



Kangaroo

D.H. Lawrence

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Kangaroo is D. H. Lawrence's eighth novel, set in Australia. He wrote the first draft in just forty-five days while living south of Sydney, in 1922, and revised it three months later in New Mexico. The descriptions of the country are vivid and sympathetic and the book fuses lightly disguised autobiography with an exploration of political ideas at an immensely personal level. Based on a collation of the manuscript, typescripts and first editions, this text of Kangaroo is closest to what Lawrence would have expected to see in print. There is a full textual apparatus of variants, a comprehensive introduction giving the background and history of composition and publication and a summary of contemporary reviewers' opinions. Explanatory notes elucidate the many geographical, political and literary allusions in the text; there are three maps and an appendix detailing Australian locations.

Kangaroo Details

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Author : D.H. Lawrence

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From Reader Review Kangaroo for online ebook

Linda says

This Lawrence book was written while he was "stuck" in Australia. The entire time he was on the continent he wavered between desperately wanting to leave and deciding it wasn't so bad and he would stay for awhile. He eventually decided he HAD to leave but had a month before a steamer would be leaving from Sydney.

He wrote this book, largely about his experiences there with an attempt at adding a plot concerning a group of mainly ex-soldiers (WWWI) who want to change the government. They are lead by a man whose code name is Kangaroo. The group wants Lawrence (under the name of Somers) to join. He meets several times with Kangaroo and has extremely conflicting views of him and the group.

Kangaroo was written in 6 weeks and never edited and it shows. The "plot" isn't really a plot, the characters seem to change unpredictably, and the main reason for writing the book appears to be Lawrence's angst and wish to be left alone by the world.

If you are a dyed-in-the-wool D.H. Lawrence fan you should read this to get a full picture of his writings. However, if you've only ever read Lady Chatterly's lover and THINK you like Lawrence, don't bother.

(An interesting aside: This edition was published by the Viking Press and on the back of the cover, it lists an entire page of books it has published by D.H. Lawrence. However, one is missing: Lady Chatterly's Lover.....)

Jonathan says

This was a difficult book to read, as for the most part I didn't really like it. I found hardly any of the characters to be particularly appealing, the politics simplistic, and the frequent racist overtones quite disheartening from an author I admire so much.

The book was saved for me (and largely contributing to its 3 stars) by the brilliant chapter entitled 'The Nightmare', based upon Lawrence's experiences during the First World War when he and his wife Frieda were continually harassed by the police and authorities after he had been declared unfit for active service. This actually struck me as the reason behind the writing of the book. He had turned his back on England, and during his travels had ended up in Australia, if only for a few weeks, but something must have struck him in order to write this novel.

The politics in the book touch on the rights of the working class people (Lawrence's own background), and whether the writer character Richard Lovat Somers should give his support to one of two political leaders, either the benevolent would-be dictator, Kangaroo, or the more socialist Willie Struthers. Set and written at a time that had recently witnessed the Russian Revolution, this would have been a key reference point to any thought about improving the lot of the working man (and less-so women, who are ignominiously set aside in the political geography of this book, as they were in the real world to a greater extent at the time). With Lawrence's recent experiences at home he may have seen Australia as a 'new' land of possibility, but it is the people in his book who prevent the possible from happening (Somers eventually rejects both of the leaders and indeed the country itself).

Overall unsatisfying, but with moments of genius, and great style. Some have said it is essential reading to

discover the real Australia, and the descriptive passages of the bush and nature are impressive, but Patrick White for both people and place, and Frank Moorhouse for people do it better for me.

James says

Kangaroo is an account of a visit to New South Wales by an English writer named Richard Lovat Somers, and his German wife Harriet, in the early 1920s. This appears to be semi-autobiographical, based on a three-month visit to Australia by Lawrence and his wife Frieda, in 1922.

The titular kangaroo is the central image of this novel. Somers travels to Australia in search of traditional cultural values. He finds, based on his experience there, a dichotomy between the spirit of the place and the character of its people. In spite of strange place names and the strangeness of the sky and seasons he does not sense the cultural differences from modern Europe for which he is searching. "Kangaroo" is the fictional nickname of one of Lawrence's characters, Benjamin Cooley, a prominent ex-soldier and lawyer, who is also the leader of a secretive, fascist paramilitary organization, the "Diggers Club". Cooley fascinates Somers, but he maintains his distance from the movement itself.

While rejecting Cooley Somers finds what he is looking for in the Australian kangaroo - an image that embodies his ideals. The novel is rich in ideas epitomized by the awareness of the sovereignty of the individual's power over self, his "extraordinary privilege of responsibility". Nietzsche's influence is seen in the idea of "master and slave" found in the *Genealogy of Morals* and its relation to the discussions in the novel. This is a somewhat disorganized novel, but one rich in ideas which carry the reader forward throughout.

