the threads of the plot. Dark gathers them up in a long involved episode which features a riot in Macquarie Street, and a ferry sinking. All the characters are involved in one way or another. They are either on the ferry, or should have been on it, or are amongst those who anxiously await news of the passengers.

The segment in which the ferry is run down by the much larger Neptune and capsizes, and the chaos which follows when each member of the cast reacts according to his/her character, is an inevitable climax if the author wishes to solve all the personal problems she has enumerated. A. Grove Day reveals that several reviewers have regarded this deus ex machina as a sign of weakness on the writer's part. However, this dissertation sees the episode as a revelation of character in extremis. This modernist novel (nine tenths of which occurs in the minds of the characters) does not suffer for the inclusion of the earlier technique of climax and dénouement. It is written in such a way that the psychological aspects of the crisis, the thoughts of the drowning and the saved, predominate over their physical actions and, therefore, the unities of purpose and elucidation, which are notable features of Dark's writing, are preserved.

Drowned are Professor Channing, Lady Hegarty and Arthur Sellman. Arthur manages to escape the water-filled cabin by using the Professor, himself struggling to escape, as a springboard. However, once in the water he suffers a fractured skull when hit by a piece of debris. Ironically, he is held aloft by Jack, whose injured arm is useless, and taken aboard a launch, but dies later in the ambulance. The Harnet boys manage to save Brenda and themselves. The agony of suspense suffered by Winifred and Ian before they know the children are safe, and by Dr. Denning who thinks Lois is on the ferry, is evoked with a masterly control of language which draws the reader into the narrative, similarly afflicted.

On the ferry, before the collision, Professor Channon is composing his book in his mind, thinking about man and religion:

It seemed, the Professor reflected, a strange perversity. A strange refusal to see that by his own first awed recognition of divinity within himself he made the first step toward worship. And that, fearing the inexplicable power which governed him, he made the second false and fatal step of conceiving it as apart from himself, so that instead of standing erect in confidence he began to bow down in humiliation, to cry: "Mea Culpa!" and "I am a miserable sinner!" and other ridiculous things. From there, like a man led astray by an incorrect compass bearing, his spiritual progress had diverged farther and farther from its straight and simple path, leading him on fruitless quests for a peace which he had driven out of his own heart. (p.291)

There is a correlation between this passage and Barnard's Ultima Thüle metaphor (p.170 below). Dark, too, demonstrates that mankind's spiritual needs transcend anything promised by the ideologues.
Dark is represented in Waterway by Lesley, a writer who cannot give herself up wholly to a fiction because she is 'tormented by the ruthlessness of her intellect which would not allow her to divorce her personal problems from the vast, the bewildering, the menacing problems of humanity, with which they seemed so alarmingly entangled'(189). This tends to reinforce the thesis that these novels represent an artistic talent that is being invaded by external contingencies. Nonetheless, in Waterway, Dark does not allow her world view to overshadow her role as fiction writer as she does in The Little Company, although there is evidence in Waterway that this is the direction in which she was headed. Lesley 'was astonished and angry and alarmed when she became convinced at last that the world was not run by people of integrity - not even, for the most part, by people of intelligence' (192). But, like Barnard, Dark's way of acknowledging the awesome complexity of human affairs is to refrain from positing any simple solutions; and so it is with Kylie Tennant.

-0-

The modernist, and for Kylie Tennant, existentialist, preoccupation with personal alienation is explored in Ride On Stranger. The thematic presence of a search and the restless movement of a major character that informs much of Tennant's oeuvre is reproduced here. But, although the title of this work invites comparison with Camus's L'étranger, Shannon Hicks is not the withdrawn introvert that Meursault becomes in the Camus novel. Alienation in a Tennant novel does not mean disillusionment so much as
having no illusions to begin with, and being blest - or cursed - with the ability to take an alternative view of society. Shannon is an outsider who feels her difference from the people in the country town where she grows up. Subsequently, she finds the problem follows her when she moves to the city. That Tennant intended to create a Neitzschean character is indicated by the fact that Shannon's first foray into reading, when she moves to town and her aunt's boarding house, is Thus Spake Zarathustra.

Here, she finds a kindred spirit in one of the boarders, a chemist named John Terril. Before he leaves to begin his experimental farm he opens several mental doors for Shannon, illuminating much of what had previously been merely intuitive. Here, too, begins her friendship with Beryl, a fellow seeker but in a different way. Beryl is kind but flighty and shallow, and she always keeps an eye open for the main chance. The character of Beryl provides a foil against which Shannon's disimilarity from the usual run of working girls is highlighted.

Throughout the Tennant canon there is always at least one character whose life is overshadowed by an instinctive knowledge that beneath the well-worn paths of social respectability there is often something not quite right or not as it would seem. This aspect of her work appears to be coloured by Tennant's own consciousness. Shannon Hicks is thought by at least one critic to be the character most representative of Tennant's own view of life.¹

The thing that drives Shannon, the 'stranger' of the novel's title, is not so different from that which propels the unschooled and unread central characters in *The Battlers*. Although she is an avid reader and thinker, a questioner of the status quo from her school days, like Snow Grimshaw and Dancy Smith, her search is motivated by a feeling of not belonging with the people and places among which life has thrust her. She tries to explain this to Beryl, 'I don't fit in here... What I aim to do is just go on and on until I find some place where I do fit' (57). In these words lies not only the explanation of the title but the essential theme of the novel.

The dislocation of the characters that is so much a feature of Tennant's work is representative of the mental and spiritual search in which they are engaged.\(^1\) Dorothy Auchterlonie (Green) missed the point when she stated in 1953 that 'the characters in a Tennant novel are always on the move - coming or going, but chiefly going - for no apparent reason and to nowhere in particular.'\(^2\) Parallels can be drawn with earlier Australian fiction. There is the physical correlation of being on the move (and sometimes in Tennant's ambit of the 30s, of humping the swag), and both Henry Lawson and Joseph Furphy portray situations where there is someone who not only travels about the country as he works, but thinks and philosophises about life as he goes. Such a character is an observer who is able to stand apart mentally while mixing and conversing.

2. Auchterlonie, *'The Novels of Kylie Tennant'*, (395).
with his companions, a person whose perception of life is greater than that of most people they meet along the way. In *Such is Life* we find Tom Collins, and then there is Mitchell in Lawson's *While the Billy Boils*. While Mitchell does not have the advantage that Collins has of being able to draw his analogies from the classics, his homespun wisdom, like that of Tennant's 'Battlers', carries its own conviction. Such an outsider is Shannon Hicks, albeit a youthful one who travels with more questions than answers.

Shannon was born into a community and a family whose members, more specifically the womenfolk, were of the type of poor, prevalent from Victorian times to World War II, for whom to be seen to be respectable was everything. Together with attendance at church on Sundays, respectability demanded a spotless house, good manners, and the avoidance of bad language. Such stringent standards, with their attendant narrowness of mind, provided just the right conditions for small communities to become hotbeds of gossip. For what better policeman could be found than fear of what the neighbours would say? Small-town gossip appears to have been a particular irritant for Tennant because it provides material for her pen in several of her novels, *Tiburon*, in particular.

Masculine attitudes, as well as the narrow focus of the women's lives, serve to unsettle Shannon. Her rebellion is fuelled by the schoolmaster's scathing reply to her professed interest in becoming a lawyer;
"Well, what kind of lawyer were you going to be? There! You didn't even know there were different kinds of lawyers did you? You see, it is much better for little girls like you to realize as soon as possible that they mustn't try to do things that are meant for boys. I hope you realize that?"

Through Shannon Tennant questions the, then, rarely challenged male assumptions of women's role, just as Dark does in her novels. But her feminism is more subtle than Dark's scornful tilt at domesticity; pettiness and malicious gossip are the only housewifely sins to turn her pen to the sharp side. Feminists are targets for satire, personified in this novel in the character of Janet Bubbing, and in Battlers by Dora Phipps.

Tennant reveals her appreciation of male idiosyncrasies in wry accounts of the ironies inherent in their complaints. For example, on hearing that his wife is pregnant for the fourth time (and all daughters), Mr Darcy Hicks feels that 'there was something abominably unjust' in the way things have turned out. '[(Y)ou've got to admit a man's got a right to feel fed up,' is how he receives the news of Shannon's pending arrival (p.1). His rage evokes a similar response from his wife. 'If (a woman) isn't struck down each month, she's worried because she isn't.' This is feminine realism at its most fundamental. However, this author does not dwell in the realm of realism, despite that assertion by many of her critics. Her gift of linguistic expression lifts her novels beyond mundane description. The dialogue quoted above is a fine example of humour masking the serious business of life. At other times the poet and philosopher in the author are clearly visible:
So many find life a slender chance; and for the fourth daughter of Mr and Mrs Hicks the scales remained trembling a long time in the balance, weighed with a scruple and a doubt, hovering on a hair-breadth of rage. (P.1)

Shannon's parents' fleeting consideration of the possibility of aborting the impending problem gives added force to the existential thrust of the opening words of the novel, 'To be born is to be lucky'. Her versatility is further displayed in metaphors and similes that are highly imaginative and startlingly original, as when she describes Granny Hicks as someone who 'had become a kind of emotional tape-worm hanging cosily in the midgut of other people's affairs and digesting any entertainment therefrom' (11).

