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INTRODUCTION

BY RICHARD ALDINGTON

THE writing of *Kangaroo* was an extraordinary *tour de force* of rapid composition, comparable with the almost fabulous creation of *Guy Mannering* in six weeks. Although some characters and episodes in the book are imaginary or transferred to Australia from elsewhere, much of the writing deals with Lawrence's experiences of Australia – with the unique result that he was remembering and setting down with extreme accuracy and vividness one set of experiences while actually undergoing others, themselves destined to be remembered and written as he found new ones. All that Australian part of the book was lived and written, not so much simultaneously, as successively during his brief visit.

The chance preservation of a fragment of personal diary and of several letters (most of them not included in the Huxley edition of *Letters*) now enables us to trace the period of writing accurately. Lawrence and his wife reached Perth, in Western Australia, by ship from Ceylon at the beginning of May, 1922. They stayed with friends at Darlington, about sixteen miles from Perth, and on May 15 Lawrence wrote that they had been 'a fortnight' in Australia, but were leaving for Sydney, by the *S.S. Malwa*. A letter, undated but written on the liner, to his American friend, E. H. Brewster, contains a statement by Lawrence: 'I am not thinking of any work.' Therefore *Kangaroo* was not even thought of before the arrival in Sydney (which starts the book) on May 26, 1922.

Although the first four chapters of *Kangaroo* are set in Sydney, the Lawrences in fact spent only Saturday and Sunday there, and on Monday, May 28, were already installed in a bungalow jocosely called 'Wyewurk' at Thirroul, a small mining village about thirty miles south of Sydney. He wrote

two letters that very first day, in one of which he announced 'a bitter, burning nostalgia for Europe, for Sicily' and a repudiation of Australian 'conveniences' – 'they can keep their conveniences.' The bungalow had been taken for a month, and they would have to stay until a ship sailed on July 6. By June 3 we come already on the typical Lawrentian change of mood, for he wrote to Mable Dodge Luhan in Taos: 'I have started a novel and, if I can go on with it, I shall stay till I've finished it – till about the end of August.' He was able to go on with it, and mentions his book to Brewster in letters dated June 5 and 13. On June 9 he told his mother-in-law: 'Suddenly I am writing again, a wild novel of Australia,' and tells his sister-in-law a few days later that the book is 'a queer show'. On June 22 he wrote to his friend, Catherine Carswell, that he had 'half done it – funny sort of novel where nothing happens and such a lot of things *should* happen: scene Australia.' On July 3 his private diary has the entry: 'Have nearly written *Kangaroo*.' About five weeks then saw the 150,000 words of *Kangaroo* conceived and written, except for the last brief chapter which was added in September, at Taos, New Mexico.

Kangaroo, then, is not one of Lawrence's worked-over novels, which he wrote and re-wrote over and over with such energy. It was 'improvised', as most of his novels were, in the sense that he began to write the book without having planned it and without even knowing where it would take him. *Kangaroo*, like *Aaron's Rod*, he gave to the printer in its first draft, without bothering to reconstruct. What the book lacks in conventional form and grouping is more than atoned for by its magical freshness and vividness, that immediate feeling of life which Lawrence's writings had more abundantly than those of any author of his time. Nobody else gives you that sense that you yourself have actually experienced what he has written. An Australian friend, Mr Adrian Lawlor, writes me that he has never seen that coast south of Sydney, but 'after reading Lawrence, God! I've *been* there.'

But the reader must be warned that some of these Australian characters and the scenes between people are wholly imagined or imaginatively transported from the outside world. Whenever Lawrence is evoking the Australian spirit of place and

anonymous people going about their everyday lives and so coming casually in contact with Somers and Harriet, then it is all 'real' as children say, it actually happened – the Sydney taxi-man, the garbage man, the bus conductor, and so on. But the named characters and all that happens with them were imagined. For in Australia Lawrence met nobody socially. 'I don't present any letters of introduction, we don't know a soul on this side of the continent: which is almost a triumph in itself. For the first time in my life I feel how lovely it is to know nobody in the whole country: and nobody can come to the door, except the tradesmen who bring the bread and meat and so on, and who are very unobtrusive.' Jack and Victoria and Jaz are probably founded on memories of Australians Lawrence met on liners between Naples and Sydney. Dr Eder is said to have given hints for the character of Kangaroo, and though Lawrence vehemently denied this, the reason may have been the English novelist's dread of the libel action – particularly haunting to Lawrence, who was accustomed to draw such recognizable yet unflattering portraits of his acquaintances. The minor character of William James is a recollection of Lawrence's days in Cornwall.