John says

KANGAROO

I had read *Kangaroo* 40 years ago and vaguely recall that I had liked it. I had recently been studying Plato's Republic and was possibly more accepting of the idea of a benevolent dictator; I was also just out of adolescence so I could relate to this most adolescent of novels. Rereading now, about halfway through, the word "odious" came to mind. I was astonished that the much-acclaimed Lawrence could write not only such drivel, but in places write it so badly. Here was a problem to solve.

Such plot as there is starts with Richard Lovat Somers and his German-born wife Harriet, who are clearly Lawrence and Frieda, arriving in Sydney for a three month stay. They first settle near Sydney Harbour, with friendly neighbours Jack and Vicky Callcott to whom Somers is rude. Vicky is a pretty, well-meaning but dim little thing who "knows her place" beside the aristocratic Harriet. Somers catches her eyeing him and thinks "like a sacred vestal virgin she is offering herself to me": an outrageously egocentric hint of hanky panky to come that doesn't eventuate. Jack has thick Australian thick legs, and eyes that variously flash or glow or brood. Jack and Vicky have a weekend cottage at Mullumbimby – no, not on the NSW North Coast but on the South Coast, at Thirroul, just north of Wollongong. Somers and Harriet rent the place as they love the beach and bush.

Talk becomes political. Jack claims that politics should be like the military: citizens, like those in the ranks, should obey orders from the high command. He tells Somers there are units in what seem to be RSL clubs ready to stage a military coup when the socialists stage a revolution. Jack introduces Somers to their charismatic leader, a lawyer called Ben Cooley known as Kangaroo because he has a long head, round belly and powerful hindquarters. (Jack is also said to look like a kangaroo). This is where we start to get ridiculous. Depending on what he is saying, Kangaroo can be huge and beautiful with glowing eyes, or ugly. Kangaroo explains that men need a loving father they can obey: "I offer no creed, I offer myself." Kangaroo is possibly based on Major General Sir Charles Rosenthal who was founding secretary in 1921 and later

president of The King and Empire Alliance, and alleged to have been involved with the Old Guard, a secret anti-communist militia with ties to the Bruce government. However, I doubt that Rosenthal ruled by love and had hugged selected diggers tightly, saying "I love you!" Jack is supposedly based on Major John Scott an associate of Rosenthal and an official in the Old Guard.

Through Jaz, an enigmatic Welshman now Australian, Somers' meets the leader of the Labor Movement, Willie Struthers, ugly with an "Australian" face. He too speaks of love, not top down like Kangaroo, but with workers bonded by love and comradeship to equalise the wrongs of capitalism. After talking with Struthers and rejecting his request to run a newspaper for him, Somers calls on Kangaroo. They fight in a ridiculous shouting scene, during which Kangaroo hugs Somers so tightly he can hardly breathe saying "I love you, I love you." Somers rejects him and runs from the room. Love is not in his repertoire.

In a Labor Party rally in Canberra House Struthers gives an impassioned speech, describing the inequality and victory of Industrialism over labour: workers do all the work for one pound a day while the bosses do nothing and get ten pounds a day, an accurate depiction of where the Labor movement was in 1922. Struthers is counted down by a group of diggers led by Jack, creating a riot in which three are killed. Jack exults about his feelings when he smashed in a man's socialist brains with an iron bar: Kangaroo's love seems to have bypassed Jack. Kangaroo is fatally wounded. He requests Somers to visit him in hospital and begs him as he is dying to say Somers loves him. Somers refuses, to Jack's disgust.

Harriet and Somers by now are tired of Australia and go to America not because they want to but because that's the next logical step.

Social and political attitudes

Since Lawrence models Somers so strongly on himself I assume that Somers' political and social stances are those of Lawrence himself. He is strong on distinguishing and heightening differences between groups of people: Australians/English, Cornish/English, upper class/lower class, men/women, which gets racist pretty quickly with Mr Brown and Mr Chink.

Here is Lawrence/Somers on:

Class and gender. What upper class men have said is real, what workers leave unsaid is real, whereas women chatter to each other whatever their class. Class differences depend on the aristocratic principle: differences between people are innate.

Women. The chapter on Harriet's and Somers' marriage sits oddly with Lawrence's supposed insight into the female mind. Richard in a rant claims that just as a captain needs to be in sole charge of the ship, so he should be the lord and master in the marriage, the captain of the "hymenal bark" as he pretentiously puts it. Harriet is outraged; to her marriage should be based on love. But Richard sees love as the source of evil: he is driven by his ichthyriatic (?) god. Vicky (as a generalised woman figure?) is a well-meaning pretty dimwit and is seen as sexually available.

