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The Category of Landscape in D. H. Lawrence's "Kangaroo"

Poor Richard Lovat wearied himself to death
struggling with the problem of himself, and calling it
Australia.

Kangaroo, p. 32.

D. H. Lawrence's novel *Kangaroo* has been differently viewed by critics. F. R. Leavis includes *Kangaroo* in the general judgment he passes on the novels that follow *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*.

The novels succeeding *Women in Love* are neither simply autobiographical in the way of *Look, We Have Come Through!*, nor have they the complete and impersonal significance of highly organized works of art. They were written at great speed in a tentative and exploratory spirit, and something like a direct involvement of the author is so evident in them on so large a scale as to give much colour, here, to Middleton Murry's kind of documentary reduction.¹

Leavis mentions the complexity of tone in *Kangaroo* as a consequence of Lawrence's honesty in the dramatization of his personal doubts and uncertainties but does not dwell long on this novel. Eliseo Vivas emphasizes the amorphous quality of *Kangaroo* which he calls a "no-novel" or a "pseudo-novel". He stresses the fact that the autobiographical material that has gone into *Kangaroo* has not been transmuted by a creative process into a self-enclosed and self-sufficient work of art. But in spite of his attitude of "aesthetic rigorism" he says that *in ultima linea* the judgment that he passes on the novel is based neither on intellectual nor aesthetic reasons but primarily on moral ones.

¹ F. R. Leavis, *D. H. Lawrence, Novelist*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1955, p. 147.

Ultimately, the judgment that we must pass on the book is neither purely intellectual, as it would be if it were a question of its truth, in the narrow, positivistic sense, nor aesthetic, but moral. The man with the devil in his belly has conceived life in a pernicious manner, and the evil he reveals in the guise of good is dangerous.²

Although he denies that the novel has any sort of cohesion he suddenly veers about at the end of his critique and admits quite unexpectedly that Lawrence has almost succeeded in writing a good novel.

But in a sort of sense it is a world. And it is that power Lawrence had of never altogether failing in his failures that makes him such a formidable challenge to the critic. This no-novel that is a sermon on several of the themes that Lawrence brooded over, this unlovable and disorganized cosmos instinct with hatred, revulsion and rejection is, nevertheless, some sort, of cosmos. In the end one has to admit that for all its faults Lawrence comes close to bringing it off.³

Graham Hough makes a plea for the structural unity of the novel.

Kangaroo, to a superficial glance, is even more desultory in plan and mixed in content than *Aaron's Rod*; so much so that recollection of it is likely to be of incoherence and artistic failure... further reading shows an underlying unity of a kind not immediately obvious.

...he (Somers) is living his way through a complex of experiences, related because they are factors in his development... We begin to see what some of Lawrence's fulminations about form in the novel mean; form for him was just this — the following out of an authentic process of living growth.⁴

As much as the critics differ in their final estimates of *Kangaroo* they differ about the very nature of the work. Eliseo Vivas sees *Kangaroo* as a sort of crude autobiography which has not been transmuted into art. For Graham Hough the novel is significant as a part of Lawrence's spiritual biography. Mark Shorer considers *Kangaroo* as a novel of ideas thrashing out political problems.

The Australian novel *Kangaroo*... is a novel of ideas that debates political alternatives for its Lawrencean hero, Lovat Somers... The actualisation of the dark spirit of this continent on the underside of the world is as solid as the psychological and political judgments are ambiguous, and the spiritually reductive

² Eliseo Vivas, *D. H. Lawrence: The Failure and the Triumph of Art*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1961, p. 63.

³ *Ib.*, p. 62.

⁴ Graham Hough, *The Dark sun*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1961, p. 125 and p. 128.

terrors of the one together with the elusive emotional and intellectual demands of the other give Somers no opportunity for genuine choice.⁵

Martin Jarrett-Kerr (Father Tiverton), too, places the main stress upon the political problems dealt with in the book and Somers's response to them.⁶ Anthony Beal compares *Kangaroo* to Conrad's political novels.

The atmosphere of conspiracy and fear and malignity around the rival leaders is conveyed with some of the force found in Conrad's political novels.⁷

In his book *Portrait of a Genius, But . . .* Richard Aldington treats *Kangaroo* as a travel book ("... *au fond, Kangaroo* is a travel book like *Sea and Sardinia*").⁸ In a highly original article Leo Gurko argues for the structural unity of the novel on entirely new lines. Maintaining that Lawrence's departure from Europe "coincided with the end of the strictly personal phase of his writing", he states:

The center of this novel about Australia is not any given group of Australians but the country itself... In the novel that emerged, the country controlled the characters and was indeed the source from which they grew. Lawrence breathed the qualities of the land into the people — a kind of anthropomorphism in reverse. This is the novel's central principle. It proves powerful enough to hold together a narrative which otherwise seems a fragmented hodgepodge of odds and ends.

