

‘This long and shining finger of the sea itself:’ Sydney Harbour and regional cosmopolitanism in Eleanor Dark’s *Waterway*

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In Eleanor Dark’s novel *Waterway* (1938), Professor Channon is prompted by the ominous international headline ‘Failure of Peace Talks’ to imagine the world from a global perspective (120). Channon feels himself metaphorically ‘lifted away from the earth ... seeing it from an incredible distance, and with an incredible, an all-embracing comprehension’ (119-20). This move outward from a located perspective to ‘a more detached overview of a wider global space’ signifies a cosmopolitan viewpoint, ‘in which the viewing subject rises above the place-bound attachments of the nation-state to take the measure of the world as a wider totality’ (Hegglund 8-9). Yet even this global view is mediated by Channon’s position from within ‘a great island continent alone in its south sea’ (121). Gazing from a ‘vast distance,’ he views Europe as ‘the patches where parasitic man had lived longest and most densely,’ and from which humankind ‘went out to infect fresh lands’ (120). This description of old world Europe as ‘parasitic’ provides a glimpse of resistant nationalism, reflecting Channon’s location within one of the ‘fresh lands’ affected by colonisation. Channon is ultimately unable to sustain a ‘Godlike’ perspective in this scene, desiring ‘nothing but to return’ to local place (121). Although his view initially ‘vaults beyond the bounds of national affiliation’ (Alexander and Moran 4), this move outward does not ‘nullify an affective attachment to the more grounded locations of human attachment’ (Hegglund 20). Channon’s return to the ‘shabby home ... of his own humanity’ brings a renewed sense of connection to ‘the sun-warmed rail of the gate’ and ‘the faint breeze [which] ruffled the hair back from his forehead’ (122).

This scene can be read as symbolic of Dark’s own perspective, which is both interested in the wider world and shaped by more regional commitments to local place and to the nation. This essay demonstrates the complexity of Dark’s position by presenting a reading of *Waterway* as an example of what Jessica Berman calls ‘regional cosmopolitanism.’ The concept of regional cosmopolitanism challenges the idea that writers who are ‘committed to a region and to developing its national consciousness must turn away from the world’ (Berman 144). Instead it offers a more dialectical understanding of cosmopolitanism as involving ‘multiple or flexible attachments’ (Walkowitz 9) and a balance of ‘rootedness and detachment’ (Arthur xxii). This position has been called ‘rooted cosmopolitanism,’ ‘partial cosmopolitanism,’ ‘critical cosmopolitanism,’ ‘regional modernism’ and ‘regional cosmopolitanism’ (see Appiah; Walkowitz; Alexander and Moran; Herring; Berman; Arthur). The latter term seems most apt in capturing Dark’s commitment to both the ecological dimensions of the local landscape and to a nation that had a ‘position of relative weakness or subordination within international or global cultural systems’ (Carter ix).

Waterway provides a strong example of a cosmopolitan commitment that remains partial to local place. Dark’s novel is poised between the allure of international modernity and the commitments of settler-colonial nationalism in the interwar period. Dark brings these contradictory impulses to bear upon the contested site of Sydney Harbour, which she uses both to celebrate the romance of modernity and to point to the discriminatory relations that shaped Australia’s position as a ‘provincial’ nation. The novel’s investment in distinctly national projects, including the struggle to distinguish Australian interests from those of Britain and to

locate a settler-colonial sense of ‘indigeneity,’ is registered in the persistent imagery of the soil, which rivals that of the sea.

Regional cosmopolitanism offers a framework for reading Dark’s work that accommodates her commitment to both the ‘sea’ of internationalism and the ‘soil’ of national or local place. Until recently, Dark has predominantly been viewed as a writer concerned with national problems. Critics within twentieth-century Australian literary studies—a discipline conceived as a ‘nationally bounded field of inquiry’ until the late 1980s (Dixon and Rooney xiii-xiv)—mostly explored Dark’s work in national terms. They emphasised biographical details such as her choice to live in the regional locations of the Blue Mountains and Southeast Queensland hinterland, reading these against the lives of more ‘cosmopolitan’ figures such as Christina Stead. Drusilla Modjeska’s recovery in the 1980s of the details of Australian women writers through a materialist-feminist methodology is an example of this kind of reading of Dark’s work. Although extremely important in bringing renewed attention to women writers who had been sidelined by the postwar Australian academy, Modjeska’s argument in *Exiles at Home: Australian Women Writers 1925-1945* (1981) nonetheless relies upon the limiting spatial tropes of nation and home, and does not fully account for the spatial complexity in Dark’s novels.