Love. The Chapter "Nightmare" is straight autobiography. Somers is rejected for service in WW1 on medical grounds but this only sets him apart. He is outspokenly critical of the war, and because he also has a German wife he is accused of being a spy. Somers/Lawrence is told to leave Cornwall because he may be signalling to German ships at sea. He is called up for military service several times, the last in Derby where he is outraged to the core, utterly humiliated by the medical inspection, involving genital and rectal inspection, which is standard practice. I guess this chapter is meant to explain his cynicism and his rejection of love: "the foul poison breath of love." Where does this leave Harriet – and presumably Frieda? He dwells endlessly on wanting to be alone with his dark priatic god.

Australians. Somers is patronising about Australian buildings and the people, the accent a form of Cockney spoken through clenched teeth. There are no class distinctions: not better, just better off. But money is not much good where there is no genuine culture: money is a means to rising to a fuller, higher subtler state of consciousness. Australians are hollow like straw, gleaming gold on the outside empty inside. When Australians are alone they don't exist. However, "when these Colonials do speak seriously they sound like men not like babies. They need to water Australia with their blood before it becomes a man's country."

Politics. Richard rejects both Kangaroo's fascism and Struther's socialism, but he sees himself still as of the working class and comes down roughly as a social democrat without the mately love. Yet he supports the aristocratic principle of innate differences. Kangaroo quotes "greater love hath no man" a reference that forces me to complete the phrase with the North country version: "than this, that he gives his boom to his

choom.”

I had thought that Lawrence might have something prescient to say of subsequent politics, but I don't think so. Lawrence didn't forecast the rise of fascism in Australia: it was already there with first the Old Guard and then its split-off, the New Guard. That nationalistic type of right wing died out in the 30s after De Groot's fiasco at the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Struthers' impassioned socialism gave way to the ALP's more moderate postwar social democratic type of leftism until Hawke dragged the ALP to the right where it stays bogged in neoliberalism to this day. However, I could relate to Struthers' depiction of the 20s: strip the right of its jingoism and what you have is Howard's Work Choices and Abbott's attack on any sort of welfare infrastructure. This is the rock hard face of later right wing politics, but I don't think Lawrence is at all prescient, he was simply recording what he saw was already there.

Religion. He rejects Christianity and a loving god, but believes in his dark priapic god arising from within. Humanity is a “monster with an ideal of equality for a head and industrialism and possessive conservatism for a tail that howls with frenzy”: its God drives it mad. Hard to make sense of this.

Contradictions. Apart from these conceptual corkscrews, Somers is full of contradictions, especially about love and about Australians. He wants to be alone and sees love as a poison, but when taken away from the riot in Canberra House he tries to return to bemoaning what is happening to his fellow humans. He is attracted to Kangaroo yet hates him. Odd phrases like “permanency is the root of all evil”, “the foul poison breath of love”, make little sense.

Quality of writing

When Lawrence's writing is good in Kangaroo it is very very good, especially the nature descriptions, but when it is bad it is astoundingly so for one of his stature.

The plot is loosely structured and rolls on as aimlessly as Somers' own purposeless roaming. The novel is in fact made up of different genres: part memoir, part self-contradictory rants on politics, religion and philosophy, and part lectures on botany, volcanoes, consciousness amongst different races and of species of animals, illustrated in the introspections and actions of essentially unlikeable people. Too much telling and not enough showing is a no-no in fiction.

He uses too many adjectives and adverbs. In one scene with Somers and Kangaroo, nobody actually says anything: they roar, yell, shout, or whisper; whatever verb is qualified by adverbs such as sombrely, sarcastically, threateningly, pleadingly, etc. Many phrases are repetitive: glowing eyes, beautiful faces that turn ugly in a flash, thick male legs are admired (“boys with big magnificent bare legs”) suggesting DHL would love to be crushed between a pair, “aboriginal” is a much used adjective to variously mean, wild, primitive, dangerous (you know, he seems to be saying, like aborigines are), “fern” likewise takes on a basic primitive meaning used widely, then there is the dangerous “love octopus”, and many more.

The nature writing is detailed and evocative, if at times repetitive. Lawrence was a trained botanist and he uses that to advantage, at the same time making the point that Australians themselves don't value their natural heritage. It was true then, now it depends on which political party you back.