The novel was the first of Lawrence's massive explorations of vital energy outside the strictly human scene... *Kangaroo* has as its hero and controlling element nothing less than the shape of a continent.⁹

In my view *Kangaroo* cannot be defended as a political novel. The political plot is entirely inadequate. I do not want to waste much time on things which are pretty obvious but should like to mention a few essential facts. In the great political novels of modern times (Stendhal's *Chartreuse de Parme*, Dostoevsky's *Demons*, Conrad's *Nostromo*) the characters are drawn against a sharply particularized, densely rendered back-

⁵ Mark Shorer, "D. H. Lawrence and the Spirit of Place", *A D. H. Lawrence Miscellany*, ed. by Harry T. Moore, Heinemann, London, 1961, p. 289.

⁶ Martin Jarrett-Kerr (Father Tiverton). *D. H. Lawrence and Human Existence*, SCM Press, London, 1961, pp. 80—87.

⁷ Anthony Beal, *D. H. Lawrence*, Edinburgh and London, 1961, p. 72.

⁸ Richard Aldington, *Portrait of a Genius, But . . .*, Heinemann, London, 1950, p. 256.

⁹ Leo Gurko, "Kangaroo: D. H. Lawrence in Transit", *Modern Fiction Studies*, Lafayette, Indiana, 10, No. 4., 1964—65, pp. 349—350 and p. 358.

ground. In *Kangaroo* there is no correlation between the wider social ambience and the political intrigue. Kangaroo, Jack Calcott, Jaz and Will Struthers feel like the externalized fragments of Somers's consciousness. Their primary function is to debate things with Somers or to echo his ideas.¹⁰ Moreover, there is an essential discrepancy between the description of the Australians, their manners, behaviour and their general way of life (done mainly on the level of travel book vignettes) and the political intrigue. If we confront the numerous descriptions of Australia and the Australians scattered throughout the novel from the beginning to the very end with the characteristic atmosphere of the political conspiracy we must come to the conclusion that there are in fact two worlds in the novel: first, Somers's observations of and responses to Australia which are done mainly on the level of travel book sketches, brief but vivid; and second, the imaginary scene of social conflict that has been superimposed on it. (Somers's reflections on the qualities of the Australian political life also seem to be suspended in mid-air.)

In the travel sketches relating to the Australian continent and its inhabitants there prevails a great sense of freedom, a sense of the vast, uninhabited spaces of a continent which has not yet been subjugated by man, of a rudimentary state of civilization. In contrast with the overpopulated Europe, heavily burdened with tradition, this gives a pleasant sense of relief but at the same time frightens by its vacancy and its utter absence of human associations and traditions.

The Australians themselves are noted for their good-humoured casualness in manners, democratic tolerance, respect for an individual, a certain coarseness, stubbornness and sardonic humour. Nowhere in these travel vignettes do we feel the submerged tensions of political life, the explosive state of society where the accumulated social problems demand urgent solution. The atmosphere of the political conspiracy round the

¹⁰ It is not to be excluded that while writing *Kangaroo* Lawrence had unconsciously in mind *The Brothers Karamazov* and Dostoevsky's work in general, where the confrontation of personalities means at the same time the confrontation of ideas. In *Kangaroo* we seem to detect a faint and distorted echo of the Dostoevskian model.

Lawrence's attitude towards Dostoevsky, the greatest of all ideological writers, is characteristically ambiguous. Cf. a letter to J. Middleton Murry and Katherine Mansfield of 17th February, 1916, in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. and with introduction by A. Huxley, Heinemann, London, 1932, pp. 325—328. Cf. Lawrence's article "The Grand Inquisitor by F. M. Dostoevsky", *Phoenix, The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. and with introduction by Edward D. MacDonald, London, 1936, pp. 283—291. Cf. "Letters to S. S. Koteliansky", *Encounter*, December, 1953. See also G. Phelps, *The Russian Novel in the English Fiction*, The Hutchinson University Press, London, 1956.

political protagonists contradicts the wider social ambiance as represented. The scenes concerning the political protagonists are charged with political explosive while the very premises for a revolutionary upheaval are missing, on the evidence of the rest of the novel.¹¹

Evidently, it has not been a happy thought on Lawrence's part to embody the ideological problems in which he was interested at the time in a political intrigue rendered by the realistic mode. As soon as he chose that solution he became subject to a number of laws which he had to respect if he wanted to keep the integrity of his novel. The political plot rendered by the stylistic means of realism must have a probable basis, must grow out of a suitable social ambiance. It is subject to the laws of probability and the need for documentation, it must correspond to a certain extent to the given empirical data in order to be convincing. In connection with this aspect of *Kangaroo* it is legitimate to ask a number of questions such as: how is it that the political leaders of both the extreme right and the extreme left have absolute confidence in Somers who is a complete stranger to them, what qualifies Somers as a potential leader of the secret terrorist political organization, does his pursuit of power bear the remotest resemblance to anything that actually happens in the political world, etc.? These unanswerable questions reflect the dilettantism and the political naivety of Somers-Lawrence when dealing with political realities.