More recent accounts, influenced by the transnational turn and by the ‘new modernism’ studies, have sought to liberate Dark’s work from a solely national framework. For example, Susan Carson explores *Waterway* in terms of ‘the transmission of new cultural, political and social convictions that swirled around the world in the 1930s’ (‘Paris’ 229). Similarly, Brigid Rooney explores the ‘broader itinerary of travelling modernisms, trafficking ... in multiple directions’ in *Waterway* and identifies both ‘internationalist’ and ‘broadly socialist’ styles in Dark’s work (101, 108). These readings have contributed to ‘loosening up the chronology and geography of the nation’ (Dimock 4) in studies of Dark’s writing. As both Carson and Rooney point out, however, the national scale remains extremely important in Dark’s novels. How can we account for the persistence of the idea of the nation in her work, and what kinds of reading strategies best accommodate her unique combination of the local, national and global?

Regional cosmopolitanism offers a form of reading that neither denies the presence of the global scale nor subsumes the local and national. Critics have applied a range of terms to Dark’s work in order to capture the confluence of local, national and international influences, including geomodernism (Carson, ‘Girl’s Guide’; ‘Sydney’), regional modernism (Ailwood; Cooper) and traumatic cosmopolitanism (Gildersleeve). This essay adds to these accounts by both acknowledging the moments when *Waterway* moves beyond the bounds of the nation, and noting its frequent returns to regional commitments. It avoids the tendency of more extreme formulations of transnational or world literature to absorb local differences, instead providing a ‘scale-sensitive’ mode of reading that is attentive to the particular conditions of interwar Sydney (Dixon, ‘National’ 8). As Australian literary studies responds to transnational paradigms and seeks to liberate writers from purely national frameworks, it is important that scholars remain cognisant of the uneven conditions that prompted writers such as Dark to maintain a strong sense of local and national attachment.

Dark’s position is not an untroubled one. Her attachment to local place is implicated in the settler-colonial desire to locate ‘an unmediated encounter between the settler and the land’ (Tout, ‘Nationalists’ 1) and, as such, it contributes to the ongoing structures of indigenous dispossession. It is not the purpose of this essay to uphold Dark’s position as ideal or utopian, but rather to explore its distinctiveness as a means of negotiating the competing tensions of the interwar period.

Sydney Harbour: ‘haled with glamour and romance’

In *Waterway*, the tension between nationalism and internationalism converges in the contested space of Sydney Harbour. The novel is organised around the harbour, and follows the interconnected lives of several characters that live in Watson's Bay and interact over the period of one day. As a coastal suburb situated on Sydney's South Head, Watson's Bay operates as a liminal space in the novel; it is connected both to the inner harbour and to the Pacific Ocean. It is a place that Dark knew well. She lived for a time at 'Benison,' the waterfront house of her father Dowell O'Reilly and stepmother Molly in Vaucluse, a suburb neighbouring Watson's Bay (Wyndham 53-4). As Pamela Bell notes, the view across the harbour described by many characters in *Waterway* is similar to that from Benison's verandah (76-7).

By representing the harbour, Dark is able to interrogate aspects of 1930s intellectual culture. In particular, she attempts to moderate cultural nationalism by presenting it in tension with cosmopolitan humanism and by subtly challenging fears about imported culture. Dark's work has much in common with that of influential cultural nationalist commentators such as P. R. ('Inky') Stephensen, Vance and Nettie Palmer, and Miles Franklin. Like these writers, Dark believed in the importance of a distinctive national culture that would give voice to 'the spirit of a Place' (Stephensen 15). Dark corresponded with a number of these figures, and Stephensen published her second novel, *Prelude to Christopher* (1934). Despite warnings from her literary agent that this would jeopardise the publication of her work overseas, Dark went to great lengths to have that novel published locally (Brooks with Clark 128; Dixon, 'Australian fiction' 243-4). For his part, Stephensen described Dark as 'a novelist undoubtedly of world calibre' (110-1).