Characterisation and dialogue. Somers behaves like an adolescent, self-contradictory, emotionally volatile, loving and hating in the same paragraph, constantly changing his mind, over reacting to quite simple statements by others – is this how Lawrence wants the world to see him? Remember he was in his mid-30s when he wrote Kangaroo, not a confused adolescent. Harriet is amorphous, we don't get a clear picture of her at all, which is odd because Frieda was all too sharply defined as a person. Kangaroo is a caricature, contradictory, unconvincing not to say ridiculous. Jack and Vicky come across as real people, as does Struthers. Jaz is enigmatic, hard to get hold of him. Dialogue is strained, especially in the didactic exchanges between characters.

I might have liked the book as an adolescent but as a mature adult I saw it as an adolescent patchwork of emotional volatility, pretension and knowledge-airing on a range of barely relevant subjects. And the book badly needs a good edit.

Some Critiques

Gideon Haigh saw fit to dub Kangaroo “one of the sharpest fictional visions of the country and its people”, particularly for its insight into the political system Australia of the 20s, when Labor became ever more militant after the Great War, creating a strong conservative backlash by the Bruce Government and in NSW by the Old Guard, a fascist paramilitary organisation strongly pro-Empire.

Lawrence scholar Christopher Pollnitz dwells on Lawrence's appreciation of Australian wilderness especially flora rather than on other aspects of the novel. George Simmers writes in his blog: "Was any other writer as tormented by the Great War as D.H. Lawrence was? Considered as a novel, his Kangaroo is a broken-backed unsatisfactory thing, but as a human document it is engrossing, revealing the pain of a man whom the war has excluded from the community to which he feels he rightfully belongs." Paul Eggert writing a critique in Ranim again dwells on Lawrence's sense of place and draws attention to much disagreement amongst critics about the accuracy of Lawrence's commentary on Australian society and politics.

Most critics dwell on what the book was about, that is Australian wilderness and politics, not on the novel as a novel – apart from Simmers' passing judgment that it is "a broken-backed unsatisfactory thing." I agree, but I enjoyed finding that out for myself.

But back to the paradox. EM Forster described Lawrence as "the greatest imaginative novelist of his generation". How then did Lawrence, regarded as one of England's most important novelists, particularly for his insight into female characters, come to write Kangaroo (1923)? His reputation was built on such as Sons and Lovers (1913), The Rainbow (1915) and Women in Love (1920), which are gritty accounts of personal relationships and social class in the coal mining English Midlands. Having written those three novels he spent three months in Australia and during that time wrote most of Kangaroo, seemingly using eyes that had been accurately focused on the industrial Midlands of England. However, his eyes hadn't yet accommodated to allow him to see individual Australians as anything much more than hollow Derbyshire miners with thick legs, powerful hindquarters, and gleaming exteriors. As for the structural problems and poor writing, I suppose you have to put that down to haste and lack of editing.

John Biggs

Wayne says

A LENGTHY PRELUDE:

It was somewhere written that a visitor is more struck
by the peculiarities of a place than those
who live there and are accustomed to it.

Which is why I like asking Australian migrants
who have lived here for a fair while:

"What do you really think of Australia?"

I don't often ask because you are putting people on the spot,
so one must be judicious about to whom one poses this question.

As a result I have only asked it twice

I have asked it once and was met with embarrassment and excuses
and apologetic tones and so didn't press the issue.

I have asked it once and was met with a deliciously wicked smile.
(I had scored!!!)

I have overheard an honest opinion, and an immediate apology
when the realisation occurred that I was in earshot.

(I said there was no need for any apology.)

In each case I realised that my ambiguous question, (because although

I named the place, what I really meant was the inhabitants of the place, and not the indigenous ones), was perfectly understood by these most recent 'invaders'.

I have heard old migrants interviewed on a TV series about our migrants and they will always mention the racism, which our politicians NEVER do.
And I have heard 2 German tourists accuse Australians of being "too friendly".

And then there are the books...about the Land of Oz ie. OZ-tralia!!!
Bill Bryson has to be polite because he wants to sell to support himself and family.

D.H.Lawrence was not one to mince words.
Which is why "Kangaroo" is an exciting read for an Australian, well, for this Australian anyway.
And he agrees with the two German girls above.
This friendliness, this laid-back, easy-going lifestyle and manner is a worry.

The two Italian women mentioned above,for that is what they were, the one, Mirella d'Aristotle Postiglione of the deliciously wicked smile, lately of Rome, told me with mirth, that "Australia is like a giant nursing home."
Only one other Australian has laughed at this description.
So did I...and both of us had lived overseas.
The Other Italian, Sylvia, whose conversation with two others I was overhearing at lunch at the Migrant Interpreter base at a big suburban Sydney Hospital where we all worked,had described the fourth woman, the one they were discussing,as being "as cold as an Australian."