One of the most important factors impairing the integrity of the political intrigue is the confusion that exists in the mind of the writer himself with regard to the Australian political movements, especially that led by *Kangaroo*, alias Ben Cooley, on which a far greater weight is placed. For most of the time Lawrence leaves aside the political and socio-economic realities for the sake of dealing with the existential and psychological problems, which are far more interesting for him. The basic focus is thus blurred, which results in the lack of clarity of the political programmes. The novel in fact mostly sidesteps the political problems in the strict sense of the word. They occasionally appear in the pro-Fascist ideology of Jack Calcott and in the casual remarks made by *Kangaroo* and Will Struthers but the real centre of interest for both political

¹¹ Cf. Somer's sudden feeling of terror overwhelming him on the night of the quarrel with *Kangaroo* which sharply contradicts all that he has been previously experiencing on the Australian continent: "He was thankful for the streets, for the people. But by bad luck, it was Saturday night, when Sydney is all shut up, and the big streets seem dark and dreary, though thronging with people. Dark streets, dark streaming people. *And fear. One could feel such fear in Australia*". *Kangaroo*, Penguin Books, p. 235.

leaders as well as their real interest for Somers lies in fact elsewhere. It is characteristic that in one of his talks with Harriet Somers says that he is not interested in the political problems as such but in a new conception of life, a new *Weltanschauung*, "a new life-mode".

It is not the politics. But it is a new life-mode, a new social form. We're pot-bound inside democracy and the democratic feeling. (111)¹²

This is a direct transcript of Lawrence's own attitude. When on one of the rare occasions in the novel *Struthers*, the Socialist leader, starts putting political questions to Somers:

Then he began to put a few shrewd questions concerning the Fascisti and Socialisti in Italy, the appropriation of the land by the peasants, and so on; then about Germany, the actual temper of the working people, the quality of their patriotism since the war, and so on. (215)

we see Lawrence's distance from these problems even in this novel which pretends to be political.

The real centre of interest for both political leaders is in fact defined by Somers's own formulation of "a new life-mode". The basis of *Struthers's* big speech is a vision of a new society which should be based upon brotherly love and real comradeship ("the love of comrades") and should thus realize Christ's ideal of the love of one's neighbour as well as the political ideal of democracy which bourgeois society failed to bring about in any real sense although it pretends that it did. Likewise, the centre of *Kangaroo's* speeches is a vision of a new society which should have an entirely new *Weltanschauung* built into its basis.

I should try to establish my state of Australia as a kind of Church, with the profound reverence for life, for life's deepest urges, as the motive power. Dostoevsky suggests this: and I believe it can be done... If a man loves life, and feels the sacredness and the mystery of life, then he knows that life is full of strange and subtle and even conflicting imperatives. And a wise man learns to recognize the imperatives as they arise — or nearly so — and to obey. But most men bruise themselves to death trying to fight and overcome their own new, life-born needs, life's ever-strange new imperatives. The secret of all life is in obedience: obedience to the urge that arises in the soul, the urge that is life itself, urging us on to new gestures, new embraces, new emotions, new combi-

¹² References are to page numbers in D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo*, Penguin Books, 1960.

nations, new creations... That is the only way of true holiness, in my opinion. (125—126)¹³

Kangaroo's "philosophy" is in fact an incongruous mixture of Somers-Lawrence's own views (a special pleading for the spontaneous movements of the emotional-instinctual layers of the psyche and the rejection of the traditional ethical schemes so that these regions of the psyche may be integrated with the totality of personality) and the relics of the Christian ethics that Somers-Lawrence discards.

"Is there any other inspirational force than the force of love?" continued Kangaroo. "There is no other. Love makes the trees flower and shed their seed, love makes the animals mate and birds put on their best feather, and sing their best songs. And all that man has ever created on the face of the earth, or ever will create — if you will allow me the use of the word create, with regard to man's highest productive activities." (149)

The love of man for wife and children, the love of man for man, so that each would lay down his life for the other, then the love of man for beauty, for truth, for the Right. Isn't that so! Destroy no love. Only open the field for further love. (358)

The confusion in the writer's very conception of the Australian political movements brought about many illogicalities and improbabilities as a result of the unintentional shifting of focus. There is a marked discrepancy between the programmes of the Australian terrorist movement as put forward by Calcott, Kangaroo and Somers respectively. Calcott speaks about the political position of Australia, the menace that Japan as a world power represents for his country, the Apartheid policy towards the coloured races, etc. Kangaroo uses entirely different categories when talking about the new society of the future that he would like to bring about.

