Place, pastoral and the politics of the personal: a semi genre-based exploration of D.H. Lawrence's Kangaroo

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PLACE, PASTORAL & THE POLITICS OF THE PERSONAL

A semi genre-based exploration of D.H. Lawrence's 
Kangaroo

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To contemplate the social is as good a way of detachment as to retire from the world. That is why I have not been wrong to rub shoulders with politics for so long.

Simone Weil

... the pastoral tradition is primarily a tradition about a place - concretely localized within the frame of the normal world but also completely abstracted from it - which acts as a sort of laboratory where ideally natural man is anatomized in himself and in his relations to his fellow men and his world.

Walter R. Davis

If the Christian view rests on the cornerstone of creed, the pastoral ideal shifts on the quicksands of wishful thought. Wishful thinking is the weakest of all moral and religious resorts; but it is the stuff dreams, especially daydreams, are made of.

Renato Poggioli

The expectations enshrined in the conventions of genre are, of course, often violated. Their function, like that of all constitutive rules, is to make meaning possible by providing terms in which to classify the things one encounters. What is made intelligible by the conventions of genre is often less interesting than that which resists or escapes generic understanding, and so it should be no surprise that there arises, over and against the vraisemblance of genre, another level of vraisemblance whose fundamental device is to expose the artifice of generic conventions and expectations.

Jonathan Culler
ABSTRACT

The thesis argues that Kangaroo is both an unnoticed example of the modern pastoral novel and a development of those variants of the pastoral genre which Renato Poggioli has designated 'pastorals of solitude'. While another critic, John Alcorn, has previously made a courageous start in identifying Aaron's Rod as a 'pastoral travel novel', it is the primary aim of this thesis to explore D.H. Lawrence's Kangaroo as an example of Lawrence's continuing utilization and development of the pastoral conventions with which he began his career as a novelist in The White Peacock.

Its task is to examine the ways in which Lawrence, while developing a formally adventurous and politically revolutionary novel, wedded his peculiar notions of place with many of the techniques of traditional pastoral. While Lawrence may have undertaken this development of the 'form' of the novel in order to achieve an obliquely satiric critique of modern political life and democratic suburban living, along with a jaundiced exploration of the consequences of conventional political entanglement for the sensitive individual, it is a primary intention of this thesis to keep in sight the idyll he created in doing so. Moreover, because of Lawrence's 'pastoral' depiction of an actual locality in Kangaroo, an attempt has also been made to shed light on the connections between Lawrence's depiction of Thirroul as 'Mullumbimby' and his notion of the 'spirit of place'.

Rather than suggesting that Lawrence achieved a completely new literary 'form' in Kangaroo, however, the thesis argues that Lawrence really only succeeded in exploding existing forms of the political novel. In Kangaroo, this is managed in such a way that the conventions of linear narrative are re-ordered in a highly unorthodox fashion, one that enables Lawrence to accommodate such 'disruptive' and 'out of place' reminiscences as 'The Nightmare', along with various other narrative intrusions,

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in order to give the reader a stronger sense of the flux and the chaos which more closely approximates the way life is actually lived.

Furthermore, the thesis attempts to show that if Lawrence's manipulation of the device of a narrative voice which identifies itself with 'the spirit of the place' and his play with the loose set of tropes which characterize the modern pastoral novel are made the focus of the examination then *Kangaroo* takes on a unity, and a seriousness of purpose, which explores deeply, and in a satisfying and relatively orderly manner, the competing attractions of urban political commitment and retirement into rural-coastal solitude. In addition, the thesis stresses that it is the conventional pastoral contrasts of old world and new world, city and country, which enable this theme to be given its fullest expression.