Nothing here of the friendly image at all, rather extreme British reserve, as if the friendliness is part of another self, how deep or shallow, I don't know, but I suspect it is as integral as the two sides of a coin are to its very existence.

The apologetic, non-committal migrant was a Serbian man, a next-door neighbour, who I found was reserved about everything personal,as are most Men of Oz.

Finally...an Australian friend and husband arriving at their Parisian Hotel was challenged by the woman on the desk with:"Why are you Australians always so happy?"
"Because we are on holidays", came the reply.
"No,no" she responded."I have worked here for many years and dealt with many nationalities on holiday ...and here she listed them...and they are never like you Australians."
True...but only one side of the coin.

A little more to come....

Matthew Thompson says

Some of the sharpest insights into Australia ever written, and all from only a few secluded weeks in Oz.

Mark Chillingworth says

Although written in the 1920s still as relevant today as then. DH Lawrence describes many of the emotions and confusions I experienced living in Australia so well. A brilliant tale of searching for a connection, failure to understand and the wonders of the Australian landscape. Challenging, but well worth reading.

Petra X says

I've just finished Accidental Death of an Anarchist and this book goes well with it. Political, socialist or anarchist, not sure yet. I have generally identified myself as a socio-anarchist, so I quite enjoy books exploring aspects of this political philosophy.

Exchange between two men, one an Australian, one, who is probably the author himself, English:

"We won't be having women in if we can help it. I don't believe in it, do you?"

"No, not in real politics, no."

I got the wrong end of the stick with the book. So I put the rant in spoilers. It's nothing to do with anarchism of any variety, more to do with the glory of a dictatorship as the ideal form of government for the White man. Or at least that's the bit I'm up to. Maybe I've still got the wrong end of the stick!

(view spoiler)

Nicole says

A brilliant exploration of class and what it is to be Australian.

"You're not with the middle classes, as you call them, the money-men, as I call them, and I know you're not. And if you're not with them, you're against them."

"Look at Australia. Absolutely fermenting rotten with politicians and the will of the people. Look at the country-going rottener every day, like an old pear."

"Now, Mr Somers, you are no believer in capitalism, and in the industrial system as we have it. If I judge you correctly from your writings, you are no lover of the great Washed Middle Classes. They are more than washed, they are washed out. And I think in your writings you say as much. You want a new spirit in society, a new bond between men."

"And how do we get it?... We must have a new bond between men, the bond of real brotherhood. And why don't we find that bond sufficiently among us? Because we have been brought up from childhood to mistrust ourselves and to mistrust each other. We have been brought up in a kind of fetish worship. We are like tribes of savages with their witch-doctors. And who are our witch-doctors, our medicine-men? Why, they are our professors of science and professors of medicine and professors of law and professors of religion, all of whom thump on their tom-tom drums and overawe us and take us in. And they take us in with the clever cry, 'Listen to us, and you will get on, get on, you will rise up into the middle classes and become one of the great washed.

The trick of this only educated men like yourself can see through. The working man can't see it. He can't see that for every one that gets on, you must have five hundred fresh slaves and toilers to produce the graft. Tempt all men to get on, and it's like holding a carrot in front of five thousand asses all harnessed to your machine. One ass gets the carrot, and all the others have done your pulling for you."

"Everybody very friendly and nice. The friendliest country in the world: in some ways, the gentlest. But without a core. There was no heart in it, it all seemed hollow."

"...and we have been determined from the start that Australia should not fall into the hands of a small number of millionaires and a larger number of semi-millionaires. It has been our idea that a just proportion of all profits should circulate among the workers in the form of wages. Supposing the worker does get his pound a day. It is enormous, isn't it! It is preposterous. Of course it is. But it isn't preposterous for a small bunch of owners or shareholders to get their ten pounds a day, for doing nothing. Sundays included. That isn't preposterous, is it?

They raise the plea that their fathers and their forefathers accumulated the capital by their labours. Well, haven't our fathers and forefathers laboured? Haven't they? And what have they accumulated? The right to labour on, and be paid for it what the others like to give 'em."

"A job is nothing but a job, when all's said and done."

"What class do you feel that you belong to, as far as you belong to any class?" asked Kangaroo, his eyes on Richard's face.

"I don't feel I belong to any class. But as far as I do belong- it is to the working classes. I know that. I can't change."

Leanne says

One of the books written during Lawrence's stay in Australia. Not his finest work. Supposedly a novel, it is semi-autobiographical, and is more a self-indulgent philosophical soliloquy than a satisfying read. Overly long at 492 pages, a decent editor could have cut that by 200 pages. Very little happens and much skimming

was required to mercifully reach the end. But there were rare literary gems hidden amongst all the navel gazing. The descriptions of the Australian bush, the astute perceptions of the differences between Australian and European society and the comparisons of the state of marriage with ocean currents were all superb.