A *generous* power, that sees all the issue here, not in the after-life, and that does not concern itself with sin and repentance and redemption. I should try to teach my people what it is truly to be a *man* and a woman. The salvation of souls seems too speculative a job. (125)

In his talks with Harriet Somers projects his own wishes upon the programme of the revolutionary movement, about which, in any case, he does not know much.

¹³ Cf. Somers's own views: "This is the innermost symbol of man: alone in the darkness of the cavern of himself, listening to the soundlessness of inflowing fate. Inflowing fate, inflowing doom, what does it matter? The man by himself — that is the absolute — listening — that is the relativity — for the influx of his fate, or doom. The man by himself. The listener". *Kangaroo*, p. 310.

It's not the politics. But it is a new life-form, a new social form. We're pot-bound inside democracy and the democratic feeling... I believe that the men with the real passion for life, for truth, for *living* and not for *having*, I feel they now must seize control of the material possessions, just to safeguard the world from all the masses who want to seize material possessions for themselves, blindly, and nothing else. The men with soul and with passionate truth in them must control the world's material riches and supplies: absolutely put possessions out of the reach of the mass of mankind, and let life begin to live again, in place of this struggle for existence, or struggle for wealth...

"And you think Jack Calcott will do it?"

"I did think so, as he talked to me". (111—112)

All that the reader knows is that Calcott never spoke in these categories, which are entirely alien to him on the evidence of the novel itself.

As an ideological novel *Kangaroo* is equally inadequate. The ideological preoccupations of R. L. Somers which are at the centre of the book are never explained with anything like clarity. Graham Hough raises the objection that Lawrence's "dark god" is a *deus absconditus* but *in ultima linea* tries to defend Lawrence.

It is easy to regard Lawrence's dark god as a piece of portentous flummery: it is quite true that he is continually using, in key places, an idea that he himself does not understand; and those who are unwilling to accept his work as a genuine exploration must, I suppose, reject such vague concepts. The defence of Lawrence is that, indefinite as the concept may be, he is in the process of defining it...¹⁴

In my view this cannot justify the novel as a meaningful structure. An ideological novel must contain in itself a self-enclosed ideological system. The ideological categories must be clearly defined within the novel and the argument itself developed dialectically until all its inner possibilities are exhausted. It is a grave weakness of the novel if we have constantly to go outside it for our references in order to understand what the writer is talking about. This is what happens in *Kangaroo*. In order to get a clearer idea of what Somers is talking about we have constantly to refer to Lawrence's other imaginative and non-fictional writings (*Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, *Mornings in Mexico* and *Etruscan Places*, *The Plumed Serpent* etc.).

One of the primary requirements levied upon an ideological novel is that the ideological element should be closely connected with the action of the novel. The author must find some way of incorporating the ideological debate within the body of the novel. To take one of the greatest examples, in

¹⁴ O. c., p. 137.

The Brothers Karamazov the patricide is the structural focus. Through the complex of moral, psychological and existential problems that gather round this event the personalities of the main characters of the novel are refracted as well as their theoretical attitudes. The ideological and the psychological are closely interconnected. Similarly, the crime and punishment of Rodion Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* is a crime story full of suspense, a basis for a profound psychological split within Raskolnikov, and a platform of the ideological debate that, as the novel unfolds, retraces the steps that Dostoevsky himself made on the way from the social-revolutionary convictions he held to a religious conversion.

In Lawrence's novel *Kangaroo* the theoretical thought is not an integral part of the novel. Lawrence's old and well-known ideological antinomy: the instinctive-spontaneous "quick" of an individual psyche as contrasted with the automatism of ideas and ideals ("the octopus of the human ideal") is not successfully embodied in the action of the novel. The theoretical element (the elaboration of the concepts of the "living unconscious" and the "creative urge") is not absorbed in anything like an inevitable way by the body of the novel but exists more or less exclusively as a flow of abstract argument going on within Somers's brain. (It is a telling fact that Lawrence mostly uses the form of an essay in order to expound Somers's ideas.) It is true that the political plot as well as some of Somers's intimate relationships (the relation with Harriet, Kangaroo, Jack Calcott etc.) make him try harder to clear up for himself his concept of the "dark god" as opposed to the views, convictions and the emotional commitments of the other characters around him. But this abstract flow of muddled argument could just as well have existed independently of it all. The theoretical element constantly falls apart as it is not vitally correlated with the body of the novel.

But even when we question the value of *Kangaroo* as a novel of ideas or as a political novel, even when we pass a severe judgment on the ultimate incoherence of the novel, ideological as well as structural, there are indubitable values that remain. In my opinion, they are primarily to be found in the portrayal of R. L. Somers (Lawrence's self-portrait). In spite of the fact that the inner life of the main character is not always organized with sufficient clarity and that not all its intellectual, moral and emotional components have received their full due, in spite of the fact that Lawrence did not succeed in fusing the manifold strands of Somers's inner life, and of the novel's texture, into a meaningful shape,

he nevertheless powerfully embodied certain significant complexes of Somers's personality.