Taking its cue from Michael Wilding's introduction to *Political Fictions*, part of the essential task of the thesis is to identify an additional tension between romance and realism in *Kangaroo*, thereby positing the novel as part of a tradition of personal and political pastoral romance with a strong kinship to both travel literature generally, and the imaginary utopian voyage in particular. But because Wilding appears uninterested in the way the adoption of a modern pastoral mode, as an alternative to bourgeois realism, sets up a tension within the realistic depiction of place in *Kangaroo*, I seek to emphasize as much as is proper the pastoral basis of Lawrence's art. Recognizing that *Kangaroo* is a fiction which adopts a mixed mode, utilizing vernacular picaresque, the dream vision, collage, and the techniques of realistic travel literature as well as the imaginary journey (along with even a touch of utopian/dystopian satire), the thesis attempts to highlight the way in which the hopes of pastoral romance engage with the challenge posed by documentary realism and are held in balance sufficiently well to enable Lawrence to give a strong sense of the Australian 'spirit of place', the character of Australian democracy and the very personal political decisions which dictate how life is lived.

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Throughout an attempt has been made to highlight the point that it is important to see these fictional issues, and the essentially pastoral patterning and positioning which underpins them, in the context of the non-fictional and critical work Lawrence was undertaking at the same time they were being expressed in his fiction. The wide-ranging nature of the exploration of Kangaroo which results is the product of an attempt to avoid the usual hazards of a type of genre criticism which merely offers a taxonomy of pastoral that Lawrence's Kangaroo happens to satisfy.

Part One of the thesis thus contains three introductory chapters. The first of these attempts to trace the development of the importance of place within an English tradition of political pastoral writing and to identify mutations of the genre termed the pastorals of solitude and self; the second seeks to identify those few critics who identify Lawrence's fiction as part of a living tradition of pastoral writing and who have made reference to Lawrence's handling of place and pastoral in his major novels. The third, and final, of these introductory chapters, undertakes a discursive survey of Lawrence's handling of pastoral places in his pre-Kangaroo fiction.

Part Two examines, within a series of largely discrete chapters, Lawrence's use of the loose tropes of traditional and more modern pastoral in Kangaroo, and concludes by arguing that Lawrence's pastoral art is best described as form of 'utopian pastoralizing'. In this section, only the ""Saturday Night in Arcady"" chapter is almost exclusively taxonomic in approach.

Part three of the thesis attempts to place Kangaroo in its Lawrentian, generic and political context by examining the way in which Lawrence's manipulation of both his notions of place and his emphasis on the politically revolutionary aspects of individualism impinges on the adventurous literary form of Kangaroo.

The thesis concludes by arguing that Kangaroo is a generic gallimaufry with a primarily pastoral focus.
This is a re-submitted Ph.D thesis. The examiners of the original thesis noted numerous general faults, identified a number of substantial flaws in the argument and brought to notice an exceedingly long list of typographical errors. As a result, the revised thesis now presented does not much resemble the original study.

Since this new work is a study devoted in large measure to the pastoral genre, it seems pertinent to quote some remarks from Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*. To the version which appeared in folio in 1593, a work which amounted to an extremely large-scale revision of the Old *Arcadia* under the guidance of Sidney's sister, the Countess of Pembroke, Sidney attached this prefatory claim:

> The disfigured face, gentle Reader, wherewith this work not long since appeared to the common view, moved [my examiners]... to take in hand the wiping away those spots wherewith the beauties thereof were unworthily blemished. But as often in repairing a ruinous house, the mending of some old part occasioneth the making of some new. . . .¹

For doing their best, *mutatis mutandum*, to offer constructive advice about how to repair the 'ruinous house' of the original thesis, I must first of all acknowledge my examiners, Associate Professor Bruce Steele and Dr Paul Eggert.

In this resubmitted version, Chapters 2, 3, 6, 10, 11, 12 and 13 are entirely new; chapter 1 has been expanded; chapters 9 and 10 contain additions and alterations; and chapter 14 has been re-thought, rewritten and retitled. Chapters 4, 5, 7 and 8, although essentially the same as those of similar title in the previously submitted version, have undergone a number of cuts and slight alterations in order to align them more closely with the central thesis of this revised study: that *Kangaroo* is a modern utopian pastoral travel novel, a veritable generic gallimaufry, displaying a wide range of literary allegiances within the superstructure of a dominant pastoral genre. In addition, the theoretical bases of the study have been brought slightly more to the fore in this resubmitted version.