Vishal says

Kangaroo is D H Lawrence's love poem to a strangely beautiful land-Australia. The sense of place he creates is so rich and so deep, you could almost be there among the crystal blue skies, smelling golden wattle deep in the bush, or hear his glassy seas roar against the wild, rocky shores. Weird as this may sound, I have a strange feeling of having experienced Australia (along with a few other countries) in a past life, and this book reinforces it.

I picked Kangaroo up on a whim, having heard the title alluded to in a Bukowski short story. It's a semi-autobiographical account of a man who leaves behind the claustrophobic paranoia of post-war Europe in search of freedom. However the political ghost from his past stalks him in the form of Kangaroo, the leader of a militant/fascist organization.

Although suffering from descriptive repetitiveness at times (the book was poorly edited, among other flaws such as the whiny, irritatingly capricious lead character Somers), the book is worth it alone for the chapter Nightmare, which takes us back to his tempestuous time in Cornwall, to which he lends a ghostly beauty.

Worth a read if you're looking for something slow, thoughtful, deep, evocative and philosophical.

David says

As with *The Plumed Serpent* ... the challenge with DH Lawrence is that there's a lot about honesty, frankness ... lots about the nature of being a man and the fundamentals of men relating to each other ... but we never, ever talk about homosexuality. It literally doesn't exist. And if it *isn't* gay, the modern reader needs to *know* it isn't gay. Otherwise, we spend the whole time going "Oh. Gay."

"And he wanted to know him, to talk to him. He wanted to get to the bottom of him."

"Yet Jack did want to get at him, somehow or other."

"But Somers was mistaken. He didn't understand Jack's way of leaving seven-tenths of himself out of any intercourse."

"Your instinct brought you here - and brought you straight up against me."

"Somers gave him his hand, and Jack clasped it fast, drawing the smaller man to him and putting his arm round his shoulder and holding him near to him. It was a tense moment for Richard Lovat."

"He knew that her greatest grief was when he turned away from their personal human life of intimacy to the impersonal business of male activity for which he was always craving."

"He had all his life had this craving for an absolute friend."

"The perfect love that men may have for one another, passing the love of women."

The chapter on Cornwall ... "The Nightmare" ... was very interesting. And I liked learning a bit about "counting out". The Prince of Wales (Edwards VIII) was "counted out" by Australian troops in Egypt?

Bits:

"Verbal agreement and silent opposition is perhaps the best weapon on such occasions."

"somebody will have to water Australia with their blood before it's a real man's country. The soil, the very plants seem to be waiting for it."

"and the Japs come down this way. They'd squash us like a soft pear."

"But if the thing had really happened, it could hardly have happened to him more than in this dream."

"Cripes, there's *nothing* bucks you up sometimes like killing a man - *nothing*. You feel a perfect *angel* after it. ... Having a woman's something, isn't it? But it's a flea-bite, nothing, compared to killing your man when your blood comes up."

"Love is perhaps an eternal part of life. But it is only a part."

Robert says

This book purified a part of me and restored my faith in what it is to be human. Lawrence's honesty and artistic integrity made me realize how far the modern world wants us to travel from being human - what makes us valuable and vital.

His words are so beautiful. Many of the chapters are deeply moving and full of personal experience and emotion. The book is also semi-autobiographical. This is Lawrence's greatest work. It is full of who he is and how he loves the human condition and yet struggles with mediocrity and the mass hatred of those who are on the outside.

You can really begin to love the characters he encounters. They often grow to hate him but he always bears a place for them in his heart. Lawrence is indefatigable and brave.

He never enlisted in the army for the 1st world war but you will know by reading this book - what a great warrior and artist this man was. And of course - Harriet. She is the hero of this book and Lawrence knows it. He makes way for her.

Just by writing these words I feel myself being moved. This is a book I will always treasure. An experience I will never forget.

Marcel Ozymantra says

At first I had to get used to Lawrence's writing. It's a rather expansionistic and by times simplistic style for this day and age. Many repetitions, simple images, convoluted ways of describing what's happening inside

someone's head and endless descriptions of the scenery. For the modern editor a writer like that would be a nightmare. Rather than sending it back for endless rewrites I can imagine someone throwing the whole manuscript in the fire and then jumping out of the window.