Dark's experimental literary style, however, which includes a form of stream-of-consciousness, compressed timeframes and cinematic flashbacks, complicates her inclusion amongst cultural nationalists. In general, cultural nationalist writers and commentators resisted literary modernism, arguing that only realism had 'the potential to communicate to the nation as a whole' (During 15). They associated modernism with a declining European culture, and suggested it went 'against the grain of our potentially-expansionist Australian culture' (Stephensen 56). Dark's use of vernacular modes such as international magazine romance also drew criticism from Nettie Palmer and M. Barnard Eldershaw (Brooks with Clark 143; Barnard Eldershaw 190).

In *Waterway*, Dark gives voice to the cultural nationalist position through the character of Roger Blair, who acts as a mouthpiece for Stephensen's ideas (Brooks with Clark 125). Roger is editor of *The Free Voice*, a magazine dedicated to 'the fostering of a national consciousness' (76). He believes that the nation is at risk of losing its 'blessed isolation' (80) due to the consumption of 'cheap syndicated trash,' which promotes 'an American film star ... a Paris-trained mannequin' above 'the real wealth of the soil, of man-power, of brain-power' (76-7). As a cultural nationalist commentator, Roger expresses antipathy towards both the encroachment of British imperialism and the proliferation of American mass culture (Dixon and Kelly xviii). He regrets that his landlady's daughter's 'petal-smooth and sun-tinted face' is distorted by 'shoddily "fashionable" clothes ... the formal corrugations of a "perm.," ... greasy unguents ... stilt heels' and asks, 'How were you to impose culture upon people of this mentality, concerned only with clothes ... and the latest Clark Gable talkie?' (18).

Dark contests aspects of Roger's ideas, however, through framing him as a slightly comical, hyperbolic figure. In one scene, Roger's preoccupation with the lofty question of how 'we can awaken a national consciousness' is satirised as a 'knock on the door sent him leaping for his trousers' (80). Similarly, in a romantic scene between Roger and Lesley Channon in the Botanical Gardens, Lesley responds to his political pronouncements with amusement, feeling 'her lips move involuntarily into a smile with which she usually listened to Roger's

dissertations' (201). When Roger proposes to Lesley in the same scene, and raises the question of having children, she responds with a 'half-hysterical shriek of laughter' to his didactic statement, "'This country must be populated. We must have at least ten million",' saying, "'Roger, I'm not a microbe'" (203). Lesley's responses temper Roger's 'dissertations' and invite the reader to adopt an ironic distance from his ideas. While Roger articulates a nationalist message of 'populate or perish,' Lesley offers a moderating view that represents the voice of the colonial woman who was expected to fulfil these masculinist ideas.

Professor Channon presents a more direct challenge to Roger's cultural nationalism. In a letter to Roger, Channon argues that a commitment to global humanity should trump patriotism:

Love of one's own country is, or has been, a natural emotion, but we must grow out of it. Its danger lies in the fact that it reaches a certain pitch, it embraces a certain conception – and then it attempts to remain static. But love is a living thing ... and like every living thing it must grow or it must decay. It must deepen, strengthen, enlarge, until it embraces far more than one country, one people, one ideal ... the spirit, finally, is the one thing that can't be stifled ... it is not national, or even international, but super-national ... (78-9, italics in original)

Whereas Roger is primarily concerned with the problem of developing a national culture, Channon argues that the problems of the modern age—and its solutions—are universal ones. Dark obviously found the idea of a '*super-national*' ethic that could '*embrace ... far more than one country*' extremely appealing, particularly as the threat of another global war drew near. She explores similar ideas in her wartime novel, *The Little Company* (1945), suggesting through one character that the central question of the age is, 'do you believe in human beings, or don't you?' (128). If Dark was interested in a more capacious, human-based attachment that would move beyond the limitations of patriotism, she seems to have faced difficulty in fully realising this in her novels. The fact that Channon's character is killed in the climax of *Waterway* suggests she was unsure of how to reconcile these global ideas with more national or local problems.