Tennant's preoccupation in each of her works with the riddles of existence reminds us again of Joseph Hillis Miller's assertion that in creating a subsequence of characters and situations the author is creating him/herself, making sense of his/her own existence, and a perusal of Tennant's autobiography (The Missing Heir) suggests that Miller's words may well be true in this case. According to Margaret Dick, Tennant 'deliberately avoided self-analysis ... the subjective to her was suspect, consciousness a gift that should be directed outward.' From her subjective experience grew a conviction that all individual lives strive to overcome a certain element of chaos, and this perhaps explains why her considerable gift for satire is tempered by a great love and pity born

1. Miller, Charles Dickens, Introduction.
2. Dick, The Novels, p.11.
of understanding and tolerance of human frailties. It is
the reason for the preponderance in her novels of vagabonds,
failures and social misfits.

However, Tennant's compassionate view of humanity
does not blind her to its weaknesses. In her novels many
of the activities and organisations in which people become
involved are a kind of windbreak where they shelter from
life, or else they are a substitute for a dull existence.
**Ride on Stranger** is the novel where this phenomenon is
widely explored. While Shannon Hicks is searching for her
true niche in the world she meets and interacts with a
host of characters who are frantically busy devoting
themselves to various causes which inevitably come to be
seen by Shannon for what they are. **Stranger** is peopled
with a wide assortment of types who endeavour to survive,
each according to his/her particular leaning, many of them
the subject of Tennant's satiric pen.

Where the poor and struggling are concerned Tennant
chaffs them gently, but with a brilliant play on words:

> Clive was nominally attached as sub-editor to
> a magazine devoted to the doctrine of fresh air
> and vegetable foods which came out in a chaste
> green cover under the title of Foliage. It was
> full of airy poems and green buds of prose by
> unknown but aspiring vegetarians and was always
> on the point of withering away completely ...
> and like everything else at Balm Point it was
> a protest, this time a protest against the
> poisoning of the human system with animal foods.
> Its editors and contributors always had a lean
> and hungry look. (p. 98)

However, when describing society's priorities her satire
is biting. One of the strange organisations in which Shannon
finds herself employed is the Order of Human Brotherhood.
The ludicrous appellation is typical of Tennant's style. Public opinion of the dress of members of the order borders on ridicule. Nevertheless:

... it was known that the Abbey had "money behind it", and anything connected with money cannot be altogether mad. The Order of Human Brotherhood went its mystic way in the knowledge that there is safety in numbers, particularly when the numbers are in a bank book. (p. 105)

Here is the perennial reminder, found particularly in fiction of the Depression era, that those with money are accorded public respect and those without are seen as failures on a personal and social level. In any age those who do not conform are forgiven much if their eccentricity is clothed in material success, a wisdom we have already located in Waterway.

Ride on Stranger is peopled with characters who do not conform and this, one feels, is applauded by Tennant who was something of a non-conformist herself.¹ It explains why Shannon is attracted to such people and caught up in their enthusiasms for a while, only to weary of them and suffer a sense of futility from which she is compelled to escape and move on once more:

...I want to get out and do something worthwhile. I've only one life..."
"That I don't believe." (from the Abbot)
"Well, suppose we say I've only this life to play with at the moment. why should I waste it doing things that seem meaningless? I want to go on until I find what I'm looking for". (p. 151)

Tennant uses Shannon's search to highlight such phenomena as alternative lifestyles, personality cult radio programmes, religion, politics and feminism, to the purpose

1. Tennant's alternative view of life dates from her childhood, which she describes in her autobiography, The Missing Heir.
of pointing to the need of human beings for a bulwark against existential aloneness. As well, she uses these topics as scaffolding for the plot, which must accommodate the novel's title. Other organisations Shannon comes into contact with, as she continues her metaphorical 'ride' through life, are the Free Our Natives League, and the International Peace Lovers (who refuse to have their meeting addressed by a Pacifist). Always, there is the tension of a bubbling humour hiding the follies and the essential tragedy of humanity's search for a spiritual home. In this search for something that writers have only nominated by metaphor, lies the affinity between Tennant and her more serious colleagues. By masking tragedy with humour Tennant finds her own way of expressing modern life in her art.

This is a fluent and involved work. Characters disappear from the plot only to reappear later in a different guise. One such is Bleeby Peverill whose character is never revealed. He is seen in the light of his current occupation, and we are reminded of *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, where Knarf says 'I use the same (minor) characters over and over. It saves inventing new ones'(203). So Bleeby has the function of representing many kinds of humanity; the unlikely name the author has bestowed on him indicates that we are not meant to believe in him. But Olly and Merv Leggart at the Proletarian Club are portrayed as real and as symbolic of the class struggle, which Tennants touches on but lightly in her novels.

The plot of *Ride on Stranger* is totally unbelievable, even if all the characters are not, but it is difficult
to imagine how the author could have developed her theme otherwise, and without introducing even more personages. She has been accused of peopling her novels with too many characters, as we noted earlier. However, there is something remarkable in *Stranger* inasmuch as it contains no dialogue that does not include Shannon, except at the beginning when the relatives are settling her future without her presence. Here, Tennant has managed to confound her critics by her focus on a single character. The remainder are all, in effect, knitting up the threads of their lives in a search which parallels that of the central character, though without Shannon's clear-sightness.

Shannon finds the 'something worthwhile' she was seeking at the Proletarian Club where she works long and hard until Olly's death from an illicit abortion, a loss which Shannon feels would be unnecessary, were it not for society's hypocrisy. This, and Merv Leggart's too warm regard for her, added to fatigue and a sense of futility, cause her to change course once more.

Shannon's first visit to the Proletarian Club brings the reader and critic once more to confront the fact of Tennant's skill in the use of language:

The Proletarian Club was up a noisome alley near the docks. At the corner, sailors and painted girls laughed in dark doorways. There was a smell of beer-dregs and yesterday's prawns, where a hotel sheltered a fish stall in its beneficent shadow. Behind a high wooden fence was a stone courtyard and what had once been a flourishing stable. There were still a few horses stamping and stirring in their stalls. Above the stable, up a flight of wooden steps, the Proletarian Club was preparing for its gala opening the following night.

This passage displays the mark of the impressionist. It
strikes the reader with instant and simultaneous impressions of sight and sound and smell. Metaphor and simile are dispensed with; the adjectives, with the possible exception of 'beneficent', are essential and to the point although the poet in Tennant breaks through in the alliterative 'stamping and stirring in their stalls'. The passage is appropriate to its moment in the plot, for Shannon and Clive are passing quickly through this scene on their way to the Club and would register no more than a quick impression. However, the author lingers long enough to capture the atmosphere of early Sydney for her reader, as well as conveying the poverty of the Club's environment.

After her time at the Proletarian Club, Shannon is commandeered by Southwell Vaughan Quilter, erstwhile Abbot of the Order of Human Brotherhood, about to change course himself, who pulls her into the arena of Federal politics. Vaughan Quilter is a character of our times, one whose changes of endeavour are propelled by nothing more than opportunism. One of his functions in the novel is that the author uses him as a caveat regarding the power of personal magnetism, and handsomeness in dress and looks, a combination to which even the level-headed Shannon succumbs.

A pending election, which leads to the episode in which Shannon visits Canberra, allows Tennant to present her view of politicians, which she does in her usual ironical fashion. There is a kind of personal affront to Shannon in the opulent gardens and neatly trimmed hedges of the Capital. To her, it suggests sterility, or perhaps
it is all a facade designed to impress. She is cheered by the thought that she does not have to live there:

She had been through some gruesome slums, had resided in dreary enough tenements; but she preferred the tiny crowded grey streets to all this spaciousness and pretentious emptiness.

(p.208)

After a morning talking with 'stout-waisted statesmen' who try to flirt with her, Shannon reflects bitterly that 'for all her earnest arguments and her quoting of protests from various organisations, she had still not done any more good than she would have done talking down a manhole to someone who was not there' (210). That Tennant was unimpressed with politicians and suspicious of their motives is made clear in Foveaux where she makes Honest John Hutchison and all that he stands for the target for satire:

His prestige was enormous. He radiated benevolence and statesmanship. He patted children on the head and asked their names. Women said he was "a lovely man" and admired his beautiful beard. That famous beard, like the oriflamme of Navarre, had waved in the thick of many a battle.

(Foveaux p.70)

Tennant's satire is never vitriolic. She literally 'pokes fun' at pretentiousness, and it is fun to read it.

Throughout her search to find herself and the place where she belongs, and despite progressive steps which are dogged by disenchantment with what, inevitably, she comes to see as pointless endeavour or self-deceit, Shannon remains optimistic on her own behalf. And she retains the ability to see through the pretensions even of those she most admires, such as Southwell Vaughan Quilter.

Nevertheless, disillusionment takes its toll. It is at this point that the archetypal outsider usually turns
away from the world to seek a solitude free from the ennui of observing frantic humanity. So it is with Shannon. On a long overdue visit to her hometown she encounters John Terril once more, and the sanity and peace that a life with him offers would indicate that her search is over. But what Shannon sees as an illogical strain in her eminently sane husband interrupts her happiness. At the outbreak of World War II John Terril joins the army knowing he will probably die (and he does). Shannon tells him:

You joined up to escape, to escape life. Half the world is committing suicide and you join that half. It isn't I who is running away, now, John, It's you. (p.289)

Yet John is happy, doing work which is important, and has no reason to run away to war. This sequence puts Tennant in concord with Dark and Barnard, in deploring the misguided patriotism which prematurely ends the existence, chaotic though it may be, of so many lives.