Yet so convincing are these imagined scenes that Lawrence was bitterly blamed for refusing to tell the dying 'Roo that he loved him – though no such person and no such scene ever existed. Where did he get the vivid scenes of political contest between the Diggers and the socialists? Not from his favourite periodical, *The Sunday Bulletin*, for at that time no such political violence occurred in Australia. Probably they were a transference to the Australian scene of the bitter contests between fascists and communists Lawrence had seen in Italy in 1920–22. Lawrence himself was greatly interested in the nature of power, and many pages and scenes of *Kangaroo* will show the strange battle of wills between himself and his wife when, after nearly ten years of marriage, he laboured and battled unavailingly to prove to her that the basis of marriage is not perfect love, but perfect submission of the wife to the husband. This Somers–Harriet contest is one of the major themes of the book, and marvellously true to the characters of Lawrence and his wife. But Lawrence, mistaking perhaps

his power as a writer for power as a leader, was constantly brooding over the thought of himself as a leader of men in action – only to recoil violently and instinctively from any such part the moment he sensed – or his 'daimon' sensed – that it would interfere with his power as writer, which required pure individualism and isolation. Out of this in turn came the two astonishing chapters of reminiscence of Lawrence's life in wartime England when he felt himself threatened with having to submit to crude bullying power in the humblest of positions, and revolted angrily from the threat. In fact, he was never in any danger of conscription, since he was so ill with consumption that he was instantly exempted; but the spiritual battle was to be fought, and he did not shrink. As Lawrence Powell says, those two chapters are 'an impassioned chronicle of the hatred and persecution visited upon individuals who do not succumb to the madness of wartime propaganda'. But in the end as in the beginning, it must be insisted that, with all its other achievements, the supreme achievement of *Kangaroo* lies in its unforgettably vivid and accurate pictures of the Australian continent, in which no other English writer has approached Lawrence.

Kangaroo was first published in September, 1923, by Martin Secker in England and by Thomas Seltzer in America. I am told that it received only two reviews in Australian periodicals, one of them written by P. R. Stephensen, the printer, who years later issued the reproductions of Lawrence's paintings.

CHAPTER I

Torestin

A BUNCH of workmen were lying on the grass of the park beside Macquarie Street, in the dinner hour. It was winter, the end of May, but the sun was warm, and they lay there in shirt-sleeves, talking. Some were eating food from paper packages. They were a mixed lot – taxi-drivers, a group of builders who were putting a new inside into one of the big houses opposite, and then two men in blue overalls, some sort of mechanics. Squatting and lying on the grassy bank beside the broad tarred road where taxis and hansom cabs passed continually, they had that air of owning the city which belongs to a good Australian.

Sometimes, from the distance behind them, came the faintest squeal of singing from out of the 'fortified' Conservatorium of Music. Perhaps it was one of these faintly wafted squeals that made a blue-overalled fellow look round, lifting his thick eyebrows vacantly. His eyes immediately rested on two figures approaching from the direction of the conservatorium, across the grass lawn. One was a mature, handsome, fresh-faced woman, who might have been Russian. Her companion was a smallish man, pale-faced, with a dark beard. Both were well-dressed, and quiet, with that quiet self-possession which is almost unnatural nowadays. They looked different from other people.

A smile flitted over the face of the man in the overalls – or rather a grin. Seeing the strange, foreign-looking little man with the beard and the absent air of self-possession walking unheeding over the grass, the workman instinctively grinned. A comical-looking bloke! Perhaps a Bolshy.

The foreign-looking little stranger turned his eyes and caught the workman grinning. Half-sheepishly, the mechanic had eased round to nudge his mate to look also at the comical-looking bloke. And the bloke caught them both. They wiped the grin off their faces. Because the little bloke looked at them quite straight, so observant, and so indifferent. He saw that the mechanic had a fine face, and pleasant eyes, and that the

grin was hardly more than a city habit. The man in the blue overalls looked into the distance, recovering his dignity after the encounter.

So the pair of strangers passed on, across the wide asphalt road to one of the tall houses opposite. The workman looked at the house into which they had entered.

'What d'you make of them, Dug?' asked the one in the overalls.