What comes uppermost in Lawrence's portrayal of Somers's state of mind are the painful antinomies and disharmonies of his consciousness, the ideological conflicts that torment him, the chaotic emotional disturbances he had in the aftermath of the traumatic experiences of the war-time period. Lawrence expressed with particular power and conviction a salient element of Somers's make-up, namely his revulsion from humanity, his hatred of humanity.¹⁵ As the novel unfolds Lawrence builds up this element of Somers's personality by several narrative devices: Somers's meditations, discussions with the subordinate characters, but primarily and from the artistic point of view most powerfully expressed through a highly original use of the Australian landscape. Thus the landscape becomes a powerful interpreter of the turmoil of Somers's psyche.

The Australian bush, the exuberant vegetation of the century-old tree-ferns and palms, the coast, the Pacific ocean — which are rendered with great sensuous vividness — do not exist only in their own right but are according to the subtle

¹⁵ It is only late in the novel that Lawrence tells his readers about Somers's experiences prior to the time described in the book (the Nightmare chapter). It seems that he himself felt the need to anchor Somers more firmly in reality, indicating some of the psychological and sociological factors that had deeply influenced his spiritual development and determined some of his characteristic attitudes. The Nightmare chapter has been interpolated in the novel in an utterly artificial way but it yields some important material. It gives us the genesis of Somers-Lawrence's unbalance. We should distinguish between Lawrence's penetrating insight into the industrial civilization which got an even sharper edge during the war-years and his intimate psychic wound which — as the chapter testifies clearly — threw him off balance and caused the ensuing misanthropy. The first thing that strikes the eye while reading the long-drawn-out account of the troubles he went through during the war-time period is the vagueness and imprecision of Somers-Lawrence's attack. The words he uses in order to describe his adversary are either so general in meaning that they do not denote anything or anyone in particular (*the society, the mongrel-mouthed world, the outside world, etc.*) or utterly imprecise in their pejorative meaning (*canaille, the mob, etc.*) Most often he uses the pronoun *they*, which is completely vague. The most significant fact that we gather from this chapter is a dangerous exaggeration that makes him adopt the extreme position of a total denial of all human bonds. There is a great difference between the condemnation of "the stay-at-home bullies", and "the military", mentioned at the beginning of the autobiographical chapter, and the all-embracing condemnation of *the others, the millions of the others, the fellow-men*, that comes later. The chapter ends with an important confession: *He felt broken off from his fellow-men. He felt broken off from the England he had belonged to. The ties were gone. He was loose like a single timber of some wrecked ship, drifting over the face of the earth. Without a people, without a land. So be it. He was broken apart, apart he would remain.* (287)

logic of poetic creation transformed into images and symbols of Somers's inner life. All the time we are intensely aware of the further, symbolic dimension of the landscape.

Let us look at a typical example:

But he was looking mostly straight below him, at the massed foliage of the cliff-slope. Down into the centre of the great, dull-green whorles of the tree-ferns, and on to the shaggy mops of the cabbage palms. In one place a long fall of creeper was yellowish with damp flowers. Gum-tress came up in tufts. *The previous world! — the world of the coal age. The lonely, lonely world that had waited, it seemed, since the coal age.* These ancient flat-topped tree-ferns, these towseled palms like mops. *What was the good of trying to be an alert conscious man here? You couldn't. Drift, drift into a sort of obscurity, backwards into a nameless past, hoary as the country is hoary. Strange old feelings wake in the soul: old, non-human feelings. And an old, old indifference, like a torpor, invades the spirit. An old, saurian torpor. Who wins? There was the land sprinkled with dwellings as with granulated sugar. There was a black smoke of steamers on the high pale sea, and a whiteness of steam from a colliery among the dull trees. Was the land awake? Would the people waken this ancient land, or would the land put them to sleep, drift them back into the semi-consciousness of the twilight?*

Somers felt the torpor coming over him. He hung there on the parapet looking down, and he didn't care. How profoundly, darkly he didn't care. There are no problems for the soul in its darkened, wide-eyed torpor. Neither Harriet nor Kangaroo nor Jaz, nor even the world. Worlds come, and worlds go: even worlds. And when the old, old influence of the fern-world comes over a man, how can he care? He breathes the fern seed and drifts back, becomes darkly half vegetable, devoid of preoccupations. Even the never-slumbering urge of sex sinks down into something darker, more monotonous, incapable of caring: like sex in trees. The dark world before conscious responsibility was born. (197—198)