Although Tennant comes down on the side of life, we find no happy endings in her work, she is modernist enough in that sense. As for Shannon, at the close of the narrative, all that can be said of her is that, like Camus' outsider, she is 'cleansed of hope'. But, unlike Meursault, she is not resigned to death, but to a life spent working for others:

Let 'em all come. Mothers and kids, cats and old women and old men. Damn it! what am I for? She began to laugh softly.

The fatalism of this closing sentence reminds us that the author's existentialist bent was but a passing interest. *Ride On Stranger* has a plot that hangs on a web of near farcical situations, against which the black spots,
such as Olly's death, failures of business ventures, and Shannon's early widowhood, draw the reader back to the reality we feel the author is trying, with sardonic humour, not to dwell upon. The spirit of the sad clown haunts many of the episodes in this work. This tragi-comical approach has been remarked as a flaw in Tennant's writing, a contradiction which prevents the novels from reaching the success certain passages indicate is possible.¹ But the tendency to find the ridiculous element in life's adversity reflects not only Tennant's own philosophy, but the spirit of a country whose inhabitants have traditionally taken refuge in humour in times of crisis.

Whatever epithets can be attached to Ride on Stranger, 'realism' is not one of them. Only someone who has not studied Tennant's work could accept the statement that she is a social realist writer. For, as Margaret Dick asks, 'how is one to define a social realist who thinks that society is utterly unreal?'²

In this chapter we have seen how three Australian writers approached the formal problems of being an artist in an age of social upheaval. To the love of creative expression which had previously motivated Eleanor Dark and Marjorie Barnard, and which triggered Tennant's writing career, was added a social element which demanded their attention. These novels are something new in Australia's literary development, reflecting as they do the stresses

of humanity as a whole, and not just those of the authors' own land. In the following chapter the existential problems of the individual character in an unstable world is the focus of the discussion.
CHAPTER THREE

Existential Challenge

"The individual" is the category through which, in a religious aspect, this age, all history, the human race as a whole, must pass.

Søren Kierkegaard

The foregoing chapters have argued that the novels which are the focus of this thesis are a product of their age, and that they reveal a tension caused by the encroachment of external social upheavals on the creative imagination of four authors. In their attempt to contain their search for sociological answers within an artistic framework, these authors create characters who are either society's victims or intelligent seekers in the mould of the authors themselves, portraying both kinds with equal insight. In my Introduction I propose that all these authors achieve a harmony between the opposite poles of social and artistic concerns by the special way they employ their characters both as units of society and from an existential standpoint. Chapter one surveys the social aspects of three novels, firstly looking backward to the Australian democratic tradition, then demonstrating how these works differ from their predecessors through their engagement with social problems from a global perspective. Political activity on the local scene is placed in the context of

international socialist ideals. Chapter two uncovers the way three authors solve the formal and artistic problems raised in socially critical fiction, and it locates several characters who are outsiders in the modernist understanding of the term, a concept which continues into chapter Three.

I have said that historical awareness informs these novels of the Depression and War years. This chapter recalls Kierkegaard’s premise that all history must pass through 'the individual'. The religious aspect to which he refers, if we may view it in a special light, has been seen as that human yearning which Eleanor Dark believes links us to our simian ancestry, a continuing mental and spiritual involvement with: 'Somewhere I can't go? Something I can't do? Something I mayn't know? Unendurable thoughts; unfailing goads and spurs!' (Waterway p.40). This driving force is articulated also by Barnard in Tomorrow.¹ The 'criticism of consciousness', which I describe in my Introduction, comes into its own in a study of characterisation. Its followers posit that the subjective mental universe of the author, his/her knowledge, convictions, tolerance and sympathy, is revealed in a study of the text which focuses on characterisation. Characters, in turn, are revealed by the author's allowing readers access to their thoughts and feelings; and through certain passages in which a symbolic use of language points to the relationship between their inner lives and their external milieu. This chapter surveys some of the characters in these novels from an existential standpoint; that is, in the context of human

¹ See p.170 below.
existence, rather than of the twentieth-century philosophy of Existentialism.

The realism of the character portraits in these works is, in the New Criticism's view, that of verisimilitude. Realism in a novel is, at best, thrice removed from reality, (that is, social phenomena must pass through the author's frame of perception, through the strictures of language, and then through the reader's subjective view of the world). It follows that the characters in a novel, no matter how convincing or how memorable, are, like the social environment with which they interact in the narrative, just fictions. However, while Kierkegaard's profound observation regarding the individual does not refer to fictional characters, there is nothing to prevent authors from adopting the notion that all of life passes through the individual in the creation of their characters. In fact, Georg Lukács's prescription for creating realistic characters in fiction contains a very similar idea, though one that sees the individual character as a type:

What makes a type a type is not its average quality, nor its mere individual being, however profoundly conceived; what makes it a type is that in it all humanity and socially essential determinations are present at their highest level of development, in the unfolding of the possibilities latent in them, in extreme presentation of their extremes - rendering concrete the peaks and limits of men and epochs.

Lukács's 'type' is tied to his notion of 'great realism'.


which, he argues, 'depicts man and society as complete entities.' But Marjorie Bolton uses the word 'type' in a dismissive tone. She says: 'The greatest created characters have a roundness, complexity and multiplicity; they develop, they give the impression that they had a real past, have a real future. A lesser character may be a type' (Her emphasis). These critics each have a different conception of the word 'type', while in essence they are in agreement about the roundness and complexity that is necessary in creating believable characters.

Although he is known as a Marxist critic, Lukács's road to Karl Marx was via Hegel and Kierkegaard; also Dilthey, Simmel and Max Weber. Weber used the term 'ideal type' to depict a component model of humanity which could then be empirically observed or historically recognisable. There is perhaps an echo of Weber's idea in Lukács's belief that in literature 'the inner life of man, its essential traits and essential conflicts can be truly portrayed only in organic connection with social and historical factors.'

1. ibid.
While this thesis asserts that my chosen authors, with the exception of Harcourt, were not Marxists, we may safely say that the characters in the novels addressed here conform to Lukács's criteria for characterisation.\textsuperscript{1} We should note that Lukács never prefaces the word 'realism' with the adjectives 'social' or 'socialist'. Jack Lindsay tells us that:

In [Lukács's] system, Realism ceased to be a partial or polemical term. It stood for the art which achieves wholeness: which maintains the complex, devious, yet omnipresent relation of part and whole, of individual and essence.\textsuperscript{2}

This chapter sees no real conflict between Lukács's view of literature and that of the consciousness critics (both have Kierkegaard somewhere in the background), although one may lean toward the 'objective' and the other the 'subjective' in their discussions of the author. Lukács says that in discovering what the author loves and hates 'we arrive at a deeper interpretation of the writer's true Weltanschauung, at the problem of the artistic value of the writer's world-view.'\textsuperscript{3} Surely this is what Sarah Lawall and Joseph Hillis Miller mean when they talk of the 'mental universe' of the author. It is with these thoughts in mind

1. The authors studied here could not, of course, have read Lukács's 1950 work on European realism, but may have read \textit{The Theory of the Novel}, 1920, where his ideas of the relation of the 'soul' to external reality were beginning to take shape. In any case, Lukács's \textit{Studies in European Realism} gives us an insight into those novels whose authors were becoming disenchanted with the capitalist society of the thirties and forties.


that this chapter approaches a character study of certain figures in The Battlers and in Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow.

-0-

In Kylie Tennant's The Battlers, the harsh social realities of life on the track are not glossed over. But she portrays them through her characters' eyes as the external backdrop to their inner needs and conflicts. Read from a point of view which is broadly existentialist (as was Tennant's bent), it can be seen that the problem of choice versus chance - whether we have free-will or whether our lives are predetermined for us - is a major theme in The Battlers as it is in works as diverse as Moby Dick and Such is Life. Herman Melville uses the metaphor of a loom as the centre of Ishmael's reflections on the human situation:

...with my own hand I ply my own shuttle and weave my own destiny into these unalterable threads. (Moby Dick ch.47)

The warp threads, subject to restricted movement, he calls necessity; the woof (or weft) is the responsibility of the weaver, and both parts are subject to the intervention of chance. On the other hand, Joseph Furphy asserts that a man has free will provided he seizes the crucial moment of choice. If he fails at this moment predestination takes over.

Tom Collins's famous discourse in Such is Life (86-87), in which he uses as example the fork in a railway track, finds an echo in the opening lines of The Battlers,
lines which hint at the existentialist vein which runs through the novel:

If Snow had taken the road through Belburra, instead of the track through Currawong, his whole life would have run a different course. He had pulled his horse in at the fork of the road, and for a minute he sat thinking....(p.1)

When Snow decides, for reasons which he justifies to himself, to take the left-hand fork and longer way home, 'all his life, with that decision, veered into a different course'(2).

But Tennant is not so definite as were Melville and Furphy, for she gives us an opposing view in the person of Mr. Postlewaite, an itinerant preacher known to the folk of the track as 'the Apostle'.

The Apostle never believed in chance. In fact, his whole life was devoted towards combating that heresy which allows that there is no good reason why things happen or that they happen in a sequence.'(p.313)

Later, Snow is forced to admit that 'it was just like the Apostle said: 'Life just flowed along, and it didn't matter a damn what you wanted. You just paddled the way you were meant to go'(255).