'Dunnow! Fritzies, most likely.'

'They were talking English.'

'Would be, naturally – what yer expect?'

'I don't think they were German.'

'Don't yer, Jack? Mebbe they weren't then.'

Dug was abolutely unconcerned. But Jack was piqued by the funny little bloke.

Unconsciously he watched the house across the road. It was a more-or-less expensive boarding-house. There appeared the foreign little bloke dumping down a gladstone bag at the top of the steps that led from the porch to the street, and the woman, the wife apparently, was coming out and dumping down a black hat-box. Then the man made another excursion into the house, and came out with another bag, which he likewise dumped down at the top of the steps. Then he had a few words with the wife, and scanned the street.

'Wants a taxi,' said Jack to himself.

There were two taxis standing by the kerb near the open grassy slope of the park, opposite the tall brown houses. The foreign-looking bloke came down the steps and across the wide asphalt road to them. He looked into one, and then into the other. Both were empty. The drivers were lying on the grass smoking an after-luncheon cigar.

'Bloke wants a taxi,' said Jack.

'Could ha' told *you* that,' said the nearest driver. But nobody moved.

The stranger stood on the pavement beside the big, cream-coloured taxi, and looked across at the group of men on the grass. He did not want to address them.

'Want a taxi?' called Jack.

'Yes. Where are the drivers?' replied the stranger, in unmistakable English: English of the old country.

'Where d'you want to go?' called the driver of the cream-coloured taxi, without rising from the grass.

'Murdoch Street.'

'Murdoch Street? What number?'

'Fifty-one.'

'Neighbour of yours, Jack,' said Dug, turning to his mate.

'Taking it furnished, four guineas a week,' said Jack in a tone of information.

'All right,' said the driver of the cream-coloured taxi, rising at last from the grass. 'I'll take you.'

'Go across to 120 first,' said the little bloke, pointing to the house. 'There's my wife and the bags. But look!' he added quickly. 'You're not going to charge me a shilling each for the bags.'

'What bags? Where are they?'

'There at the top of the steps.'

'All right, I'll pull across and look at 'em.'

The bloke walked across, and the taxi at length curved round after him. The stranger had carried his bags to the foot of the steps: two ordinary-sized gladstones, and one smallish square hat-box. There they stood against the wall. The taxi-driver poked out his head to look at them. He surveyed them steadily. The stranger stood at bay.

'Shilling apiece, them bags,' said the driver laconically.

'Oh no. The tariff is threepence,' cried the stranger.

'Shilling *apiece*, them bags,' repeated the driver. He was one of the proletariat that has learnt the uselessness of argument.

'That's not just, the tariff is threepence.'

'All right, if you don't want to pay the fare, don't engage the car, that's all. Them bags is a shilling apiece.'

'Very well, I don't want to pay so much.'

'Oh, all right. If you don't, you won't. But they'll cost you a shilling apiece on a taxi, an' there you are.'

'Then I don't want a taxi.'

'Then why don't you say so. There's no harm done. I don't want to charge you for pulling across here to look at the bags. If you don't want a taxi, you don't. I suppose you know your own mind.'

Thus saying he pushed off the brakes and the taxi slowly curved round on the road to resume its previous stand.

The strange little bloke and his wife stood at the foot of the steps beside the bags, looking angry. And then a hansom-cab came clock-clocking slowly along the road, also going to draw up for the dinner hour at the quiet place opposite. But the driver spied the angry couple.

'Want a cab, sir?'

'Yes, but I don't think you can get the bags on.'

'How many bags?'

'Three. These three,' and he kicked them with his toe, angrily.

The hansom-driver looked down from his Olympus. He was very red-faced, and a little bit humble.

'Them three? Oh yes! Easy! Easy! Get 'em on easy. Get them on easy, no trouble at all.' And he clambered down from his perch, and resolved into a little red-faced man, rather beery and henpecked-looking. He stood gazing at the bags. On one was printed the name: 'R. L. Somers.'

'R. L. *Somers!* All right, you get in, sir and madam. You get in. Where d'you want to go? Station?'

'No. Fifty-one Murdoch Street.'

'All right, all right, I'll take you. Fairish long way, but we'll be there under an hour.'

Mr Somers and his wife got into the cab. The cabby left the doors flung wide open, and piled the three bags there like a tower in front of his two fares. The hat-box was on top, almost touching the brown hairs of the horse's tail, and perching gingerly.