I had forgotten how tedious he can be when I started reading. But, you know, I have good memories of other books. I found *Women in Love* absolutely intense, just as *The Rainbow*. *Sons and Lovers* left me devastated. I just couldn't imagine anyone describing such an inner world with so few words and so much impact. I rate it as one of the best novels I've ever read. So, despite all my misgivings from the moment, I decided to persevere, while complaining to my girlfriend.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that I grudgingly became a part of the world of Richard and Harriet Lovat, thin disguises of the writer and his wife. The characters started to live and I was transported to Australia of the 20's everytime I opened the book. I was becoming content with that. I was enjoying it much. They all had such sweet lives to follow, such rich inner worlds. Maybe it wasn't the best of Lawrence's, it was still so much better than most modern stuff I've read, was what I thought.

But over half of the book there came this really curious chapter in which their married life became part of a really stretched out allegory of the ocean and boats. It seemed a bit silly, but the gravity of the situation became gradually more poignant. After that the book just didn't want to be captured in the same naturalistic tones as before. There came a mesmerizing enormous chapter about why he and his wife left England in 1919 or abouts. Never before have I read such a sad tale of estrangement from a country. This chapter really cut to the heart of me, of my own dissociation with my country. What followed just cut deeper and deeper, about religion, love and humanity.

After a while you notice that the whole style, that specific slow repetition of words and sentences, simple images, is effectively being used to convey ideas and feelings that couldn't otherwise. That's when you truly see the mastery of D. H. Lawrence and that's when you only have to agree that so many writing courses have brought a certain poorness to writing, since Lawrence breaks with about every rule that's been taught over and over in such places. I cannot but give it the highest marks and advice everyone to read it. There's something to be learned about life which you can only find in the pages of books and Lawrence writes these books.

Rebecca McNutt says

I really liked *Kangaroo*, but I found that it was lacking in character depth and that it dragged on in some parts.

Paul O'Leary says

I've rated this one high. I can easily see another reader knocking off a star, or even two. This is a challenging, though interesting, book by Lawrence. Written, more or less, around the middle of his short authorship, as well as in the middle of his so-called literary-fascist period between *Aaron's Rod* & *The Plumed Serpent*, if I were a Straussian I might accuse *Kangaroo* of secretly containing Lawrence's special message to his select, chosen followers. Fortunately, I'm no Straussian. But there is much that is unabashedly personal to Lawrence. In fact, this book is part novel, part autobiography, and part politico-philosophical treatise. Here, the average reader will struggle with this feature, or features, as the case happens to be, because Lawrence stirs his pot, but not nearly enough to make these components dissolve seamlessly into one another. The

book starts out as a straight novel with autobiographical features. A literary man by the name of Somers(Lawrence) arrives in Australia after his self-exile from post war England(like Lawrence). He's accompanied by his German wife(Lawrence was never married to his). Somers happens to be neighbors with a lieutenant in a nationalistic right-wing organization. The lieutenant imagines that Somers is just what the group needs, for whatever reason, and introduces him to its leader, Kangaroo, a Jewish-Australian, comical and pathetic messiah. This is the basic story of the novel. Most Lawrence fans will state this is quite bad beer. Almost all his novels before Kangaroo with the exception of Aaron's Rod are far superior as novels, or so present day wisdom dictates. This should not take away from some wonderfully descriptive moments buried throughout the story where Lawrence displays his acute perception and literary artistry. Some even claim this is a fine piece of travel literature. My personal opinion is that this is overstated. Sadly, these moments are spread sometimes thinly through this 400+ page monster. As you move through the book, however, the novel almost passes away completely. Chapter 12 is basically an autobiographical account of Lawrence's experience in wartime England which caused him afterward to leave his country forever. An interesting chapter, indeed, but if you don't care about that portion of Lawrence's life, or particularly like the course of a novel being interrupted arbitrarily than you might be far from pleased with it. Thereafter, half of all following chapters are devoted to Lawrence expounding on his philosophy of man and the consequential result for politics as Lawrence sees it. Somers is an amazingly unattractive human being. So much so that one wonders how Lawrence, his creator & personifier, might have thought otherwise. His Nietzschean superman comes with an abject disregard for any fellow human being. He commits heroically to himself, but nothing and no one else. Kangaroo impresses him, but, ultimately, he fails to commit himself to anything. Somers examines life from a distance; he doesn't like to be touched; he's of working-class parents, yet believes himself to be an aristocracy of one. The communists get the same treatment as Kangaroo. But so does everyone, including his faithful wife. Science is disposed of as being merely an unhealthy fascination with cadavers. Lawrence paints his religion of Dark Gods throughout the book. Even in the beginning, the grand, dark emptiness of the bush is sketched as somehow fundamental in its connection with Lawrence's main character. The deep, dark earth God which anchors each man in his own self as Absolute is contrasted with the equally deep, dark flux of the sea. Man has no real authentic connection with another accept through farcical ideas, vertebral vibrations through which dark gods take their revenge, or in proper balance and worship of the self rested in connection with the grand & horrible emptiness of existence which is the dark gods. I can only wonder if Thomas Ligotti is a D.H. Lawrence fan. The last quarter of this book reminded me of Ligotti's writings, somewhat. This book is a bad place to start if you're interested in introducing yourself to Lawrence. I knew that going in, so I take my lumps philosophically, dark gods notwithstanding.