At the beginning of the novel we are made aware of the ambivalence of Snow Grimshaw's feelings regarding his homecoming after months on the track. Snow has a spiritual and physical affinity with his environment. A feature of Tennant's writing is her use of physical landscape to represent qualities and moods in her characters. Snow reflects his world, and the country through which he travels seems to be in harmony with his tough exterior. He had come alone through the blacksoil plain of Northern New
South Wales. The desolation and loneliness of the area are graphically described. The earth is 'baked like a tile in summer and in winter forms a black bog that the drovers dread' and 'the westerly winds bite with all the malice of the thousands of miles of barbed wire over which it has blown'(p.1). Yet Snow scarcely notices it. He is at home on the track, and the itinerant life is preferable to working for one of his wife's relations. Snow has developed the resourcefulness of his kind, and it is his firm belief (and, it becomes clear, that of the author) that this kind of lifestyle is not as harsh as it seems to the uninitiated.

The traditional city life versus country life motif recurs throughout The Battlers but only in an incidental way.¹ That is, we don't feel that Tennant wrote the novel specifically to make such a point. As we noted in the previous chapter she does not minimise the hardships associated with the itinerant's life.

Snow travels alone for preference with his dog and an old covered van, and he feels that while ever there is a sheep to steal for food his life is 'not so bad'. His chief regret is that it is time to make one of his periodical trips home to see his wife and boys. Snow's view of marriage is typical of the Australian male of his time. It was seen as the curtailment of a man's freedom

---

¹. For example: 'If you once take to the road, you come back to it sooner or later'(228). While this fits the nationalist thesis, we need not go as far as Xavier Pons, who says that we can only understand Tennant's novel if we read it in the light of 'the Lawson/Furphy tradition.' (The Battlers, Kylie Tennant and ..., p.364).
on the one hand, but on the other it was considered that when a man acquired a wife he acquired a possession.\footnote{See Anne Summers, \textit{Damned Whores and God's Police: the Colonisation of Women in Australia}, Ringwood, Vic., Penguin Books Australia Ltd (Allen Lane), 1975, p.221.} Snow's hurt when he finds his place usurped by his wife's cousin, and his subsequent restlessness, is something he finds hard to define. There is nothing for him to do but take to the road again.

Before proceeding with an interpretation of the characters of Snow and others in \textit{The Battlers} we need to make a short survey of Kylie Tennant's characteristics as a writer and the subjective reasons behind the idiosyncratic style which has caused some misunderstanding among critics of her work. Tennant appears to have been born with a talent for seeing beyond the orderly edifices set up by society and finding the turmoil within. For the individual, also, a coherent life is often difficult to achieve. Her feeling for life's 'shifting sands' gives rise to characters who seek order and coherence through continuing movement. The phenomenon is most noticeable in \textit{The Battlers} because of the nature of the plot; it is true of some minor characters, Depression itinerants in \textit{Tiburon}; and of the central character in \textit{Ride on Stranger}. But, according to Margaret Dick, her critics have failed to recognise the thematic presence of a search which is to be found in Tennant's oeuvre. The moving on of Shannon Hicks in \textit{Stranger}, and of Snow and Dancy in \textit{Battlers}, is
merely the outer manifestation of the inner quest for something they can barely identify, and the restlessness of her characters reflects Tennant's own life.¹

It was not until Margaret Dick's book on Tennant's work was published that the existential, even existentialist, bent of Tennant's writing was fully revealed. Dick insists that we recognise the 'religious and metaphysical basis of Tennant's work' and adds that unless this is accepted 'her books will appear unfocused, her choice of scene and character merely expedient.'² Dick reminds us that 'Tennant is writing in a world that finds its reflection in the work of Eliot, Sartre, Camus, Kafka; and if comparisons are called for at all they must be with them.'³ However, while alienation is a feature of Tennant's writing, nihilism is rare, although occasionally she does draw a character who is bitterly alienated from life. Such a one is Orry Mansart of Lost Haven on whose gravestone is carved the words 'It is hard to say "Yea, Lord" to Nothingness.' But the fact that we only learn of the poet long after his suicide indicates that such a nihilistic view is unusual in her body of work, and not to be fully

¹ Both before and after her marriage (in which she moved from town to town with her school-teacher husband) she would go off on her own in a quest for answers to life's riddles. Research for the background of her novels was mined from life rather than the Public Library, which she discovered at an early age. See The Missing Heir, (p.42, p.68, and passim).

² Dick, The Novels..., p.90.

³ Dick, The Novels..., p.68.
explored. David Aumbrey in *Tell Morning This* also feels at odds with his surroundings for much of the narrative, but eventually, he, like his creator, comes to a transcendental view of life which, for him, makes the pains of living 'part of a purposeful, million-fingered harmony.'¹

Margaret Dick has noted that Auchterlonie, in spite of finding little to praise in the novels, 'is almost alone in having observed behind Kylie Tennant's creative energy a directing force of considerable power; an affirmation of the value of life in the face of the evidence.'² She quotes Auchterlonie: 'All Tennant's novels represent to some extent an attempt to come to terms with this view of life, to reconcile it with the chaotic futility of individual lives...³ Kylie Tennant personally underlined this view of her work in an interview to mark the release of her novel, *Tantavallon*. She said:

I got an idea early in life of its absurdity and chaos. You make a clearing of order, but underneath everything is very strange. Human life is absolutely extraordinary.⁴

These words bring to mind Patrick White's professed desire to 'discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary' in


2. Dick, *The Novels...*, p.10

3. ibid.

the lives of the common Australian.¹

Not so different from White in another respect, Tennant deflates the pompous, ridicules the self-righteous and flays the hypocritical, but on her common people she bestows the status of their importance as individuals. As this passage from *Tiburon* testifies:

You put people into pigeon holes and twist them out of shape with statistics before you dare understand them. Come back to bedrock. Come back to the individual human being before you start talking about heredity and environment. (p.390)

There is a New Testament flavour about this attitude, although for Tennant orthodox religion is seen to operate within a framework of questionable assumptions. Like so many who write of the dispossessed, such as Lawson, Orwell and Jack London, she portrays instances where her characters are checked out for worthiness by purveyors of religion, before being offered the charity they do not want rather than the help they need.

Tennant, who was so involved in the life around her, yet outside of it, held a view of humanity's foibles that permeates all that she writes so that her descriptions are sometimes wry, sometimes dry, and often irreverent:

At first the war in Europe was just exciting. The only other chance people from Foveaux had had of being killed on a large scale was when some Dutch farmers in Africa had refused to play the game according to British rules. The prospects of the teams in this new war were discussed with all the serious consideration that might be given to a Test Match. (*Foveaux* p.85)

Even death, albeit timely death, causes no change in tone, no reverence for the dignity of human remains:

¹ P. White, 'The Prodigal Son'.
...an old woman in Plug Alley was missed by the neighbours who four days later decided to break down the door of her house. She had been dead some time and what the rats had left of her was so uninviting that no one in Foveaux who heard the details ate meat for a week. (Foveaux p.70)

For T. Inglis Moore this aspect of Tennant's work reminds him of Freud's theory of humour, which sees it as 'the highest form of defence-mechanisms.' In short, she cannot face life, she turns away and her novels fail because 'the comic treatment contradicts the tragic theme.'¹ For Xavier Pons, Kylie Tennant's 'conception of life ... remains quite dark.'² However he concedes her metaphysical outlook and recognises this as the reason for her 'refusing to make political statements on the situation of her characters.' But Pons, like Moore, fails to see that, ultimately, Tennant's view of life is in the affirmative precisely because of her metaphysical leaning. She, like Matthew Arnold's friend, 'saw life steadily, and saw it whole.'³

In common with Eleanor Dark and Marjorie Barnard, Tennant's sweeping vision encompassed more than the local scene. Margaret Dick, of all the critics of Tennant's writing is alone in discerning the truth behind Tennant's individual approach to the problems of her age:

1. T. Inglis Moore, 'The Tragi-Comedies ...', (331).
   (Moore had become more appreciative of Tennant's talents by the time he wrote his book, Social Patterns ....)


Life in her own time provides her subject matter, yet she no more sees Australia in isolation than she sees her characters in isolation ... Her constant preoccupation is life and its astonishing manifestation in the human species. ... Most efforts to impose personal purpose she sees as useless, at best misdirected or thwarted, at worst purely destructive. Yet in the face of all these separate futilities she apprehends this vital force as something joyful, magnificent, and terrible that human beings might sense and share in if only they could cease to struggle against it in an effort to impose their own wills on its flow.1

It is a lesson learned by the central characters of The Battlers. Even before Snow arrives home to confront the distressing situation which causes him to turn back to the track, an event which he comes to regard as his destiny has overtaken him. It is while Snow camps for the night down that left-hand fork of the road that Dancy Smith enters his life.

Dancy is nineteen, going on sixty, and has been abandoned at the side of the road by the man with whom she has been travelling. Her baby has been confiscated by Welfare. She is emaciated, toothless and destitute, and Snow nicknames her Stray. She reminds him of nothing so much as 'a trapped, fierce little animal'. The concept of choice has played no part in Dancy's short life, and if it is by chance that she has borne the brunt of her family's misfortune, it is a cruel one. As she relates something of her past to Snow a tale of Dickensian pathos emerges which compares with the more harrowing parts of Oliver Twist or Bleak House. But, as Kylie Tennant 'rarely

1. Dick, The Novels..., p.46.
falls into the trap of sentimentality', the information is imparted with the matter-of-fact tone that marks Henry Lawson's bush tragedies. After Dancy was frightened by the noise of a possum near their camp, she confides to Snow:

'I fought it was a ghost.' She shuddered. 'I got thinking of the time Dad come'ome. Walked out of the asylum 'e did, wiv a coat over his asylum cloves. ... I was twelve. He come home on the Friday, and Saturday afternoon, when we was at the pi'tures, he cut (Mum's) throat, and then he cut his own throat afterwards. The landlady make me go in wiv a mop and bucket and clean up the floor. ... The landlady said they was my parents and I had to do it.' (p.6)

Then, like Pip in *Great Expectations*, Dancy had gone to live with a married sister who 'thought the day wasn't lucky if she didn't find something to frash me for'(7).