It is in her representation of Sydney Harbour that Dark presents her most effective challenge to cultural nationalism. A number of characters view the harbour as 'haled with glamour and romance' (37), describing it as 'this long and shining finger of the sea itself' (36). This image of the harbour as a 'finger' suggests its constituent relationship within the larger 'body' of water that represents international space. Denis Harnet, the Harbour Pilot's son, articulates the interconnection between the harbour and other places:

There was always something to watch. There were the great ships that went to America and to England. And the colliers and the coastal steamers that went south to Melbourne or north to Brisbane and Cairns; there were island ships bringing in copra and coconuts from the Solomon Islands, and ships from Suva and Rabaul, from Sourabaya and Singapore. (97)

Dark's listing of Australia's Pacific neighbours within an imperial network, 'Suva ... Rabaul ... Sourabaya ... Singapore,' links the harbour with the romance of exotic locations. Denis' description positions Sydney as part of a hemispheric Asia Pacific, as well as connected to the more traditional vectors of America and England, and to other sub-national spaces such as Melbourne and Cairns. It suggests the 'diffuse ... relations that Australians ... had with Asia, Europe and America as well as Britain' (Matthews 8), and anticipates contemporary uses of Sydney Harbour as a point of transnational exchange in novels such as Gail Jones' *Five Bells* (2011) and Michelle de Kretser's *Questions of Travel* (2013).

It is significant that Dark structures *Waterway* around coastal Sydney, given the cultural nationalist emphasis on pastoral settings during this period. In looking for a source of homegrown, 'indigenous' settler culture that would register resistance to 'the incursions of modernity,' cultural nationalists advocated 'a return to what they believed were the unique values of their national heritage' in the bush-realist tradition of the 1890s (Matthews 11). Stephensen describes the work of Henry Lawson and Banjo Patterson as 'truly indigenous,' for example (29). As critics have shown, this pastoral vision was largely a reconstruction that had little purchase on the lives of modern, urban Australians of the 1930s (Dixon, 'Australian fiction' 238-9). *Waterway* acts to reorient the cultural imaginary outwards towards the harbour rather than inwards towards the centre. The Harbour Pilot Ian Harnet thinks of the harbour as 'the main highway of the city' (36). In the 1930s highways held utopian symbolism, and were envisioned, according to Edward Dimendberg, as 'a spatial superconductor for transporting vehicular traffic in an unimpeded, frictionless flow' (Dimendberg 93-4; Dixon, 'Shooting' 42). Significantly, it is the harbour, 'this gleaming waterway,' and not 'the long, tortuous street which led between high canyon-sides of buildings, along the route where once bullock teams had plodded a bush track' that is depicted as Sydney's 'main highway' (36). Harnet's dismissal of the Great Western Highway, with its pioneer history of 'bullock teams' and 'a bush track,' in favour of the harbour, suggests a subtle repudiation of the pastoralism of cultural nationalism.

In her representation of the harbour as a site of international traffic, Dark challenges cultural nationalist anxiety about the influence of foreign culture. Cultural nationalism was often articulated through the economic metaphors of import and export, which relied on 'a simple binary: the good was recognised as indigenous, the bad as foreign' (Matthews 12). This rhetoric was, paradoxically, part of an international response of 'reactive cultural nationalisms in the literary provinces' (Matthews 9-12; Dixon and Kelly xviii; Dixon, 'Australian fiction' 239). Through combining the metaphors of import and export with the racialised language of hygiene, cultural nationalists suggested that foreign, imported ideas could 'infect' or 'taint' local culture (Morris 125-6). Stephensen wrote with anxiety about Australia's openness to international modernity: 'Ships come and go, from Europe, America, Asia, and Africa ... All is in flux. Can it be a cultured nation?' (11-2). In contrast, Dark imbues the traffic of international goods with a sense of glamour, as Ian and Winifred connect romantically over the 'odd mixtures' of imported raw materials shipped into the harbour, '*Charcoal, coconuts, coke, copra ... salt, sand, sugar, sulphur*' (38, italics in original).

Through another character, Lois Denning, Dark associates the harbour with the romance of European explorer history. Lois reflects that modern voyages by ferry are 'lit with glammers which had also attended the journeys of Marco Polo and Diaz, Vasco de Gama and Magellan, Christopher Columbus and Captain Cook!' (113-4). In an arresting description, she also imbues the harbour with a modernist sense of madness and eccentricity:

You had the strange movement of the sea under your feet, and the salty breath of it blowing into your lungs; you saw gulls and heard their wild crying; for a few minutes as you passed the Heads there was nothing between you and the edge of the world but blue ocean. Even when you disembarked you were only on a mere shaving of land; the quiet water of the harbour lapped it on one side, and the vast breakers of the ocean assaulted it on the other, and something of their magic blew over the place like a spell, so that people discarded, not only their clothes, but their haste and their problems too ... Men, women and children walked the streets in sunburned semi-nakedness; merry-go-rounds spun madly; in the aquarium vast captive sharks swam endlessly in terrible and sullen longing for the sea ... the

whole population succumbed to the nostalgia of an ocean-faring race, and went down to the sea ... (114)

Lois' compelling description of Sydney-siders existing 'on a mere shaving of land' with 'nothing between you and the edge of the world' romanticises the transient origins of an 'ocean-faring race.' The description connects more with the picture that Stead paints of a 'Sea People' on an 'island continent ... in a water hemisphere' in the preface of *For Love Alone* (1945), than with the cultural nationalist yearning for a return to the pastoral tradition. While cultural nationalists responded to the heightened mobility of the modern moment by seeking rootedness in place, Dark depicts Sydney as a place of 'unsettled settlers, a people whose history was movement' (Matthews 9). Given its emphasis on transience and movement, it is little wonder that critics have focused on *Waterway* as the novel in Dark's oeuvre that is most open to a transnational reading.

Sydney Harbour: 'a menace, a terror, death waiting'

Dark not only represents Sydney Harbour as a site of glamour, but also as a place where various forms of international traffic converge and even collide. Dark's interest in Australia's colonial history meant that she was highly aware of the harbour as a contact zone in which people of different nationalities, classes and racial backgrounds came into contact in the early years of British invasion. *Waterway* was published in the same year as the Sesquicentenary, and the celebrations for this event called attention to Sydney Harbour as an originary site of colonial Australia. As Rooney notes, the celebrations frequently collapsed the colonial events of 1788 with the modern moment of 1938, creating a sense of 'mythic simultaneity of time in visual narratives of progress' through the symbolic site of the harbour (106-7). *Waterway* similarly reminds readers of the close proximity between colonial and modern temporalities. As Ian tells his son, the era of Captain Cook 'wasn't much more than a hundred and fifty years ago' (41) and Dark conveys this sense of folded time at the beginning of the novel, too, when Oliver Denning looks at the harbour and reflects that it 'was as quiet now ... as it must have been on the dawn of that day a hundred and fifty years ago' (11). Dark threads extracts of archival material throughout *Waterway*, including descriptions of the First Fleet's arrival in Sydney Cove. She also frequently refers to material relics of Australia's sea-faring past, including the memorial to Robert Watson, the anchor commemorating the wreck of the Dunbar, and a ship named the *Captain Cook*. In the present day, Ian watches a ship arriving on the horizon, and associates it with 'an idea of effort and of conquest' (40). The ship appears insubstantial, coming 'over the rim of the world, out of infinity like a wraith,' fashioned of 'pearly insubstantial mist' (39). It is at once a modern ship carrying imported goods and a ghostly reminder of the First Fleet's arrival in Sydney Cove. Through these moments of synchronicity, Dark positions settler culture as intrinsically modern and international in its very origins.

Dark also undercuts this narrative of colonial progress by presenting the harbour as a site of converging crisis. The historical extract with which Dark begins the novel includes the ominous '*shouts of defiance and prohibition*' from people within the Eora nation crying '*Warra warra—Go away, go away*' (10, italics in original), resonating with the 1938 Aboriginal Day of Mourning that Stephensen helped to organise. Dark is critical of some of the destructive effects of colonisation too, describing the city as a malignant growth whose 'parent cells ... fastened upon the land' (11) with the arrival of its 'invaders' (383). As critics have noted, Dark's work, particularly *The Timeless Land* trilogy (1941-53), goes further than that of many of her contemporaries in recognising colonisation as an act of invasion and challenging the idea of *terra nullius* (Carson, 'Conversations' 193). In *Waterway*, Dark criticises 'civilised man' for bringing new diseases to Australia 'like spectres in his train' (56-7), an idea that anticipates her portrayal of the disastrous effects of smallpox on Aboriginal people in *The Timeless Land*.

Through drawing attention to the negative effects of colonial invasion, Dark challenges utopian ideas of global modernity, suggesting that international traffic involves discriminatory power relations rather than equivalent forms of exchange.