With regard to the major flaws in the original thesis, Bruce Steele's point that 'the extracted and revised parts' of my previously published work sat 'unseasily with the pastoral thesis' has been well taken. As a result, a decision was made to resist, as far as is possible, the temptation of including material from my book, *D.H. Lawrence at Thirroul*, in the resubmitted version. Nevertheless, I would request that the examiners consider my book, in its published form, as supporting material towards the degree and I now submit it as such for consideration along with the revised thesis now presented.

An attempt has also been made to address the charge that the original thesis was 'lacking not so much in substance as in breadth of coverage.' The point that both examiners made regarding the history of the pastoral genre and the, in Paul Eggert's words, necessity of establishing 'the link between that history and the immediate context, for Lawrence' has also been taken up. The most difficult and serious task, however, has been to meet Eggert's charge that in, 'the absence of a contextualizing approach. . .we do not get a series of telling parallels between Somers's life and earlier versions of the pastoral. The fit is not - I suspect, cannot - be close enough when the context offered is so far away from *Kangaroo*.' In order to answer this quite fundamental criticism I have attempted to provide as much of the context as I felt capable of achieving (as well as leaning heavily on the work of other critics) and also to offer some remarks about the extent to which Lawrence wrote consciously within the conventions of pastoral. The latter, however, is not a matter about which I feel it is possible to make absolute statements. Nevertheless, I have endeavoured to make my views about what I guess to be Lawrence's motives as clear as possible.

I thank my examiners for their advice and for the way their stringent remarks have, indirectly, forced me to be even more acutely conscious of the hazards of genre

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3 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
criticism. Fortunately, the daunting task of revision they have set me has had some compensations. It has served to increase my enjoyment of a particular area of critical practice and has also forced me to read even more widely in the area of genre theory (and not just the pastoral genre) than I had previously found necessary. Both examiners also suggested a number of books which have proved germane to the revised approach I have chosen to develop.

While nearly all of the minor points raised by the examiners have been acted upon, there remain a number of minor and not so minor points which I have been unwilling to alter. I have persisted in my 'strange reading of Marvell's "green thought" passage' and have also devoted some time to arguing with Bruce Steele's view that, in terms of the political commitment, 'Somers vacillates throughout until almost the end.' I have also taken issue with Associate Professor Steele's remark that to 'categorize' Lawrence's 'pastoral as "wishful thinking"...seems quite unnecessarily reductive.' Such 'wishful thinking', however, seems to me to be a fundamental aspect of pastoral and I feel there is sufficient critical agreement about this for me to persist in such a categorization, no matter how 'reductive' it may be. A decision was also made not to take up Paul Eggert's suggestions regarding Lawrence's undeniably wider use of 'polarity' and I have, instead, merely stressed that the contrasts of city and country and political commitment versus retreat into solitude are the central polarities of Kangaroo. Furthermore, no attempt has been made to elaborate on the 'Row in Town' chapter, not because (as Dr Eggert was 'left wondering') it does not fit my argument, but because its main function in the novel seems to me to be to reveal that Jack Callcott does not possess the qualities which belong to the type of person earlier identified by the novel as 'a good Australian.'

Finally, I also wish to once again thank those I acknowledged in the original thesis. I extend my gratitude to Raymond Southall and John Ruffels for their friendship

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6 Bruce Steele, op.cit., p. 2.
8 Paul Eggert, op.cit., p. 2.
over a long period and for always providing me with much food for thought; James Wieland for willingly undertaking the tedious task of reading and offering suggestions on the style and argument of the various drafts of this resubmitted thesis; Tom Thompson and Wendy Jolliffe for their continuing interest in D.H. Lawrence and Thirroul; my wife Inga Lazzarotto for the many late nights involved in proof-reading drafts of this resubmitted work, making valuable suggestions concerning my infelicitous expression and also for putting up with my general irritability; Howard Jones for helping me to struggle with the art of word-processing and Paul Eggert, yet again, for being sufficiently computer-literate to understand that, in the case of the original version of the thesis, 'lost formatting' results when someone has 'ported files from one computer to another'.

After all the help I've received, I am willing to claim sole ownership of all the faults that remain.

Joseph Davis
Thirroul.
August 1, 1992.