Finally, Dancy maintains, because of her sister's lies, she is incarcerated in the Paramatta home for wayward girls, where 'the other girls taught (her) plenty'(7). Dancy is as her past has made her, and despite the fact that Snow finds in her a talent 'for eking out the bare bones of truth into a tasty stew' (14), all in the language of 'alley and slum and reformatory', her real courageous and loyal nature asserts itself as the narrative unfolds.2

Currently, all people seem to be against Dancy, the men who run things, 'Tryin' to down you. An' women too. All of 'em rotten' (7). Such bitterness in a young woman is the more poignant when it occurs in a novel where


2. Tennant's interest in those who are incarcerated in girls' homes and gaols is canvassed in greater detail in *Tell Morning This*. 

hardship is a central theme. But it is physical hardship spiced with humour in the traditional Australian way. Physical hardship does not daunt Dancy or Snow. In their characters Tennant demonstrates that it is lack of belonging - to someone, first of all and to some place, almost as acutely - that causes the human spirit to wilt. Dancy takes her life into her own hands when she decides to stay with Snow, to whom she clings with the tenacity of a limpet despite all his efforts to be rid of her. In her growing devotion to him she loses much of her bitterness, but not her toughness or resourcefulness.

So many of the people on the track seem to be there for the love it. Snow and Dancy are soon joined by Dora Phipps and Harley Duke, known as 'the busker' for his ability to obtain a few coins by means of his music. Both hold onto a personal pride which insists that they are itinerants by choice. The busker assures the others that he is merely gaining experience while wating for an opening in the city, where he will make his fortune. Dora, whose speech reveals that she has seen better times, insists that she is actually on 'a walking tour'. Tennant has been compared with Dickens in her ability to create entertaining characters by virtue of overdrawing or emphasising their peculiarities. Such is Dora Phipps. She is a fat middle-aged eccentric who puts on the airs and graces of a queen. She is an interesting character who adds much to the world Tennant portrays in this novel. Dora does not see the pathos of her life and one wonders if her creator realised that she
had produced a character with more depth than she knew. For Dora Phipps's function in the novel is to be the butt of satire. Her stated aim in life is to establish a World Feminised State. Feminism appears to have been a source of amusement for the author. Janet Bubbing in Stranger provides further scope for a satirical portrait of a feminist. As a strong-minded and independent woman herself, and the daughter of another, Tennant, doubtless, wondered what all the fuss was about. Nevertheless, as with Snow and Dancy and Harley, behind Dora's wanderings lies the need to find something to give meaning to her existence.

Snow accepts Dora's and the busker's company reservedly, because it had been his intention to continue alone, as was his wont, and he is still figuring a way to be rid of Dancy. He has no wish to be burdened with her any more than had her erstwhile de-facto spouse. Dancy's worth in the eyes of men is revealed when Smith attempts to dispose of her to Snow in a bizarre kind of barter where she is included in a job lot with his horse and sulky.

'Make it thirty bob, mate. And that's Dancy thrown in,' Mr. Smith said magnanimously...

(Snow:) 'Thirty bob if you take the Stray off me hands.'

(Smith:) 'I'll take a quid and you can keep 'er. It's worth ten bob just to get rid of 'er.' (p.29)

But such experiences make little dent in Dancy's optimism;

She was a battler, Snow admitted; impudent, hardy, cool, and she could take a 'knock-back' as though it didn't matter, and come up to meet the next blow, with perhaps a curse... (p.228)

1. See The Missing Heir, passim.
However, when Snow is hospitalised and she is forced to take a domestic post under appalling conditions, and then finds that Snow has moved on without her, her spirit reaches its lowest ebb. But Tennant never allows life to defeat her characters; she overturns her existential sense of futility with a religion of her own. The Apostle upholds Dancy with his calm wisdom. Although she is sceptical when he assures her that she is watched over by Someone, the words 'think of it as a kind of luck' are language she can relate to, and her simple courage reasserts itself. She vows to find Snow, and when his eldest son arrives, also looking for him, she has the perfect excuse. When they set off on foot, the farmers along the route join forces to hasten the reunion.

At this point we can observe once again the connection between the state of being of Tennant's characters and their physical surroundings. The interplay of the spiritual and physical worlds is all pervasive and reflects the author's view of a wholistic universe. When, having located Snow's whereabouts, unsure of her welcome, she leaves Jimmy to wait for him and goes on alone. She comes across a hillside covered with 'a brilliant torrent of flowers, pouring down the side of the road in colours of crimson and blue mauve, violet and opal.'

The Stray sat down on a rock and loosed her unwieldy pack. She simply sat and looked at the flowers. She also nursed her feet thoughtfully. 'I won't forget,' she thought gravely. 'Not even when I'm old.' ...She was busy glancing about, drinking in the shades of crimson and purple; pleasure and weariness making her a little
unsteady, as though this beauty were some dangerous red wine...
If she had never come out on the track, she would never have seen this unknown flower flaunting its colours over miles of hilly ground. (p. 258)

Snow, coming upon her here, is aghast at such lunacy and explains to Dancy that it is Paterson's curse, a noxious weed which is unable to be eradicated, and for this reason 'has driven many a man off his land.'

A weed it may be but Tennant uses it as a symbol of unquenchable life, life wrestled as an adversary most of the time, but on rare occasions recognised as a thing of indescribable beauty. The experience comes to Dancy when everything that has happened to her to date has seemed aimed at taking from her, her child, her dignity, her health, and even her hope. But, like the flowers on the hillside, when it rains, 'under the lash of the heavy drops' (Dancy) 'swayed undaunted and remained.'

Despite all the hardship and disappointment, The Battlers is diffused with the general hilarity that Tennant manages to inject into all her novels, the kind of approach which caused T. Inglis Moore to say of The Battlers that 'which promises to become an Australian Grapes of Wrath, turns into something like Priestley's The Good Companions.'

The analogy with Priestly's novel is fair enough; Tennant's characters manage to have a rollocking good time, most of the time, albeit in a less genteel way than their English counterparts. The men dance and drink and fight; the women dance, patch up the menfolk, and have babies as they go along.

As well as Harley Duke and Miss Phipps, many of the episodes in the novel revolve around the Tyrell family whose thirteenth child arrives while they are travelling towards the Riverina for fruit picking. While such episodes as this (and the fights and feuds with the part-Aboriginal Little family) set the background mood of the novel; and the underlying theme of a search is implicit in all their stories, as it is for the major characters, the lesser characters are defined in the narrative by the things they do, whereas Dancy and Snow are defined by what they are. Their existential preoccupations, and those of the Apostle, set the tone of the novel; the remaining characters are designed to accentuate and complement this focus.

The things Snow and Dancy seek from life are described in detail. For example;

Under (Snow's) look of a quiet yokel something smouldered - something bitter and compelling and dangerous. In his own groping way he was out on a search to which this union of his was but a clue. He was looking for something bigger than a comfortable life or work to do; he was driven on by that burning discontent, on and on; sometimes he did not know why; sometimes he thought it was to leave old wrongs behind or find a new justice and freedom...(p.296)

Here, we can link The Battlers with those passages in Tomorrow and Waterway in which the authors, like Tennant, recognise the eternal lack of a spiritual anchor in humankind. In Marxist novels it may find its articulation in descriptions of social wrongs, but these women authors acknowledge the truth of the biblical aphorism, 'man does not live by bread alone.' This is the wisdom behind the
lack of political dogma in these Depression novels.

In her naivete, and shaped by her life experience, Dancy believes that her search is for an address which will signify an end to her wanderings:

Some day, she thought, oh, some day, if they could come over the brow of a hill, she and Snow, and know that the town below was their own town, and their camp that night was a house of their own. Towards dusk it would be, and the smoke drifting up into the cool air from cottage chimneys, and the green fields going down into the folded hills like a green blanket wrapping the town from the twilight. Red roofs and little gardens and orchards ... and a hut waiting for them, ... and a patch of ground to grow feed for a cow and a few chickens, and a door to the house to shut out the darkness ... (p. 298)

It can be seen by comparing the two passages that Snow's goal was much more nebulous than Dancy's. As she is shown to be more tenacious than he, it is expected that her dream will one day absorb his. However, Tennant does not offer a neat ending. After Snow does a spell in jail for sheep stealing we leave them moving on to another town, another hope. As the narrative, echoing life, moves on episodically, the futile endeavours of the characters place this 'realist' novel within the sphere of the modernists.

A key character in the essential thrust of the novel is Harry Postlewaite, a character devised, we feel, as a means for Tennant to place the episodes of the plot in the context of her personal outlook. The Apostle's view of life on the outback roads changes over the months, from one in which he sees the itinerants as in dire need of a missionary, to a kind of admiration for the spiritual truth of a life lived close to nature. His wife has
reluctantly brought their three boys to accompany him on his travels. Finally, her painful decision to place what she sees as their welfare ahead of her husband's, and return with them to the city, culminates in a passage in which they argue the merits and disadvantages of life on the track. The incompatibility of outlook between the Postlewaites reverberates a corresponding polarisation in the views of Australians generally. However, we must see the Apostle's argument as Tennant's own:

'... Look at all the children you see along the track. Stunted, burnt-up little animals with bad teeth and sandy blight and hollow chests. I don't want my boys like that.'