In *Waterway*, the harbour is not only figured as a site of historical violence, but also of imminent local and global conflict, further conveying Dark's skepticism of utopian understandings of international modernity. Denis is disturbed by the sight of a battleship on the harbour: 'It made you feel queer because you could see its beauty, and yet you could feel its evil; your heart didn't know which way to turn—to admire it, to hate it' (98). The presence of the battleship reminds readers of the potential for Australia to be drawn into a second global war. David Carter suggests that many Australian writers of the period saw themselves as facing significant crisis due to the sequence of historical catastrophes that included the Depression, the growing threat of international fascism, and the possibility of world war (167-8). Although this global conflict does not fully arrive by the end of *Waterway*, the harbour does become the site of local tragedy, when the narrative climaxes in a collision based on the 1927 Greycliffe ferry disaster. In this moment, 'the bright harbour [was] no longer a picture for you to gaze at, but a menace, a terror, death waiting' (311). This collision punctures Ian's utopian vision of the frictionless flow of traffic along the water highway, transmuting the harbour into a site of conflict.

Waterway not only draws attention to some of the uneven structures of colonial modernity but also participates in them. As a settler-colonial writer of the interwar period, Dark seems blind to some of the ways in which her novel colludes in the ongoing displacement of Aboriginal people, even as it tries to acknowledge this. By fusing the colonial past with the modern present, Dark attempts to position settler Australians as the inheritors of cultural legitimacy, contributing to the broader project of 'settler indigenisation' within settler-colonial nationalism (Tout, 'Nationalists' 2). In the opening scene of *Waterway*, Oliver imagines Sydney Harbour from the point of view of an Eora man witnessing the arrival of the First Fleet: 'You could become a different kind of man, tall and deep-chested, black-skinned and bearded, standing upon some rocky peak with the dawn wind on your naked body, your shield and spear and throwing-stick in your hands' (11). This scene prefigures the opening of *The Timeless Land*, in which Bennilong watches the arrival of Captain Cook and, subsequently, the First Fleet. While Dark's interest in the experience of Aboriginal Australians indicates a modernist 'openness to cultures' (Scott 26), it also expresses 'a deeply desired, fantasized identification with the Aboriginal figure' (Smith, 'White' 106). As Ellen Smith shows, settler culture frequently and paradoxically turned to Aboriginal culture to express 'fantasies about Australian whiteness' (106). The desire to literally inhabit the body of the Indigenous Other can be read as a form of 'obliteration' – one of the strategies of representation used by settler culture to replace Aboriginal people (Smith, 'Visual' 267-8). Dark's work reflects the settler-colonial desire to locate an authentic form of connection with the land; she wrote elsewhere that, through a 'slow, resistant merging with their environment,' settler Australians were becoming 'welded into our land as firmly as were the black Australians' ('Australia' 10, 12). As Rooney notes, *Waterway*'s climax of the ferry crash displaces Aboriginal dispossession onto a narrative of modern settler tragedy, performing 'a mythic back-projection, replacing black bodies with white' (109). Dark's novel is both attuned to and shaped by the uneven conditions of 1930s settler-colonial Australia, suggesting that readings of her work need to show a similar sensitivity to the particular conditions of interwar colonial modernity.

The soil and the sea

At the same time that *Waterway* seeks to moderate more polemical articulations of nationalism, it never fully retreats from the idea of the nation. The tension between international modernity

and a nation-based attachment is registered in contradictory sets of imagery that oscillate between the sea and the soil. In cultural nationalist writing, the soil was frequently used as a metaphor for Australia's distinctive cultural environment, into which British culture had been 'transplanted' (Tout, 'Stephensen' 73). This metaphor proved useful in capturing the idea that Australian culture would grow and adapt in response to local conditions. Both Stephensen and Nettie Palmer describe Australian culture as a plant struggling in 'stubborn soil' (24; 59). This imagery is re-articulated by Oliver in *Waterway*, who speculates on the 'exotic and unique and gorgeous blossoming' that might eventually come from 'a soil of what richness!' (116). In *The Timeless Land*, Dark ascribes similar imagery to Captain Arthur Phillip, who thinks of the new colony as a 'sickly offshoot' that is 'struggling for survival in an inhospitable earth' but which will eventually 'live to reach maturity' (238). The persistence of this organic, soil-based imagery suggests a strategic and ongoing commitment to the category of the nation in Dark's work.