'If you'll keep a hand on that, now, to steady it,' said the cabby.

'All right,' said Somers.

The man climbed to his perch, and the hansom and the extraneous tower began to joggle away into the town. The group of workmen were still lying on the grass. But Somers did not care about them. He was safely jogging with his detested baggage to his destination.

'Aren't they *vile*!' said Harriet, his wife.

'It's God's Own Country, as they always tell you,' said Somers. 'The hansom-man was quite nice.'

'But the taxi-drivers! And the man charged you eight shillings on Saturday for what would be two shillings in London!'

'He rooked me. But there t's the man who makes you pay who is free – free to charge you what he likes, and you're forced to pay it. That's what freedom amounts to. They're free to charge, and you are forced to pay.'

In which state of mind they jogged through the city, catching a glimpse from the top of a hill of the famous harbour spreading out with its many arms and legs. Or at least they saw one bay with warships and steamers lying between the houses and the wooded, bank-like shores, and they saw the centre of the harbour, and the opposite squat cliffs – the whole low wooded table-land reddened with suburbs and interrupted by the pale spaces of the many-lobed harbour. The sky had gone grey, and the low table-land into which the harbour intrudes squatted dark-looking and monotonous and sad, as if lost on the face of the earth: the same Australian atmosphere, even here within the area of huge, restless, modern Sydney, whose million inhabitants seem to slip like fishes from one side of the harbour to another.

Murdoch Street was an old sort of suburb, little squat bungalows with corrugated iron roofs, painted red. Each little bungalow was set in its own hand-breadth of ground, surrounded by a little wooden palisade fence. And there went the long street, like a child's drawing, the little square bungalows dot-dot-dot, close together and yet apart, like modern democracy, each one fenced round with a square rail fence. The street was wide, and strips of worn grass took the place of kerb-stones. The stretch of macadam in the middle seemed as forsaken as a desert, as the hansom clock-clocked along it.

Fifty-one had its name painted by the door. Somers had been watching these names. He had passed 'Elite' and 'Très Bon' and 'The Angels Roost' and 'The Better 'Ole'. He rather hoped for one of the Australian names, Wallamby or Wagga-Wagga. When he had looked at the house and agreed to take it for three months, it had been dusk, and he had not noticed the name. He hoped it would not be U-An-Me, or even Stella Maris.

'Forestin,' he said, reading the flourishing T as an F. 'What language do you imagine that is?'

'It's T, not F,' said Harriet.

'Torestin,' he said, pronouncing *it like* Russian. 'Must be a native word.'

'No,' said Harriet. 'It means *To rest in.*' She didn't even laugh at him. He became painfully silent.

Harriet didn't mind very much. They had been on the move for four months, and she felt if she could but come to anchor somewhere in a corner of her own, she wouldn't much care where it was, or whether it was called Torestin or Angels Roost or even Très Bon.

It was, thank heaven, quite a clean little bungalow, with just commonplace furniture, nothing very preposterous. Before Harriet had even taken her hat off she removed four pictures from the wall, and the red plush tablecloth from the table. Somers had disconsolately opened the bags, so she fished out an Indian sarong of purplish shot colour, to try how it would look across the table. But the walls were red, of an awful deep bluey red, that looks so fearful with dark-oak fittings and furniture: or dark-stained jarrah, which amounts to the same thing; and Somers snapped, looking at the purple sarong – a lovely thing in itself:

'Not with red walls.'

'No, I suppose not,' said Harriet, disappointed. 'We can easily colour-wash them white – or cream.'

'What, start colour-washing walls?'

'It would only take half a day.'

'That's what we come to a new land for – to God's Own Country – to start colour-washing walls in a beastly little suburban bungalow? That we've hired for three months and mayn't live in three weeks!'

'Why not? You must have walls.'

'I suppose you must,' he said, going away to inspect the two little bedrooms, and the kitchen, and the outside. There was a scrap of garden at the back, with a path down the middle, and a fine Australian tree at the end, a tree with pale bark and no leaves, but big tufts of red, spikey flowers. He looked at the flowers in wonder. They were apparently some sort of bean flower, in sharp tufts, like great red spikes of stiff wistaria, curving upwards, not dangling. They looked handsome against the blue sky: but again, extraneous. More like scarlet cockatoos perched in the bare tree, than natural grow-