'And how about their minds? You'll take them back and bury them under the ruins.'

'Ruins?'

'Books, business, and banks. Stale ruins of other men's minds left for hundreds of years. Towns, streets, churches, all the things that make life easier and thinking harder. Cluttering up their lives and minds. Softening in corners. Air-conditioning their flesh, getting them accustomed to accepting aeroplanes, cars, machines for building more machines. Crawling about in a stinking, swarming city. Bah!' He recovered himself. 'even at the risk of sandy blight or bad teeth (which they haven't had so far), I wanted them away from that.'

'But you came out to lead these people to a better way of living.'

'I know,' the Apostle admitted. 'Poor fool that I was! But I'm not a missionary now. I'm a refugee. I'm fleeing from a civilisation that drops bombs on its cities and fouls its nest. Give me the road any time.' (pp.321-22)

The pathos in this passage is superficial when it is read from a knowledge of Tennant's style. She is using satire to exaggerate her opinion of the institutions which shape humans to society's mould. She distrusted formal education, as well as formal religion. The unfettered mind which was free to grow was Tennant's ideal.
However, we should allow that other readings of this passage are possible. From a female point-of-view\(^x\), we see a woman torn between her husband’s welfare and that of her children, a woman who has been raised in a conventional way, and who fears for her children away from the safety net of civilised living, with its dentists, doctors, libraries and churches. Read from the formalist standpoint, as Auchterlonie reads it, 'the passage has behind it the whole weight of tragedy.' 'Fully developed', Auchterlonie believes, 'the story of the Apostle would have made all the difference to The Battlers' as a novel.\(^1\) This may be true, but then it would not have been a Tennant novel at all. Kylie Tennant’s oeuvre has a special place in Australia’s literature. It reflects a certain eccentricity, reminiscent of the exaggerated tales of Australian folk literature. But it also reflects an incisive mind that cuts through all the comforting social customs which mankind has devised, to find the bedrock of existential terror.

---

In the frame section of Tomorrow, Knarf’s chief function is as an author and philosopher of human history. However, Barnard provides enough information for us to survey this character’s personal story from the point of view of his inner life. Knarf has felt a compulsion to write his novel, not for the reasons Barnard wrote Tomorrow

\(^1\) Auchterlonie, 'The Novels of Kylie Tennant',\((401)\).

\(^x\) But not feminist; her conflict is a primal one.
(Knarf is satisfied with his social system), but for personal reasons. He suffers the loneliness of being a celebrity who has lost touch with his wife and son, and 'his life did not mesh with that of the community.' Oddly, there is a poignancy in the life of Knarf, himself, which is not reproduced in that of Harry. Although Harry is portrayed as society's victim, powerless to change his situation, he does have a kind of nobility in his role as Everyman, and as 'the surviving principle of Man' revealed in the Anzac statue. Knarf is a man who is 'shut out of [his] own heart' by virtue of the fact that his book is finished, 'a man who by his work as an author sought an audience for his personal drama'(21).

Knarf has 'the face of an individualist'; his aloneness is heightened by his public achievements, but:

He could not bring down fire to his own altar.
To his wife, to his son, Ren, he was a dead man.

(p.21)

Having dwelt in the past for the long duration of his book's writing, giving it, according to Lin, his wife, 'all his thought, energy and emotion,' he now feels that his present is barren. We learn of Lin's bitter feeling towards Knarf through his own troubled musings. Knarf has become his book, and although set four hundred years in the past, it is to some degree autobiographical, as Ord notes during the reading of it:

This worry in Harry's mind spoilt the relationship between father and son. Harry thought with remorse that Ben was more friendly to him than he to Ben.
"Ren," Ord thought. "Knarf is bound up in Ren and doesn't know it. Even the names. I didn't think of it before." (p.187)

However, Barnard provides a dénouement in this section of the novel, bringing about a reconciliation between father and son, and a new understanding of the social issues of their times and each other's place in them.

In this, and in previous chapters, I have attempted to demonstrate that the realism of socially critical fiction is not necessarily achieved at the expense of those existential and universal preoccupations which are integral to the human condition. The characters' concerns for social injustice are shown in these novels to be inextricably melded with their private needs for love, for fulfilment and for peace of mind. In Tomorrow, this is nowhere more clear than in the characterisation of Ren.

Unlike Harry's son, Ben, who accepts his lot and asks no more of life than to be a truck driver, the independent thinking of Knarf's son, Ren, soon leads him to attempt to bring about change. The young people of the society of the future all look alike in their uniformity of dress, and cropped heads. Their wish to participate in the arrangement of their lives is the catalyst for 'the Movement', in which Ren is a leading figure. Knarf believes that future generations would look on his age as 'the Golden Age', for '(t)here has never before in the whole history

1. cf. Aldous Huxley's Ends and Means (London, Chatto and Windus, 1965): 'From Isiah to Karl Marx the prophets have spoken with one voice. In the Golden Age to which they looked forward there will be liberty, justice and brotherly love.
of man been anything like this, peace and plenty'(19).
But for his son, 'the shining walls of the world had never
seemed so unsealable'(35). Ren is the 'outsider' character
in Tomorrow. His feeling of separateness from his father's
way of life, his hopes of change, his subsequent despair
and disillusion, are central to the point Barnard is making.
Human nature is perverse; it demands the opportunity to
strive, and if it must, to fail. The twenty-four hours
chronology of the frame novel encompass a twenty-four hour
crisis in the life of Ren. He is the instrument for
Barnard's analytic prognosis of the future.

Middle age came early in Ren's society, at twenty-
eight years. At twenty, all young people are drafted for
eight years of service. During these years they are called
the Workers, and do all the work for the whole country.
As early as the mid-forties, Marjorie Barnard, trained
in interpreting history, could see the direction which
high technology would take, and extend it to its logical
conclusion. The new technology was to free everyone from
boring, repetitious work and provide time for creative
leisure. Barnard, early, recognised the fallacy of this
and of William Morris's utopian idea of leisure in News
From Nowhere. For, in the centre, despite all this leisure,
the Pavilion, where every citizen has the right to exhibit
anything he has made, is little used. 'The citizens of
the Centre weren't interested in Making and the wisest
provisions of the authorities could not force them to it.'
The creative urge has been lost; thus Barnard expresses
a fear that is found in much anti-Utopian fiction.
That 'people never change' is remarked by Knarf in one of his conversations with Ord. When the Votometer, a device which measures telepathic signals, is used for a referendum which proposes to give the Workers more say in their affairs, Ren learns the truth of this for the first time. He was sure he knew the feelings of his fellow workers, but the graph registers twenty-two per cent for the motion, sixteen against, and sixty-two indifferent. Ren, who has agreed to abide by public opinion, must face Oran's words 'there is no public opinion'. In this way the author, like Harcourt and Dark (Chs.1 & 2), draws attention to the largest segment of all populations, the apathetic majority who grumble but who are afraid of change or of the need to think for themselves.

A gap in the thinking of the older and younger generations is more evident in this section than in the main novel where depression and war affect all age groups. Here, creativity is stifled because all physical needs are met, and there appears to be nothing left to strive for. Yet there is festering rebellion among many of the young which Oran, an elder bureaucrat, sees as a paradox. 'These romantics thought they could have one without the other (liberty without controls), a Utopia of incompatibles!' (226). He thinks they have not yet realised that if a person chooses freedom s/he also chooses pain. But perhaps Ren does know. That very morning he said to his father 'The end of life isn't comfort, it's fulfilment.' We recall John Savage in Brave New World, when he says:
"But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness, I want sin."
"In fact", said Mustafa Mond, 'You're claiming the right to be unhappy.' (B.N.W. p.205)

Like Huxley, Barnard demonstrates that the human spirit has needs that transcend the material security people strive for, needs that are innate and independent of learned wisdom, as Ren is to discover.

If the climax of the frame novel were the voting episode, as it appears to be, the defeat of the motion recommending change would be an anti-climax. Its importance in the narrative is to denote a crisis in the development of Ren who, in turn, stands for the developing wisdom of successive generations of humanity. It lays the ground for the real climax which is located in Ren's consciousness and couched in the turmoil of his regeneration. Ren makes his way alone to the countryside (where as a boy he had ridden wrapped in his father's cloak, on an old horse called Murrumbidgee). Nostalgia for the past is only the beginning.

Barnard conveys the essence of mankind's yearning since time began:

(Ren) had a fantastic nostalgia for something beyond what he knew ... He wanted to stand on ground that he had never trodden before. He ... every minute made himself some new toy, called in to his aid every phantom and illusion that man has invented and re-invented a thousand times for the assuagement of his own grief and despair. ...he sought, not in concrete terms, but in their shadowy essence, that Utopia, New Atlantis, Ultima Thule, those Islands of the Blest, that North West Passage, that fabulous Cathay, and all the other curious destinations of the seafaring imagination from Sinbad to de Quiros. (p.442)

The recurring metaphor in this passage has its source in
the collective literature of our cultural heritage, and
the author takes her place in the company of those writers
who place all strife, collective and individual, in the
context of the puzzle of human existence, a puzzle to be
confronted by all active, as opposed to passive, thinkers.
This is Ren's rite of passage from boy to man. He sees
now that he was being romantic in expecting change to come
about so simply. His inner struggle is continued in the
first person through his stream of consciousness. Ren
realises the need for a new understanding, one he must
grow, 'as a crab grows a new claw, if need be'(442-43).