It is easy to see why the cultural nationalist emphasis on landscape and local environment may have appealed to Dark. As Carson shows, Dark had a strong ecological and conservationist focus ('Conversations'). She was a keen gardener and both she and her husband Eric were involved in local bushwalking and mountain climbing clubs. In her novels, Dark often uses respect for the native landscape as an index by which to measure her characters. In both *Sun Across the Sky* (1937) and *Waterway*, the antagonists seek to exploit the natural environment for profit. In the earlier novel, Sir Frederick Gormley plans to destroy the native scrub and local fishing village so that he can create 'the most flourishing tourist resort in the state' (5). In *Waterway*, Arthur Sellman rejects his wife's request to invest in saving native gum trees (a reference to the Blue Gum Forest campaign of the 1930s), believing this impulse to be sentimental and economically unsound (Carson, 'Conversations' 191). In contrast, other characters are framed in positive terms because of their sense of connection to native Australian plants. In *Return to Coolami* (1936), Bret's mother Agatha is remembered for planting 'Silver Wattle,' a 'crooked Coolabah' and 'boronia with feathery leaves' on her pastoral property (138-9). In *Waterway*, Ian is first drawn to Winifred in a scene that captures her attachment to the local environment. He remembers her,

standing at the window and looking down at the Quay and the ferries and the people, turning round to say to him eagerly: "How good it smells! The salt water—and there's a man down there selling brown boronia! I've missed it all dreadfully—I've been abroad you know ..." (37-8)

This moment captures both the allure of international modernity, with its 'salt water' and opportunities for travelling 'abroad,' and a strong attachment to local place, represented through Winifred's attraction to the 'brown Boronia.' On a symbolic level, the scene suggests Winifred's commitment to local culture, represented through the native plant, and it can also be read autobiographically. Dark left the Australian continent for the first and only time in 1937, traveling to America for a two month visit that included meeting her New York publishers (Brooks with Clark 194). As a middle-class white woman Dark had the freedom to undertake some international travel, although this was constrained by the geographical isolation of Australia and the unstable conditions of the late 1930s; she had to abandon plans to visit England due to fears that she would be unable to return if global war began. Like Winifred, Dark seems to have been relieved to return to the 'brown boronia' of home.

One of the reasons why Dark's work remains so committed to the idea of the nation is that, like other settler-colonial nationalists in the interwar period, she was keen to distinguish Australia's interests from those of Britain. Her 1930s fiction frequently draws attention to the traumatic effects of the First World War, depicting it as a senseless 'orgy of organised and nauseated

killing' that unjustly involved Australian soldiers in defending British interests (*Coolami* 24). In *Waterway*, Roger recalls being drawn into the war by 'all the usual dope ... Flags and glory, King and Country' and asks '*what the hell did it have to do with us, anyhow?*' (204-5, italics in original). Another character, Jack Saunders, expresses resistance to being drawn into another 'of their bloody European wars!' (146). Lady Hegarty conveys similar anguish, reflecting on the futility of a mother caring for sons when 'some day they will be blown into small and bloody pieces by shell, or perhaps they will be gassed and their skins peel off ... or perhaps they will fall, blazing, from the sky' (270). These examples point to a position of resistant nationalism in Dark's work. As Hegglund points out, 'Anticolonial nationalisms, in particular, have needed to fight their struggles on the terrain of cartography, precisely because a bounded place on the map—a territorial nation-state—is the only form through which sovereignty and self-determination can be realized in the post-Versailles world' (82). Recent re-investigations of cultural nationalists such as Stephensen and the Palmers show that they thought of their projects in precisely these terms, drawing their ideas from anti-imperialist struggles in India, Mexico and Ireland (Jordan 92; Tout 'Stephensen' 84). Although Dark sought to mediate strident articulations of nationalism, she was nonetheless drawn to the anti-imperial dimension of cultural nationalism, and her attempt to delineate Australia's interests from those of Britain is one reason why her novels remain strategically invested in the idea of the nation.

The ferry crash in *Waterway* marks a transition in Dark's writing, from a more optimistic vision of international modernity to a growing awareness of the uneven structures that shaped Australia's 'peripheral' status within a world system. Dark's skepticism of modernity would only deepen in the postwar period, so that her novels of the late 1940s and 50s evoke a mid-century sense of 'exhaustion' with narratives of progress (Cooper 211). In *The Little Company* (1945), the conflict predicted in *Waterway* is realised in the form of the Japanese submarine attack on Sydney Harbour. In the latter volumes of *The Timeless Land* trilogy, *Storm of Time* (1948) and *No Barrier* (1953), the harbour not only connects the early colony to liberating democratic ideas from Europe, but also transports international goods such as rum, which are exploited by the capitalist classes. In her final novel, *Lantana Lane* (1959), Dark moves away from the site of Sydney altogether, writing about a small-scale farming community modelled on the town of Montville in Southeast Queensland's Sunshine Coast hinterland, where she and Eric lived between the years of 1951 and 1957. Dark draws attention to the effects of capitalist expansion on small-scale communities, writing: 'the little businesses [are] being swallowed by the big businesses, the suburbs being swallowed by the cities, the little nations crouching beneath the wings of the big nations from whose benevolent shelter they never will emerge' (81). This final novel is shaped by a deep realisation that, despite the claims of modernity to 'bring about universal peace, progress and plenty,' it in fact 'functions in a way that structures rather than diminishes uneven development and discriminatory power relations' (Young 611, 613). The regional cosmopolitanism of *Waterway* therefore captures Dark's position at a point of transition, from the more cosmopolitan, optimistic attitudes of the interwar period, to the increasingly regional commitments she developed in response to the dystopian aspects of postwar modernity.

Returning to harbour

The tensions between the regional and the international in *Waterway* are captured in the novel's ending. The conclusion is generally interpreted as resolving the novel's competing ideas through providing an image of national belonging. Rooney argues that the novel 'convenes around its scene of ferry wreck a predominantly national—albeit culturally progressive national—community of spectator-survivors,' and that this ending 'reifies and resolves contradiction' (108-9). Carter similarly argues that *Waterway* ends with an 'image of harmony,'

providing ‘final resolution’ through a ‘sense of Australian history as the story of civilisation in discord and harmony with its environment’ (182). Carter’s reading focuses particularly on Oliver’s concluding reflections about the Australian landscape:

But in the end, he found himself thinking, the land will win, the land must always win ... the land is eternal and it can wait ... Its rule is aloof and dispassionate – not an enmity, but a discipline with which to mould and drive its people, hurt them, gladden them, terrify or exhilarate them, kill or save them so that they must become, whether they wish it or not, shaped to some pattern which will make them one with it at last. (384)

Here Oliver expresses the settler-colonial desire to become ‘one’ with the land. And yet this is not the final image of the novel. Rather, *Dark* ends with the following description:

The long waterway ... lost itself in a western haze of paling gold, the bridge spanned it like a rainbow, the city skyline sank into a lavender-coloured mist. He turned with a sigh which was the released breath of contentment rather than regret, and looked down at the shadowed sea. A little sailing boat with all her canvas out was racing for the Heads, making for the harbour like a bird homing. (384)

The image of Ian turning from the westward gaze of the city and harbour to the Pacific Ocean is a curious one on which to end the novel. Robert Dixon suggests that Oliver’s ‘divided’ gaze, both ‘westward into ‘the heart of the land’’ and ‘eastward toward the Pacific,’ could signify ‘the conflicting demands of international modernism and cultural nationalism’ (*Australian Literature* 51). If this is the case, then it is significant that Oliver makes a final turn towards the open sea, that is, towards international modernity. What is the significance of the ‘little sailing boat with all her canvas out racing for the Heads’ that Oliver observes there? It could re-enact the historical moment with which the novel began, when the First Fleet entered the Heads of Sydney Cove, connecting modern Sydney to its colonial past in a moment of modernist synchronicity. The description of the boat ‘making for the harbour like a bird homing’ could alternatively be read as a cultural nationalist desire to shelter from international modernity within the confines of national culture. Another interpretation is that the boat ‘racing for the Heads’ evokes the romance and adventure of a transient ‘ocean-faring people’ who live for the moment of liminality in which, as Lois expresses it, there is ‘nothing between you and the edge of the world but blue ocean.’ I read the final image as one of return. Like Channon’s imaginative voyaging and Winifred’s return to the ‘brown boronia’ of local place, it signals a flexible attachment wherein one is able to move beyond the boundaries of the nation but also return to familiar ground ‘like a bird homing.’

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