However subtle the interpenetration of the outer, physical and the inner, subjective reality may be in this passage, we can nevertheless point to the border-line between the two. First, the rendering of the milieu: "the massed foliage of the cliff-slope", "the great, dull-green whorls of the tree-ferns", "the shaggy mops of the cabbage palms" etc. Details of this kind create the atmosphere of the tangled age-old growth of the exuberant tropical vegetation into whose predominant dull-green colour a detail that stands out clearly on the sombre background (»In one place a long fall of creeper was yellowish with damp flowers») brings in a splash of bright colour. But the statement "Gum-trees came up in tufts. *The previous world! — the world of the coal age*", announces a spiritual theme, highly characteristic for the workings of Somers's consciousness. The Australian tropics for him represents primarily a reversal of time, a return to the prehistoric world; the adjectives *lonely, ancient, hoary* accumulate, building up

the characteristic idiom of his vision. The writer intensifies the physical reality with every movement of the brush but at the same time lifts it imperceptibly from its realistic experiential basis and transforms it into an inner subjective mood: *"What was the good of trying to be an alert conscious man here? You couldn't. Drift, drift into a sort of obscurity, backwards into a nameless past . . . Strange old feelings wake in the soul: old, non-human feelings And an old, old indifference, like a torpor, invades the spirit"*. The key words, the bearers of central meaning are: *non-human feelings, indifference, torpor, the semi-consciousness of the world of the twilight, he didn't care.*

Somers's tormented and split consciousness is projected upon the Australian tropics; these densely wooded mountain slopes, the age-old tree-ferns and palms talk an intimate language of his soul, expressing its painful restlessness, a traumatic wish to escape his own being, a desperate longing for the obliteration of consciousness with its concomitants of torment and pain — all of which is projected here as Somers's satisfaction in the obliteration of the dimension of human history.

In the key passages of this kind the Australian landscape is recreated in Somers's image. The physical reality is intensely present but all the time we are well aware that the landscape has been creatively distorted by a highly personal vision and that somebody else with a different approach could use the same experiential data for an entirely different synthesis by placing the major accents differently.

Besides the land component the Australian landscape as refracted through Somers's consciousness has another significant component, namely the Pacific ocean. The ocean sounds all throughout the novel. It is superbly rendered over a wide range of its moods from the crystal clarity of its waters on a fine day when dolphins hang in the breakers as if in a pane of bright green glass to the terrifying crash of the waves upon the rocks when it is turned into a cauldron of seething foam. The descriptive passages of the Pacific coast return over and over again in the novel. The ocean is a component part of the everyday life of the Somers' in their seaside cottage. But it is much more than that. It is to the Pacific ocean that Somers turns whenever he is seized with a particularly nauseating revulsion from humanity. It is the only thing he can communicate with, the only thing that gives him solace in its utter remoteness from and unconcern for humanity. The ocean, rendered in its elemental power and glory with its savage assaults upon the land and its remote forms of life, focusses powerfully a

whole complex of Somers's turbulent emotions: his misanthropy, his savage denial of humanity in himself.

The thud, the pulse of the waves: that was his nearest throb of emotion. The other emotions seemed to abandon him. So suddenly, and so completely, to abandon him. So it was when he got back from Sydney and, in the night of moonlight, went down the low cliff to the sand. Immediately the great rhythm and ringing of the breakers obliterated every other feeling in his breast, and his soul was a moonlit hollow with the waves striding home. Nothing else. (361—362)

In the same way he occasionally identifies himself with various forms of non-human life: a gannet, a hawk, a kite, and — above everything else — a fish. The fish — cold, self-sufficient, rapacious, at the furthest remove from the human — embodies the antinorm proposed by Somers.

These days Somers, too, was filled with fury. As for loving mankind, or having a fire of love in his heart, it was all rot. He felt almost *fierily cold*. He liked the sea, the pale sea of green glass that fell in such cold foam. *Ice-fierce, fish-burning*. He went out on to the low flat rocks at low tide, skirting the deep pock-holes that were full of brilliantly clear water and delicately-coloured shells and tiny, crimson anemones. *Strangely sea-scooped sharp sea-bitter rock-floor, all wet and sea-savage*. And standing at the edge looking at the waves, rather terrifying, rolling at him, where he stood low and exposed, far out from the sand-banks, and as he watched the gannets gleaming white, then falling with a splash like white sky-sparrows into the waves, *he wished as he had never wished before that he could be cold, as sea-things are cold, and murderously fierce*. To have oneself exultantly *ice-cold, not one spark of this wretched warm flesh left*, and to have all the *terrific, ice energy of a fish*. To surge with that *cold exultance and passion of a sea thing!* Now he understood the *yearning in the seal-woman's croon, as she went back to the sea, leaving her husband and her children of warm flesh. No more cloying warmth. No more of this horrible stuffy heat of human beings. To be an isolated swift fish in the big seas, that are bigger than the earth; fierce with cold, cold life, in the watery twilight before sympathy was created to clog us.*

These were his feelings now. Mankind? Ha, he turned his face to the centre of the seas, away from any land. The noise of waters, and dumbness like a fish. The cold, lovely silence, before crying and calling were invented. His tongue felt heavy in his mouth, as if it had relapsed away from speech altogether.