The struggles being waged in the inner and outer
sections of *Tomorrow*, the push for equality and shared
prosperity in the twentieth century, and the disadvantages
attendant on such a situation, once attained, in the society
of the future have a complementary, rather than a parallel
function in the work. Writing of utopian and dystopian
fiction in Australia, Nan Bowman Albinski, says that 'doubts
of what a preferred utopia might demand in terms of
conformity and repression (such as those expressed in *Brave
New World*, and Zamiatin's *We*) had little direct counterpart
here.' In fact, Barnard makes just such a point a major
focus of this work, especially in the chapter titled
'Symposium', which is a part of the frame novel, but
appropriately placed in the centre of the book. It is
structured in the form of a discussion around a banquet
table (as in Plato's original *Symposium*), but the debate

1. Nan Bowman Albinski; 'A Survey of Australian Utopian
and Dystopian Fiction', (20).
in this instance is on the subject of Liberty. The concept of liberty as a paradox is inescapable, as noted in the discussion on *Upsurge*. In an ordered society personal liberty cannot wholly exist, because, admits Ren, quoting 'a man in the old times, called Laski', 'liberty also is an inescapable doctrine of contingent anarchy' (p.227).

As well as having read Laski, Barnard, as reported above, had read Aldous Huxley's *Ends and Means*, the subtitle of which is 'An Enquiry into the Nature of Ideals and into the Methods employed for their Realization'. Certain passages in *Tomorrow* bear testimony to the fact that its author had absorbed Huxley's wisdom. For example:

None of us dares have a will of our own, or protest when we catch a glimpse of how corrupt things really are. We'd lose our chance of making the grade and getting into the ruling class if we did. If we do make the grade, well we go over to them. ...And if we don't - well, after eight years of holding our tongues, we go on holding them. (p.225)

These words are from Illil, who is denied marriage by the authority because of her tubercular illness. Throwing what remains of her life into fighting for the cause she tells Ren, 'I can serve (the Movement) and I will. It's going to devour a lot of people and they'd better be people like me' (428). This could well have been Bowie speaking four centuries earlier.

1. Harold J. Laski, 1893-1950, was an English political scientist, author of such works as, *The Grammar of Politics; Problems of Sovereignty;* and *Communism*.

2. cf. If your goal is liberty and democracy, then you must teach people the arts of being free and of governing themselves. If you teach them instead the arts of bullying and passive obedience, then you will not achieve the liberty and democracy at which you are aiming. (*Ends and Means*, p.184-85)
The pattern we are able to discern in *Tomorrow* is the age-old law of genesis, or order from chaos. It is a law that is universally manifest in ways both large and small. Earth itself was formed out of chaos; a chicken emerges from an egg after a struggle. A new society is founded on the debris that remains after a great upheaval in the old. And when a person, here represented by Ren (and also Illil), suffers severe emotional trauma s/he either succumbs or emerges wiser and stronger, better able to cope with the next crisis. In Ren, Barnard creates a symbol of developing wisdom and her hope for the future.

With the pain of a broken leg compounding his inner suffering, Ren comes to perceive the events of the day in proper perspective:

> The Movement was wrong when it held out little gifts, all it had to do was ask for sacrifice. To cry out "Give your lives and your happiness and your peace", and the ancient springs of man's spirit would open again. (p.443)

Ren knows, suddenly, that his urge towards liberty is not an isolated instance, but part of a great and eternal imperative. In the inner novel it is shown to be the imperative which is used to raise armies for 'just and holy' wars which, in retrospect, are seen to be neither. For Harry Munster, whose war service is his one source of self-esteem, such enlightenment proves to be a destructive experience. Enlightenment for Ren illuminates the way forward.

-o-

When she conveys the existential stress of Harry Munster and his wife, Ally, Barnard brings into play the
tensions of city living. The apparent indifference of its residents is compared in Harry's mind with the caring and hospitality of country folk. We first meet the Munsters as battling poultry farmers in old Toongabbie, just after World War I. Although struggling financially, Harry was able to say, 'We're not broke, Ally, we're keeping up' (61). But it isn't enough for her. Worn down with childbearing and poverty, Ally dreams of the city where her brother, Arnie, manages a large grocery warehouse. In the manner of humans longing for greener fields, she dreams of the city 'with its lights, its amusements, its piled up plenty' (and its pains, as the Munsters soon discover). Here is another link between Tomorrow and The Battlers.

In the hope of a better life for his family Harry moves to the inner city on the promise of work from his brother-in-law. He is disillusioned in ways more debilitating than just dashed hopes. He finds his fellow humans less humanitarian than his neighbours in the country, and his marriage suffers because Ally is unable to cope. Even before the Depression hits the city, the Munsters find the reality very different from Ally's dream. Their first night in the upstairs tenement is a nightmare in which their year-old son is convulsing, and Harry wanders through the strange streets seeking a doctor. Barnard describes, 'a river of traffic ... a blaze of light and noise.' The tension builds as Harry jumps into this river:

...cars hooted, brakes screamed, a tram clanged very near him, he thought in an unheeded flash, "What would they do if I was run over?" but he was on the other bank, crossing another road, battling against a leisurely stream of people, lights, noise. There were many red lights...
That Barnard knew her city doesn't surprise us, but her evocation of the danger, panic and desperation that accompanied Harry marks her skill as a novelist. When Harry finds a doctor and convinces him to see Jackie it is too late and the child dies. The original city doctor had failed to diagnose the Bright's disease which is shown to be the cause of death. This, and the 'perfunctory sympathy' of the coroner, Harry sees as part of the general indifference of the city.

Barnard's descriptions of the city have much in common with those of Ruth Park's *Harp in the South* trilogy, and with Tennant's *Foveaux*. It is worth noting that, prior to the thirties, Australian fiction with an inner city setting was not common. But, despite the myth, which grew in the fiction of the nineties, the 'true' Australian (tough, resourceful, free with a helping hand) was not confined to the countryside; particularly in the Depression, which raised our consciousness of urban Australia. Harry is horrified when he sees their new residence: 'It beat him where the children would play. Not in the slip of backyard at the back among the garbage tins. Out in the road. They'd have to learn they couldn't go where they liked. There wasn't any place for them and they'd have to learn it' (68). The broader connotations of what this

1. City literature since Lawson's poem, 'Faces in the Street' and Lane's *The Working Man's Paradise*, has been limited, for the purposes of literary discussion, to the novels, Louis Stone's *Jonah* and Edward Dyson's *Factory 'ands*. Croft, in Hergenhan ed., has drawn our attention to the 1920s novels of Chester Cobb, which, he tells us, are both urban and modernist.

sentence suggests for the Munsters does not detract from its immediate impact. We recall that it was while playing 'out in the road' that Thady Darcy disappeared in Harp in the South, and that Roie's little girl, for that very reason, is required to play 'among the garbage tins.'

However, what was intended to be temporary accommodation becomes permanent, because it suits Ally:

Living in rooms might be a come down, but it let you out. You lived as other roomers did. Without effort she sloughed off all her housewifely duties. ... The rooms were dark and a bit of dust didn't show. Besides, people didn't drop in here, you met them in the street, standing in the doorway, at the little corner grocery, in the paper shop. (p.83)

This description of the residents of the inner city, how they live and how they guard their privacy and keep their 'good name', is too long to reproduce here. But, to all the other features of this many-faceted novel is added a cameo picture of urban life. Tenement dwellers are a special kind of people in whatever city they dwell, and Barnard faithfully captures this commonality of experience.¹

Lest the reader wonders how Knarf would have had access to this kind of detail about Sydney in the mid twentieth century, Barnard has covered herself by Knarf's recollection that 'Ord, who knew perhaps all that had been salvaged of the old Australia, had been his quarry' (18).

A measure of Barnard's strength as a writer is her description of the emotional drain on Harry of the poverty-induced quarrels with Ally. So far as we know, she had no personal knowledge of such feelings and yet, in the following lines, Harry's inner pain is palpable:

Every quarrel they had ever had, every hardship she had suffered, every wish unfulfilled, every disappointment, besides this new burden (a fourth pregnancy), ... were piled against him. And he was the guilty party. His attitude had made things worse, for it was at once an admission and an opposition. He had not given a word nor a gesture of tenderness, the tenderness that was still in his heart for her, only overlaid by cares and anxieties. He wanted to break through.

(pp.59-60)

However, the move from Toongabbie begins a time of deterioration for Ally that parallels the disintegration of her marriage and the worsening national situation as it affects Sydney. With the onset of the Depression '[t]he ice age was beginning. Paralysis crept by back channels through the city'(95). It suits Barnard's purpose to make Harry and Ally representative of the impotent victims of Sydney's downhill slide into war and revolution. The reader need not pity Ally and her female neighbours in their unquestioning ignorance of social issues; but we do pity Harry, who, even when he is enlightened about the history of the class struggle, 'feels impotent and powerless to act. In Barnard's portrayal of 'straw caught in the tide' the character of Harry Munster, in all his existential bewilderment, is one of the more unforgettable in Australian fiction.