Rob says

A strange book that seems to be bits of different writing sewn together with the seam rather exposed. Beautiful lyrical writing about the Australian bush, just gorgeous and he does seem to get this country. I came back from the NSW south coast where much of the book is set and this is how it feels all the way down to the stickiness of the sea water.

When Lawrence describes human interactions he gets them very right. The descriptions of the different types of male silences is very, very good. The ups and down of a domestic relationship are also well done. The book comes apart when he tries to integrate the personal with the political. The current feeling is that Lawrence did stumble upon a proto-fascist movement in Sydney in the 1920s. There is some element of reality being bent into shape by a supremely talented modernist author with romanticist leanings. The irrational politics of fascism could be a rich field for such an author. And how Lawrence tries but he just does not have the tools. He has an intuitive understanding of the subconscious but he can't quite use this to comprehend the phenomenon of fascism. There was/is definitely an appeal to the darker urges of the human psyche with the politics of fascism which Lawrence gropes toward but please do not read this book as some sort of explanation of the Australian right between the wars. He just does not quite get it.

He gets into long and involved internal discussions of the nature of love and whether that is enough for politics. This is by far the worst part of the book. It is long and meandering and frankly makes little sense on any level.

This groping for understanding that is far from complete is on some levels reflected in the ambivalent character of Richard Lovat Somers. He has the ambivalence of Hamlet. He can make a choice but it is always just out of his grasp because of some newly constructed reason.

Lance Ramsey says

Strangely poignant, this confused and rambling semi-autobiographical account of DH Lawrence's own trip to Australia is full of reflections on the nature of man, politics and the differences between England and Oz. Written hastily in a few weeks, it sometimes cries out for editing - some characters never distinguish themselves or stand out strongly from others (Richard Lovat Somers, the main character, included). Yet Kangaroo, once he enters the novel, blazes through the pages, and burns right through to the final chapter. It is rightly named for him, and the Australia he represents - at once everpresent and lost. Don't read this if you are after a light read, but nevertheless for lovers of Australianness, this is a must-read.

A note - much of the book concerns profound love between men. Given it is written in 1922 (and knowing DH Lawrence's own life), it is uncertain whether this is deep mateship or something more like sexual love. Perhaps both, and perhaps deliberately. The relationship between Richard Lovat and Kangaroo remains, to the final pages, one of great tension and denial. Yet, this is not a gay book, nor will it ever be, I think.

Nicko says

There's good reason why this book does not score highly, has mixed reviews, is not widely read, and my dad had to go to lots of effort to track down a copy. Generically mixed novel, part autobiographical, part political treatise, part travelogue. Unlike other DH Lawrence - it's hardly Lady Chatterley's lover. I loved the descriptions of Australian bush and beach landscapes and Sydney life of the times. I found the long interlocutory dialogues, thick with political symbols & metaphors, tedious.

Bill says

Believe it or not, with all the thousands of books that I have read in my life so far, I had never read a book by D. H. Lawrence. Until now. And unfortunately, I didn't make a very good choice in which novel of his to read first.

In fact, it's hardly really a novel at all, as there is almost no plot whatsoever. The book mainly consists of philosophical musings, which to be perfectly honest, I found quite boring, for the most part.

What little plot there is, concerns the two main characters, Richard and Harriet Somers, who according to the blurb on the dust jacket, are a thinly disguised D.H Lawrence himself, and his wife Freida. The book is called Kangaroo, not merely because the book is set in Australia and kangaroos are found there, but because Somers meets a man there, who is the leader of a group of would be revolutionaries, and he is known as Kangaroo because he apparently resembles one. A large part of the book consists of this Kangaroo fellow, and his minions, trying to convince Somers to join his band of rebels.

Unfortunately, this is about all the action, if you can call it that, that takes place in the book at all. I will admit that the writing is very good. Lawrence's descriptive writing is beautiful, and his sentences describing the landscape, plants and the sea are sublime. This however was not enough to hold my interest and I must admit I actually skimmed the last 80 pages or so. So although this was a fairly major disappointment, I will try another of Lawrence's novels at some point in the future. I'm just not sure which one to try next.