He did not care a straw what Kangaroo said or felt, or what anybody said or felt, even himself. He had no feelings, and speech had gone out of him. He wanted to be cold, cold, and alone like a single fish, with no feeling in his heart at all except a certain icy exultance and wild, fish-like rapacity. "Homo sum!" All right. Who sets a limit to what a man is? Man is also a fierce and fish-cold devil, in his hour, filled with cold fury of desire to get away from the cloy of human life altogether, not into death, but into that icily self-sufficient vigour of a fish. (139—140)

The positives defined by this passage which lays bare the workings of Somers's mind represent a reversal of human values, a denial of the human bond. The fish is praised because it is *cold, ice-cold*, a quality which contrasts sharply with the *warm flesh, the cloying warmth, the stuffy heat of human beings*. The fish possesses a "terrific, ice energy" but in contrast with the potentially constructive human energy its energy is all geared to a destructive purpose (*rapacious and murderously fierce*). This "ice energy" has its own intensity, its own exultation. Lawrence links together notions that are normally contrasted. Denying "a fire of love in his heart", namely a spark of solidarity with humanity, he transfers the notion of "fire" and "burning" on to a new plane. By being put into a new context they entirely change the original meaning. Instead of denoting the warmth of emotions in the human heart, they now depict an exultance in utter self-centredness and the rapacious activity of a sea-creature. The qualities Somers envies the sea-things are *ice-fierce, fish-burning*. He himself would like to be *fierily-cold*.

The passage contains a significant *motif* of a song about the seal-woman from the Hebridean folklore which Lawrence mentions also in the Nightmare chapter and elsewhere.¹⁶ The seal-woman turning her back on human beings, returning to the mindlessness of animal existence after having tried human life, focusses poignantly Somers-Lawrence's painful wish to escape the torments of consciousness by sloughing off his humanity.

The evocation of *the watery twilight before sympathy was created to clog us* echoes its land counterpart of *the lonely, lonely world that had waited, it seemed, since the coal age, the semi-consciousness of the world of the twilight, the fern-world, the dark world before conscious responsibility was born*, of the narrative passage describing the Australian bush that has been mentioned earlier.

¹⁶ This fact itself testifies to the impact it made upon his imagination. Cf. the following passage from *Mornings in Mexico*: "Or the wild fishermen of the Outer Hebrides will sing in their intense, concentrated way, by the fire. And again, usually, the songs have words. Yet sometimes not. Sometimes the song has merely sounds, and a marvellous melody. It is the seal drifting in to shore on the wave, or the seal-woman, singing low and secret, departing back from the shores of men, through the surf, back to the realm of the outer beasts that rock on the waters and stare through glistening, vivid, mindless eyes". *Mornings in Mexico and Etruscan Places*, Penguin Books, 1960, p. 56. Cf. also the Melville essay: "Melville is like a Viking going home to the sea, encumbered with age and memories, and a sort of accomplished despair, almost madness. For he cannot accept humanity. He can't belong to humanity. Cannot". *Studies in Classic American Literature*, Mercury Books, No. 58, London, 1965, p. 124.

Of the many passages that I could quote to illustrate my thesis I shall choose two rather extended ones. Both are notable for the fineness and intensity of writing.

Richard had it all to himself — the ever-unfurling water, the ragged, flat, square-holes rocks, the fawn sands inland, the soft sand-bank, the sere flat grass where ponies wandered, the low, red-painted bungalows squatting under coral trees, the ridge of tall-wire-thin trees holding their plumes in tufts at the tips, the stalky cabbage-palms beyond in the hollow, clustering, low, whitish zinc roofs of bungalows, at the edge of the dark trees — then the trees in darkness swooping up to the wall of the tors, that ran a waving skyline sagging southwards. Scattered, low, frail-looking bungalows with whitish roofs, and scattered dark trees among. A plume of smoke beyond, out of the scarp front of trees. Near the sky, dark, old, aboriginal rocks. Then again all the yellowish fore-front of the sea, yellow bare grass, the homestead with leafless coral trees, the ponies above the sands, the pale fawn foreshore, the sea, the floor of wet rock.