Harry is described as 'lean and hard', as opposed
to Arnie's city-bred softness, and this gives him an advantage in the fight which follows his retrenchment. His physical fitness is mentioned more than once but it is soon to be pitted against the hardness of the city. During a fruitless search for work Harry stops to feel the pavement: "Hard", he thought, "City streets are hard." As such they become a metaphor for life. Following a spell of relief work and a short burst of revolutionary zeal, he sinks into apathy:

He realised that he was not himself a revolutionary or a leader. His heart sickened and the ferment in his mind staled. He began with renewed despair to long for a job, to rest in that job, and think no more of bright unattainable futures and the long hard pull of social reconstruction. (p.121)

Here, Barnard fulfills the criteria for characterisation in a novel of realism as laid down by Weber and Lukács. Harry is 'empirically observable and historically recognisable,' but in the words 'heart' and 'mind' is revealed his existential wholeness. By the time Olaf Ramsay finds him a job, five years have passed and his innocence (which even the war had not affected), his naivete, his very humanity has been vitiated. And the reader lives through it all with him, subjectively, as it is presented to us.

A recurring subjective image in Tomorrow is of unscaleable walls. In the world of the twenty-fourth century we saw how, to Ren and his peers, despite their living in a society where everything was ordered and orderly and nobody knew want, 'the walls of (their) world had never
seemed so unsealeable.' Living in Sydney in the thirties, Harry Munster 'felt he was shut in by high, glassy walls, on which he could make no impression' (75). And, when Harry is unemployed, Ally, although willing to seek a job, is afraid to venture out of her street, because 'she was paralysed by the sudden unsealeable vastness of the world as she saw it' (103). The image reflects the complexity of human affairs. The feeling of impotence in the individual may be induced from without by the strictures of the State, but this kind of person may feel hemmed in because they are ineffectual or apathetic. In *Tomorrow* there is a suggestion that they are this way as a result of being uneducated and uninformed, a situation revealed by the zeal of the soap-box orators in the Sydney Domain. Nevertheless, as we see in the future society of *Tomorrow*, this aspect of human nature has remained to thwart the efforts of the reformers.

It can be appreciated from what has been revealed so far that, as readers, we are given two choices in our apprehension of the character of Harry Munster, the objective one that we saw through Ord's eyes, or the subjective appreciation of his inner world which Barnard, in the guise of Knarf, has provided. Finally, we learn that, while a life may be socially determined to some degree, there are far more complex factors involved in the making of a person's happiness. Personal relationships, a human's innate disposition, his/her social conditioning, state of health, level of intelligence, and so on, are
all shown to be relevant, and the author overlooks none of these in her portrayals of Harry and Ally. With such an understanding it is not surprising that in *Tomorrow* there is no hint of existentialist nihilism, and in the wide canvas of the novel we are left with the suggestion that 'somewhere across the impenetrable marshes, the Right Answer marches parallel to the struggling column of humanity'(239).

Formally, *Tomorrow* holds in fine balance two sets of concentric circles that interlock. The simple pattern of the strife-ridden individual within his strife-ridden society, within that of humanity as a whole, holds true in the Munster story. But the pattern is upset in the frame novel by the characters of Knarf and Ren. Ren is an unhappy individual within an (ostensibly) functionally perfect social system; while his father is simply an unhappy individual who lives, in his mind, within the three circles he has created beginning with Harry. Diagrammatically, however, the three 'Harry' circles exist within the circle we would designate 'Knarf'. *Tomorrow* is unique in Australian literature, and perhaps in that of the wider world. The exposition of the narrative is as complex as the form of the novel. For this reason it is counterproductive to attempt to classify this work within a genre. Like David Carter, one is obliged, then, to talk of 'genre fault-lines.'

We should allow Barnard the last word: 'People love labels and the case for no labels was difficult to

CONCLUSION

I have noted that there was a burgeoning of the Australian novel in the thirties and forties. In *Tomorrow*, Marjorie Barnard causes her author in the twenty-fourth century to say: 'The surge of novels - what was that but an attempt to get the chaos of circumstances into some sort of shape, using every method of attack, every ingenuity. A natural organic reaction' (81).

The truth behind Barnard's words is the essence of this dissertation. There was world-wide chaos and there were authors already involved in a creative exploration of human existence. These writers now began to feel that they had a social duty to use their talents in an analytical way, and to establish a dialogue with their readers via their characters. If they were not able to solve contemporary problems, at least they would set their readers thinking. References to the act of thinking (or not thinking) recur frequently in these novels. But the second half of Barnard's statement, too, is relevant to this thesis. In the process of 'using every method of attack, every ingenuity' these authors were thrust into literary modernism, producing works which have many parallels with their Northern counterparts. They reflect an historic and global sensibility, yet remain essentially Australian.

However, these novels of the Depression and War era are not trapped in their Zeitgeist. They are both a part of the ongoing process of humanity and a part of Australian literary evolution. But the chief reason we should take
a closer look at them is their continuing relevance. If they were merely, as has been claimed, a kind of documentary journalism, or even a literary rendering of contemporary social conditions, they would be frozen in time like a page from a 1940s Sydney Morning Herald.

Like many works of literature that retain their immediacy for successive generations of readers, these novels contain aspects of human life that continue to be recognisable. If they take as their scaffolding the years of depression and war, and as their cladding the flaws in Western capitalism, they are furnished with the eternal strivings of mankind. What emerges from this study is the conclusion that human beings have spiritual needs that can rarely be met, indefinable needs that drive them ever onward, to metaphorically turn the next corner or climb the next mountain. We have seen Eleanor Dark call these urgings 'unfailing goads and spurs' and Barnard create a magnificent passage calling in all the imaginary destinations that have beckoned men's souls through history. On the other hand, we have met characters who do not entertain such abstract thoughts, who see their happiness in the possession of a home or a job.

In uncovering the universal and literary aspects of these six novels in the face of their social orientation, many factors have had to be considered, such as social history; literary history and theory; certain details of the authors' life and work as they have bearing on the texts in hand; and not least, attitudes caused by Australia's geographical isolation. A single argument has
been neither possible nor appropriate. However, there is an overall thesis which asserts that the novels addressed here grew out of their authors' anxiety about the modern age, and concern for the future of capitalist society the inherent principles of which they saw as responsible for the recurring eruptions of wars, depressions and revolutions. Furthermore, it posits that, with the possible exception of *Upsurge*, whose ideological effectiveness I have questioned, the thrust of these novels is aesthetic and moral, rather than political.

Three major points have arisen during the study and exposition of this thesis.

1) Because of their common genesis certain affinities are to be found in these works, and these have been noted. Primarily, there is a strong authorial presence, beyond the role of narrator. Another is the exasperation shown by the authors with the unthinking masses, (Dark, Barnard, and Harcourt). Conversely, there emerges an opposing view from Tennant which suggests that the individual is ineffectual and that all personal effort is futile. In listing the areas of affinity we find a correlation of generative and formal concerns which allow us to make some general assertions about the literature of this period, essentially that it escapes earlier preoccupations of nationalism or of cringing colonialism. Nevertheless, I have said that the novels of the thirties and forties should not be collectively labelled because, despite their affinities, each speaks with the individuality of its author.
ii) This dissertation locates in most of these Australian novels a modernist sensibility, with aesthetic problems, stated and unstated, revealed as a major preoccupation. A synthesis of the moral and social with the aesthetic and formal has been located in the characterisation by a critical method which draws on the 'criticism of consciousness' practised by the Geneva critics, as well as certain writings by Kierkegaard and Georg Lukács. The discussion has been, of necessity, sociological but also literary and existential, the aim of the analysis interpretive rather than judgmental. The passages quoted are chosen as those which best reveal the essence of the author's expression in each novel, and their grasp of the possibilities inherent in language for representing the abstract as well as the factual.

iii) I have sought to demonstrate that the social orientation of these works is genetic rather than journalistic. The existential and the social aspects of an individual's life are shown to be inseparable. Society is seen, too, as germinative, a consideration of it growing in the author's mind to cover history, philosophy, art and all that concerns humanity as a whole. This thesis posits a view that realism in a novel is, in most instances, essential to credibility; and, conversely, that reality is subjectively and imaginatively modified to serve the author's purpose. I would like to conclude with a quotation from Ian Reid with whose work this research was begun. Although Reid's purpose was to demonstrate that, contrary to learned opinion, the Depression did have a catalytic
effect on the authors of Australia and New Zealand, he does not lose sight of the fact that social realism in a novel is, by its nature, subjective and dissimilar to that in other novels which describe the same phenomena. He writes:

Although what a work of fiction expresses is not unmediated social reality but a personal vision of it, that vision is itself shaped by the reality to a substantial, if ultimately indeterminate, extent. Except with downright fantasy, where the mimetic elements are quite subordinate (and none of the fiction discussed is of that kind), the subjective factor in a writer's representation of the actual has much the same effect as a staining liquid rubbed into wood, modifying the original material but usually in such a way that the grain, the social fibre, is all the more evident.  

(Fiction and the Great Depression, p.130)
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

NOVELS and SHORT FICTION:


Ride On Stranger, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, Sirius Edition, 1980. (First published by Angus and Robertson, 1943.)

also:


POEMS:


**ARTICLES:**


**Primary and Secondary Sources (General)**

**BOOKS, PARTS of BOOKS, and ARTICLES relevant to this thesis:**


Writeings on Australian Literature and History.

**BOOKS AND ARTICLES:**


MOORE T. Inglis, Social Patterns in Australian Literature, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1971.


Critical Works on the authors.

Eleanor DARK:


M. Barnard ELDERSHAW:


Kylie TENNANT:


