

Chapter 14

Paris and beyond: the transnational/national in the writing of Christina Stead and Eleanor Dark

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In July 1937, two Australian writers left their respective homes and steamed across the Pacific and Indian Oceans to opposite coasts of the United States. Sailing west from Europe, Christina Stead (1902–83) and her partner, Bill Blake, reached New York on the *SS Aquitania*, while on the *Niagara*, Eleanor Dark (1901–85), with husband, Eric, crossed the Pacific to the west coast and made their way east to New York. Both women were in the great metropolis, the eternal city of the New World, but they did not meet. They had, in fact, lived in adjoining suburbs on Sydney Harbour a decade earlier, and there, as in New York, their paths did not cross. For a time in the 1930s, however, they shared an imaginative space that was informed by their Sydney adolescence and stimulated by inter-war global political and social change.

In the following discussion, I examine ways in which the writers conceptualised transnational experience in their fiction and negotiated the complexities of their own relationships with ‘home’. The transnational functions as a barometer of their encounters with aspects of modernity and indicates that their lives, and those of their readers, were increasingly complicated by the transmission of new cultural, political and social convictions that swirled around the world in the 1930s. Dark and Stead represented and influenced this transnational experience (albeit in different ways) and this focus provides a way of tracing imaginative connections between major Australian writers whose work is often discussed in quite different literary contexts. My examination of Dark’s *Waterway* and Stead’s *House of All Nations* indicates that the tensions of the transnational/national are important emotional, political and thematic dimensions of their fiction and an emphasis on the transnational opens a space for making connections between seemingly diverse Australian writing.

Although the women never met, their imaginative intersections resulted in narratives that intersected on questions of race, class and gender. Later in their careers, their lives would touch—but at arm’s length: Stead was a manuscript reader in the United States for Dark’s *The Timeless Land* (she imagined Dark as

an 'old girl'),¹ while Dark was asked, in 1952, to supply a reference for Stead's application for a Commonwealth Literary Fund award (which she did).² Points of connection, however, keep surfacing, especially in the context of the fraught geopolitics of the 1930s, when both writers understood that war might eventuate.

Figure 14.1: Christina Stead, 1940s.



National Library of Australia: nla.pic-an24717059.

Figure 14.2: Eleanor Dark, ca 1945.



Max Dupain, photographer, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

History records that in early 1937 Stead was uncertain as to her next move after nearly a decade away from Australia. She wrote from the cold of a London January that she was back in Britain and had completed a novel 'about banking and full of crooks'.³ She wondered just where she would live next: revolution had forced an early exit from Spain, a return to Paris was unlikely and although there was work in Moscow and Manhattan she preferred England, despite the climate. A few months later, life changed again and she moved to New York, where, in 1938, her virtuoso critique of international finance was published, the Paris-inspired *House of All Nations*. In Australia, Dark also had completed a novel, *Waterway*, a homage to Sydney, also published in 1938. Dark's two-month visit to the United States in 1937 was to be the only time she left the Australian continent. She returned, eagerly, to Katoomba and the large mountain home that became her base for the rest of her life, with the exception of winter retreats to a farm in Montville, in south-east Queensland.

In future accounts of their lives, the women would be ascribed very different positions in Australian literary history. Stead is confirmed as the most transnational of novelists: a contender for a Nobel Prize, who roamed the northern hemisphere for most of her life. Dark was one of Drusilla Modjeska's 'exiles' at home and a writer of historical fiction who focused on representations of Australian landscape and nation-building. The development of a gap between those who write 'at home' and 'away', however, tends to gloss over the ways in which the writers meet imaginatively, and travel through literature, in turn representing and influencing how Australians think about their world. In investigating the interstices of their work, I have employed Marc Augé's discussion of the spectator-traveller to help describe the extent to which these writers appear to conceive of and write transnationally while producing a location-based narrative.

Challenge

Dark and Stead were born a year apart (Dark in 1901, Stead in 1902) and they shared a beachside adolescence in wartime Sydney. Their mothers died when they were young: Stead's mother when Christina was two and Dark's when Eleanor was eight. They attended academically oriented high schools where their literary pursuits were encouraged. Dark published poetry and short stories in her twenties and her first novel, *Slow Dawning*, in 1932, and Stead's first publication, *The Salzburg Tales*, appeared in 1934. By the time these works were published, the authors were living on different continents and involved in relationships with men that extended their early interest in socialism. Stead's partner, Bill Blake, was a writer on Marxist economic theory and a sometime member of the Communist Party. Dark's husband, Eric, was likewise interested in Marxist politics and he and Eleanor supported a range of left-wing causes. It is not surprising, then, that the novels of the late 1930s, *House of All Nations*

and *Waterway*, each critique the exploitative global and local financial structures of mid twentieth-century capitalism. It is interesting to note, however, that this repudiation of capitalism reaches into the private realm via an assault on the economics of marriage.

In *Waterway*, Dark investigates the impact of global economic change on a settled and smug Sydney. Modern transport and communication systems meant that Sydney was a technologically advanced city at the centre of burgeoning international trade. Dark chooses, however, to depict the parochialism of the city and its somnolent ruling class as turning away from international affairs. Dark is fearful of the turmoil of Europe and she is especially nervous about fascism, but she insists that Australia must look out to the world and be part of an intellectual resistance to rampant nationalism. Her novel resonates with the tensions of this ambivalence as the class-stratified characters carefully pick their way in and across Sydney Harbour, almost in slow motion, as preparations for war intensify in Europe. Stead, alternatively, in *House of All Nations*, appears to embrace the growing chaos of Europe as she rushes the reader through the world of bull and bear financial markets driven by fabulous and bizarre characters who meet in Paris in the mid 1930s.

The authors therefore react to the conceptual double-act of early twentieth-century modernity, in which time and space simultaneously shrink and expand, in quite different ways. In his discussion of the relationship between place and space, Augé⁴ argues that the spectator–traveller experiences disorientation when passing through a landscape. This disorientation opens a gap that prevents the spectator from perceiving what he views as a place, or from ‘being fully present in it’.⁵ Stead, as a confessed wanderer—a spectator–traveller, in other words—never seems to be quite present in the European ‘place’ and this sense of dislocation is transferred to the fictional Paris of *House of All Nations*, where it induces a restlessness and intensity that frames the narrative action. Freed from national and regional boundaries, her narrative captures a cosmopolitan urgency that most fully articulates the transnational impulse. Like Stead, the characters are unsettled and mobile, so that national boundaries become nonsense. Such spectator–travellers inhabit a space that is a ‘rhetorical territory’,⁶ to continue Augé’s line of thinking, rather than a ‘place’—that is, the cast of *House of All Nations* shares an imaginative transnational space that is characterised by the discourse of finance.

In Dark’s work, however, there is an allegiance to place that seemingly overrides the activities of the assembled cast. Sydney, the city, is an eloquent voice in Dark’s writing and the harbour and its environs inform every aspect of the novel. At first glance, there appears to be no dislocation at work: the lengthy descriptions of the sea and landscape and the entanglement of character and site privilege a sense of place. At the same time, however, the characters continually

engage in an intellectual debate, either with themselves or with other characters, that ranges across international politics, labour conditions, class divisions and Australia's position as a modern nation, as they travel across the water or walk the foreshores of Sydney Harbour. The space they inhabit is almost disembodied but it is through this rhetorical territory that the characters become part of an international community of ideas.

A shared past

Sydney Harbour is at the centre of this imaginative process. Stead grew up in Watson's Bay and Dark lived, for a time, in Vaucluse, the next (and wealthier) suburb. Stead, like Dark's fictional children in *Waterway*, swam in the natural pools along the harbour's edge. At night, she listened to stories of Australia and far away places told by her naturalist father, David Stead. 'I was born into an ocean of story, or on its shores,' she says in writing about the way stories jump time and borders, 'the same thing could have happened anywhere; and anywhere it does.'⁷ She writes in *A Waker and a Dreamer* of David Stead's genius for verbiage so that on seeing one of his books, she says:

I am at home again...the whole landscape of childhood rises up, a marvellous real world, not bounded by our time, fragrant, colored by the books he liked...that landscape rising and depressing coasts, the deeps, the desert; the landscape had no time limits—it had 'giants and pygmies of the deep'.⁸

This sense of being in a marvellous other time, of the transfer of story from place to place, of the insubstantiality of the material world, describes Stead's own life as well as many of her narratives. Her father remarried when she was four years old and she became stepsister and carer for her siblings in an unconventional existence in which there was never enough money. David Stead's stories of his travels and his scientific pursuits further stimulated Christina's thriving imaginative life. It was living by the water, however, in full view of international shipping lanes, that made boarding a ship for England, when she was twenty-seven, 'so natural, because these ships were always in and out, in and out'.⁹

Dark, like Stead, was in the care of a father who was well known in intellectual and political circles. Dowell O'Reilly, a poet, novelist and teacher, married a distant relative when Eleanor was sixteen. Although Dark attended boarding school on Sydney's North Shore, she spent time with Dowell at his various lodgings, where household visitors included the poet Christopher Brennan. O'Reilly, like David Stead, often relied on a daughter to bring order to his home. Both girls became office workers for a time in the city area but when they reached their twenties their life patterns diverged dramatically. Stead decided that although she loved Sydney and that she was 'full of Australian culture', she

wanted to go abroad.¹⁰ Eleanor married Eric Dark in 1922 and she was living in Katoomba and settled as a doctor's wife when Stead left Australia in 1928. Dark was content to remain in the Blue Mountains, where she could have a settled home and walk and climb in the Australian bush. Her letters written during a tour of the United States in 1937 reveal her admiration of American open spaces, especially Yosemite National Park, but her reaction to New York is typical of her suspicion of the cosmopolitan crush:

The really revolting thing about it is, I think, the feeling one has about it is its *packed* population, and that of course is because being on an island it has not been able to spread outward at all and has had to go into the air and down into the bowels of the earth, so that when one is walking the streets one is conscious of sardine-like humanity not only all round one, but up above and below.¹¹

Dark's evident distaste for the compression of modernity resonates with the sense of physical freedom she so often associates with life in Australia. This ambivalence about modern life would find its way into her interrogation of 'modern' Australia in *Waterway*, when she celebrated the benefits of a modern attractive city in a peaceful landscape but critiqued the corrosive effects of parochialism and unchecked nationalism. If New York was to be *the* future, it would not be *her* future, and, after publication of *Waterway*, she spent more than a decade focusing on a historical trilogy of Australia, in which she would interrogate the 'idea of Australia', as she told her publisher.¹² Whereas Stead's interests were taken up with European politics and international writers in the 1940s, Dark promoted writing in Australia about Australia, if not a national literature. She told Jean Devanny in 1945:

Personally, I don't care if the rest of the world is interested in Australian literature or no...What concerns me is that Australian writers should contribute something of value to the literature of their country. This does not mean that I am advocating a narrow nationalism. Australia should be realised as part of the world. The writer's business is to interpret and record Australian conditions in a manner that will lead and guide with its implicit significance.¹³

Dark would always find it difficult to negotiate this realisation. Sydney in the 1930s, however, provided a brilliant location for an investigation of a national rhetoric of modernity and progress. In the white and monocultural space of *Waterway*, characters make their way around the harbour's edges to the city centre, as they ruminate on the difficulties of their lives. Their decision-making processes inevitably involve some form of interaction with harbour water or ocean, which becomes a device for the meeting of the old world and the new.

Ian Harnet, for example, revels in watching ships from afar reach Sydney and he looks at them 'with the eye of the landsman as things haloed with glamour and romance!'.¹⁴ This pleasure in adventure is, however, restrained and he is content to maintain the gap between land and sea, between place and space. The ships bring the imaginary of the wider world across the Pacific to Sydney but neither Harnet, nor any of the characters in the novel, feel the urge to leave Australia. In fact, Winifred Sellman, the only traveller in the novel, tells Harnet how glad she is to be back in Australia, almost echoing Dark's refrain during her American tour.

City spaces

Despite Dark's description of Sydney in *Waterway* as a 'quiet grey city',¹⁵ the outside world intrudes. Professor Channon reads of the failure of peace talks in Europe in the morning paper and understands that the 'greyish patch' in the newspaper (Europe) will soon burst into smoke and flame,¹⁶ and the inference is that Australia will be drawn into the conflict. As a progressive thinker who advocated the benefits of science and technology, Dark was nevertheless uncomfortable with the shrinking of time and space, made material in the development of the city skyline, and she wrote of this in an unpublished note:

When I was seventeen and saw Kingsford Smith arriving in Sydney after the first flight from England to Australia I felt that nations could never again be separate as they had been before, and this feeling became a conviction as the years passed. Now the mind puts a shadowy question mark after every thought of the future.¹⁷

How then to act in a time of war? Dark was a socialist and, while her political beliefs were not especially problematic in Katoomba in the 1930s, she seemed to suspect that her loyalty to Australia would be questioned at some point—and she was right. In 1938, however, she could allow her characters to become transnational subjects and express their support for international socialism and to relate to new ideas about environmentalism, workers' rights and gender equality. The growing international interest in conservation fitted well with Dark's preference for an outdoors life in which to be Australian was to hike, climb, drive, walk or swim through the landscape. At this point, the rhetorical territory of transnationalism could be fostered without endangering her sense of place.

Stead was also taken up with thinking about place at this time but, unlike Dark, she celebrated this unease: she was philosophical about her role as a wanderer, saying, '[I]t is like the uneasiness and loneliness felt by Russians, US Americans, Brazilians, who with, at their backs, the spaces and untamed land, seek Paris, the Riviera and New York?'¹⁸ Cities attracted wanderers (which perhaps explains Dark's discomfort in New York) and there are many such characters in *A House*

of All Nations. The novel tells the story of the downfall of a private bank, Banque Mercure, 'a sort of cosmopolite club for the idle rich and speculators of Paris, Madrid, Rio, Buenos Aires, New York, London and points farther east and west'.¹⁹ The bank is led by the fabulous Jules Bertillon, a wealthy playboy-banker whose international risk taking knows no bounds: it is entirely appropriate that the name 'Mercure' connotes Mercury, the classical god of merchants and messengers. The book's title refers not just to the bank itself but to a famous Parisian brothel of the period, neatly linking the worlds of prostitution and banking. The bank is, however, the geographical focus of the narrative: richly, if conservatively, appointed, its luxury creates an atmosphere of an illusory financial solidity. This is a novel in which interiors—of the bank, restaurants, bars, dining rooms and the occasional farmhouse—provide the structure against which the transnational game of finance is played. The bank's interconnecting secret passages throughout the Parisian quarter provide the scaffold for the movement of money around Europe and the United States, including drug running and white-slave operations between Africa and South America. None of this, of course, is a concern to the operators of the bank. As Jules Bertillon reminds his employee Aristede Raccamond, 'whoever heard of clean money?'.²⁰

Their money flows out of communist Russia and into international markets as Germany, France and Russia take market positions on the British pound sterling. This money has the power to cross race and class boundaries and produce subjects who inhabit a temporary hybrid nationality. Stead populates the work with close descriptions of racial and national stereotypes that are followed by accounts of the ways in which perceptions can lead one astray. Bertillon's trusted advisor, Michel Alphendéry, is a French Jew of German (Alsatian) parentage, and Brigid Rooney argues that Alphendéry is 'a familiar revolutionary—the deracinated, déclassé intellectual of the generation that, after the Dreyfus affair, defined the political activism of modernity's cultural intelligentsia'.²¹ Alphendéry certainly attempts to balance being both inside and outside the system and it is this mobility that makes him such an asset to Jules—and, one could say, such an attractive figure for Stead. He finds a perverse pleasure in lecturing working men at night while keeping the bank afloat during the day. He sees capitalism as a form of social organisation and he asks himself why he should wear his life away 'grubbing for rich men'.²² When the bank collapses, however, he immediately takes a position with another finance house. Alphendéry moves location but not occupation, much as did Stead and Blake when one of their banking colleagues was arrested in the United States.

Like Stead, Alphendéry is a wanderer who, like the money he moves, can disappear across borders. A liberal socialist of Jewish heritage, his cultural background is contrasted with other Jews, such as the grain merchant Henri

Léon, who 'knew no Yiddish. Coming from the Balkans, he spoke various Eastern tongues and the Ladino of the Jews exiled from Spain';²³ and the bankers Franz Rosenkrantz and Franz Guildenstern, who claim: 'We in international business, are never in a foreign country. The market place, the exchange booth is our home...France is just a foothold to do business in. What is there in it to hold the soul of man?'²⁴ The transnational cosmopolitanism of financial exchange becomes a rhetorical territory in which hybrid languages signify the displacement and time is marked by the opening and closing of the major stock exchanges of the world.

It is obvious that Stead does not unilaterally condemn the amoral world of Banque Mercure, despite the opening credo in which she frames the cynicism and corruption of the novel's main characters. There is a fondness for the charming and desperate characters who stride across the bank's foyer and a humour that lightens the economic wrangling between Jules and Michel or many of the bank's clients or friends. This, of course, could have been a strategic move on Stead's part. She and Blake worked for some years at the Travelers' Bank in Paris, on which Banque Mercure's activities were based. Blake was deeply implicated in the financial dealings of the bank and he resigned only three months before the collapse of the business in 1935. Many years later, Stead said that *House of All Nations* was not 'an attack on the system, it's a picture of the system...there's a certain amount of amusement and love in a way, of the system. I'm not a polemic writer.'²⁵ Hazel Rowley, however, points out that the American-owned bank had operated for some time on a legal and illegal basis, noting that 'it is plain that she [Stead] was perfectly aware of the illegality of the proceedings'.²⁶

By this time, Stead had travelled a long way from her youth in Watson's Bay, but the community of international finance offered her a stimulating framework for social critique. As a citizen of the world who mixed in intellectual circles, she could bring to Australian readers a singular perspective on the financial and political movements that were in turn shaping events at 'home'. Her life became one of continual movement across borders and the fictional accounts of this transnational experience found their way onto the bookshelves in libraries from London to Sydney under the title of 'Australian Literature'.

In Sydney, the financial space that Dark examines is a far more circumscribed and ordered structure in which wealth is derived from trade or property rather than speculation on a gold standard. It is, however, similarly gendered, class based and powerful. The narrative deals chiefly with relations between the upper and lower middle class, with occasional guest appearances from the professions, the politically committed and the unemployed. The two wealthy families of *Waterway* represent this division: Sellman's and Hegarty's share the retail economy in which 'Hegarty's was vast and cheap and amorphous—the Mecca of the lower middle class, but Sellman's stood for quality, distinction,

good taste, the last word in modernity'.²⁷ Dark, unlike Stead, is not troubled by polemics, and the character of Arthur Sellman represents quite literally the ugly face of capitalism. Whereas Stead showcases Bertillon as sophisticated and erudite, Dark's Sellman is overfed, cruel and ignorant. Sellman is opposed by those in the narrative who hold socialist sympathies, including his wife, and he has little understanding of the working class, who, however, have his measure. Dark's working men might have 'tall, loose-knit bones in shabby clothes', but they have 'intelligent' eyes that lack 'utterly any suggestion of deference'.²⁸ Her narrative sympathy is firmly on the side of the socialists, while worldly sophisticates are treated with disdain. The young man about Sydney, Sim Hegarty, is an air-ace (as is Jules Bertillon), but unlike Jules, Sim does not theorise about the source of his wealth. His only qualms about his future are momentary and personal. With the well-travelled local beauty Lorna Sellman (who has rejected an active modernity by turning down a role in a Hollywood film), Sim represents a passivity that stands in stark contrast with the politically engaged (and Australian-focused) characters, Roger Blair and Lesley Channon. Roger and Lesley are united by left-wing philosophy rather than class or money, which is denounced as 'that false and arbitrary substitute for the real wealth of the soil, of man-power, of brain-power'.²⁹ These lovers have the interest of their country at heart, but this is couched in the discourse of international socialism.

In an interview, Stead admitted that *House of All Nations* was 'badly received in Wall Street, because it was so true'.³⁰ She said she liked her work at the bank and found the bankers 'very friendly fellows',³¹ who revealed all their business to her, knowing that she was a writer. This is the 'old world' that Blair calls unclean in *Waterway*, a world that has the potential to pollute Australia. He argues, '[I]t's all very well to talk about being international—who wants to rush forward and embrace his brother, the leper?'³² Dark's answer, in the words of Professor Channon, is that one must look beyond the national to a strong intellectual 'sense of brotherhood'³³ led by scientists and artists. In this emphasis on an international intellectualism, Dark was countering nationalist sentiments of the day: in general, her works of the 1930s offered a stronger contestation of what it meant to be an Australian in that period of modernity than was generally accepted.

Stead and Dark display, therefore, a common distrust of capitalism, but their work provokes different responses to the situation. Stead is content to show the personal and political wreckage caused by the bank, but she stops short of the advocacy of a Professor Channon or Roger Blair. One further way in which the writers do connect, however, is in their discussion of marriage as an economic institution and a form of prostitution—a preoccupation that travels through time and space. The wedding scenes in *Waterway* and *House of All Nations* show

with disarming frankness the institutional relationship of sex, marriage and money.

Two weddings and a proletariat

In *House of All Nations*, Jules and his wife, the elegant and perpetually youthful Claire-Josèphe, attend the wedding of new multimillionaire Toots Legris and the son of 'old' money, Duc-Adam Lhermite. Stead's wedding guest list runs for a page of the novel, including:

It was a garland of youthful vanity and superannuated cunning, hoary rank and young money, famous beggars, notorious debtors, unsuccessful rakes, lordly borrowers, impenitent usurers, princely automobile salesmen and brokers' runners of Bourbon blood, shady viscounts, distinguished pillars of cafés, illustrious readers of the *Journal des Débats*...All of them were news items, and a certain number had money themselves.³⁴

The most revealing commentary on the marriage takes place, appropriately, in the bank's plush offices after the ceremony. Toot's father says that he told his future son-in-law, 'Take her, my boy, you been sleeping with her two years anyhow. The sooner she marries you the sooner she'll get tired of you...she's not my daughter: what rot you talking Jules? She's the daughter of seventy million guilders.'³⁵

Jules refuses to condemn the amorality of his friends, telling Alphendéry, 'I sleep with my own wife, true; but I sleep with other people's money. And raped money gets people much wilder than raped wives.'³⁶ The triangulation of money, sex and marriage (the 'recurrent cash-flesh nexus' described by Don Anderson)³⁷ is made clear by Jules when he tells Raccamond that 'every woman is a whore, but the whores are the ones who never learned the game...What is a whore? A poor girl who never had a chance to go into business with a man and set up a little house of her own.'³⁸ For Jules, women must use sex as a pathway to financial power both inside and outside of marriage, as do many of the notable women characters in the novel: Claire-Josèphe, Marianne Raccamond and Margaret Weyman are interested primarily in manipulating relationships with men because their feminine status denies them an alternative. The situation is little better for the novel's female intellectuals, who attend Communist Party meetings that are racked by internal dissension and who seem, as much as their wealthy counterparts, to be subject to masculine control. As Rooney notes, the masculinity of the novel is disrupted momentarily in a scene in which three women, Judith (Jean Frère's wife), Henrietta Achitophelos and Suzanne Constant (Adam's wife), arrive at Adam's workshop-flat³⁹; but none of these women, despite their powerful disruption of the brotherly proceedings, can ultimately challenge the institutional order.

Waterway's society wedding of Veronica Stewart and George Hegarty will, like its Paris counterpart, make news. The melee of newspapermen and bystanders gathers to watch guests arrive at the city church that has been the site, also, of a demonstration by the unemployed. As the guests arrive, they comment on the 'proletariat' outside the church, while inside Sim Hegarty speculates on the marriage of money and privilege that will secure Veronica and George's future. The institutional and stifling power of the accumulated wealth in the Sydney church is the driving force of a ceremony that is described by way of the heady mix of flowers and summer heat:

It is not to be trifled with, this power which has filled the church with silent, beautifully mannered people, faintly rustling like trees, giving out perfume like flowers...It is a power to be reckoned with. It is shackling the group of men outside with their notebooks and their pencils and their observant, disillusioned eyes.⁴⁰

Lorna Sellman, conscious that her beauty is her stock-in-trade, manipulates her attendance to her advantage and by the time the ceremony is over she has been able to secure a future with Sim Hegarty. Lorna's credo—'Blessed are they that have anything over five thousand a year...And thrice blessed are they that have titles, no matter how they got them'⁴¹ —preserves her position as one of the rich and beautiful in this 'familiar, material, recognisable city'.⁴² Although she has not preserved her virginity, she has been smart enough to be selective in her affairs so that her name has market value. Both writers are keen to promote a view of marriage as a financial transaction, unless, as in Dark's case, politics can smooth the way. For these Australian writers, marriage provokes questions about sexual and class relationships that cross international boundaries.

Dark is, of course, aware that events in Europe will displace the familiar and the recognisable and the novel develops an elegiac tone for a city that will shortly change either by virtue of war or class revolution. Likewise, Stead's bankers have underestimated the rise of fascism in Europe, but the political disruption provides an excellent cover for Jules' disappearance at the end of *House of all Nations*. Stead's narrator speculates on the new rhetorical territory this spectator-traveller will inhabit: 'Adventurers are flying every day and rising again under new governments and speaking new languages.'⁴³ The dance that Jules led the financiers will be replicated in another time and another place in Stead's transnational world.

Conclusion

Given that both writers were published overseas by internationally based firms, the reviews of these works offered an appropriate closing comment on the relationship between the national and the global before World War II. New York reviews of *House of All Nations*, published a few months before *Waterway* in

1938, commented on the bizarre brilliance of the book and the heightened fantasy elements. Hazel Rowley said that Stead was undoubtedly influenced by the mid 1930s European emphasis on documentary form, but many felt the book was too long and too crowded (there were more than 100 characters in the novel).⁴⁴ Sales were not what Stead had expected, although this was due partly to poor marketing. Stead was doubly disappointed as she had wanted to use the income from this most transnational of novels to fund a visit to Sydney. In Sydney, however, reviews were mixed and tended to focus on Stead's style rather than on content.

American critics praised *Waterway* and Australian reviews were generally positive, although the 24-hour time frame and plot devices were a sticking point. Although it was hard to buy the novel in Sydney, it was available in London, where Dark's friends Mary Alice and Bert Evatt saw it on a bookstall at Victoria Station.⁴⁵ Dark had similar marketing problems to Stead: publishers complained of disappointing sales, but the books were difficult to obtain in Australia or were subjected to small print runs. Like *Waterway*, *House of All Nations* was not reprinted for many years.

After these works were published, the gap between the authors' writing widened, although they were each subject to the traumas of Cold War politics. Stead continued to live in Europe and America after World War II, writing continually and consolidating an international literary reputation that would see her described, finally, as a major writer in English in the twentieth century. Dark changed literary mode and wrote a historical trilogy, the first volume of which, *The Timeless Land*, was sent to Australian troops. Barbara Brooks wrote that a copy of *Waterway* was held in Changi Prison and, for the Australians, '[n]o-one else brought Sydney home to us as she did'.⁴⁶ Dark moved between Katoomba and Montville in Queensland and her longest period of travel was a trip around Australia in 1948.

The women's writing continued to circulate around the world but in Australia they became part of quite different literary traditions. Dark is grouped, usually, with her inter-war network of Australian women authors and precedence is given to her representations of national ideas and a particular geographical sense of place, while Stead's literary stature is configured around the transnational. The points of contact in the imaginative journey that began around Sydney Harbour, however, show how complex and interdependent is the relationship between the national and the global. Stead died in Sydney in 1983 and Dark in Katoomba in 1985. Their respective funerals were attended by a small group of family and close friends but their stories continued to interest successive waves of readers, at home and abroad, in different ways of looking out at the world.

Notes

- ¹ Harris, Margaret (ed.) 2005, *Dearest Munx: The letters of Christina Stead and William J. Blake*, The Miegunyah Press, Carlton, Victoria, p. 16.
- ² Rowley, Hazel 1993, *Christina Stead: A biography*, William Heinemann, Sydney, p. 389.
- ³ Christina Stead to Gilbert Stead, quoted in Rowley, *Christina Stead*, p. 234.
- ⁴ Augé, Marc 1995, *Non-Places: Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity*, Translated by John Howe, Verso, London, p. 84.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 84.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 77.
- ⁷ Stead, Christina 1985, *Ocean of Story: The uncollected stories of Christina Stead*, Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria, pp. 9–10.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 493.
- ⁹ Wetherell, Rodney 1980, 'Interview with Christina Stead', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 9, no. 4, p. 437.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹ Eleanor Dark to Molly O'Reilly, 4 September 1937, Mitchell Library, MSS 4545, Box 15, 16.
- ¹² Eleanor Dark to William Collins, 26 November 1937, Mitchell Library, MSS 4545, Box 22.
- ¹³ Devanny, Jean 1945, *Bird of Paradise*, Johnston, Sydney, p. 251.
- ¹⁴ Dark, Eleanor 1938, *Waterway*, London, Collins, p. 37.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xii.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 120.
- ¹⁷ Eleanor Dark Papers, Mitchell Library, MLMSS 4545.
- ¹⁸ Stead, Christina 1985, 'Another view of the homestead', in *Ocean of Story*, p. 519.
- ¹⁹ Stead, Christina 1938 [1966], *House of All Nations*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, p. 19.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 309.
- ²¹ Rooney, Brigid 2003, "'Those boys told me everything': the politics of the secretary in Christina Stead's 1930s fiction", *Antipodes*, June, p. 29.
- ²² Stead, *House of All Nations*, p. 673.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 216.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 168.
- ²⁵ Wetherell, 'Interview with Christina Stead', p. 441.
- ²⁶ Rowley, *Christina Stead*, p. 149.
- ²⁷ Dark, *Waterway*, p. 263.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 264.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.
- ³⁰ Wetherell, 'Interview with Christina Stead', p. 441.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 440.
- ³² Dark, *Waterway*, p. 80.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 79.
- ³⁴ Stead, *House of All Nations*, p. 346.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 349.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 351.
- ³⁷ Anderson, Don 1979, 'Christina Stead's unforgettable dinner-parties', *Southerly*, vol. 1, p. 42.
- ³⁸ Stead, *House of All Nations*, p. 309.
- ³⁹ Rooney, "'Those boys told me everything'", pp. 33–4.
- ⁴⁰ Dark, *Waterway*, p. 232.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 179.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 181.
- ⁴³ Stead, *House of All Nations*, p. 787.
- ⁴⁴ Rowley, *Christina Stead*, p. 213.

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⁴⁵ Brooks, Barbara with Clark, Judith 1998, *Eleanor Dark: A writer's life*, Macmillan, Sydney, p. 202.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 244.