He had it all to himself. And there, with his hands in his pockets, he drifted into indifference. *The far-off, far-off, far-off indifference. The world revolved and revolved and disappeared. Like a stone that has fallen into the sea, his old life, the old meaning, fell, and rippled, and there was vacancy, with the sea and the Australian shore in it. Far-off, far-off, as if he had landed on another planet, as a man might land after death. Leaving behind the body of care. Even the body of desire. Shed. All that had meant so much to him, shed. All the old world and self of care, the beautiful care as well as the weary care, shed like a dead body. The landscape? — he cared not a thing about the landscape. Love? — he was absolved from love, as if by a great pardon. Humanity? — there was none. Thought? — fallen like a stone into the sea. The great, the glamorous past? — worn thin, frail, like a frail, translucent film of shell thrown up on the shore.*

To be alone, mindless and memoryless between the sea, under the sombre wall-front of Australia. To be alone with a long, wide shore and land, *heartless, soulless*. As alone and as absent and as present as an aboriginal dark on the sand in the sun. *The strange falling-away of everything*. The cabbage-palms in the sea-wind were sere like old mops. The jetty straddled motionless from the shore. A pony walked on the sand snuffing the sea-weed.

The past all gone so frail and thin. "What have I cared about, what have I cared for? There is nothing to care about". *Absolved from it all*. The soft, blue, *humanless* sky of Australia, the pale, white, *unwritten* atmosphere of Australia. *Tabula rasa*. The world a new leaf. *And on the new leaf, nothing*. The white clarity of the Australian, fragile atmosphere. *Without a mark, without a record*.

"Why have I cared? I don't care. How strange it is here, to be soulless and alone".

That was the perpetual refrain at the back of his mind. To be soulless and alone, by the Southern Ocean, in Australia.

"Why do I wrestle with my soul? I have no soul".

Clear as the air about him this truth possessed him.

"Why do I talk of the soul? *My soul is shed like a sheath. I*

am soulless and alone, soulless and alone. That which is soulless is perforce alone". (364—365)¹⁷

In a way the description of the sea-coast in this passage is obverse in meaning to the passage describing the bush which has been mentioned earlier. The obscurity, the twilight reigning among "the massed foliage" of the bush is replaced by "the white clarity" of the atmosphere on the sea-coast. The tangled mass of vegetation where it is difficult to distinguish one thing from another (all things are mentioned in the plural — the tree-ferns, the cabbage palms, the gum-trees, with only one individual detail singled out: "In one place a long fall of creeper was yellowish with damp flowers") is replaced by a great number of sharply individualized details that build up a vivid picture, well-worked in depth, distinguishing clearly between the foreground and the more distant planes of presentation. The density of growth where one thing stifles another has been replaced by the wide, open spaces of the sky and the sea. But in spite of these visual and pictorial differences both landscapes have the same basic meaning for their observer R. L. Somers. The Australian seashore speaks to him with the same language as the Australian bush, luring him outside himself, helping him to flee his own personality, his own preoccupations, his own past. In Somers's mind the Australian bush is identified with the prehistoric earth, "the coal age", dragging him back into it. "*Drift, drift into a sort of obscurity, backwards into a nameless past, hoary as the country is hoary*". It induces in him a heavy torpor, a great indifference. He welcomes its influence upon him because it annihilates the spirit. "*He breathes the fern seed and drifts back, becomes darkly half-vegetable, devoid of preoccupations*". The Australian bush points towards the "nameless past"; the Australian seashore points towards the un-created future. He likes it for its wide, empty spaces which open the corresponding great vacant spaces in his own mind.

¹⁷ Martin Jarrett-Kerr (Father Tiverton) quotes this passage with the following commentary: "There follows a passage describing Somers's desolation which seems to me one of the finest Lawrence ever wrote. It has been suggested by Mr. Walter Allen that Lawrence was 'a mystic of a sort'. If the word is used in a very loose sense, for anyone who relies upon intuitive rather than discursive knowledge, this may be allowed. In that case it may be said, in an analogical sense, that this passage at the end of chapter seventeen is Lawrence's account of the dark night of the senses". O. c., pp. 84—85. He also says: "*Kangaroo* leaves us chiefly with a sense of wide, open barrenness: the wonderful description of the little house by the coast, 'Coo-ee', seems to tell us that it is the sea — the surf and the eternal relentless breakers — that is really alive". O. c., p. 82. While noticing the vitality and force of Lawrence's writing in the passages relating to Somers's solitary life on the sea-coast he does not explore the situation, does not search for the underlying causes of the intensity of writing.

"The world a new leaf. And on the new leaf, nothing... Without a mark, without a record". Man has not yet left his mark on these wide spaces, they are humanless and alien. *"Far-off, far-off, as if he had landed on another planet, as a man might land after death"*. He praises the uncreated time not for the possibilities it offers but for its utter blankness. In the case of the description of the bush the past weighs heavily on him, obliterating the consciousness, in the case of the Australian seascape the utter blankness and the absence of meaning bars out the workings of consciousness. *"The past all gone so thin and frail... My soul is shed like a sheath. I am soulless and alone, soulless and alone"*. In both cases he strives for the annihilation of the spirit and the destruction of time. On the one hand the way of escape leads into the vegetable past, on the other into the blankness of the uncreated future. In both cases the present moment with its torment is evaded. Both descriptions create a sort of timeless universe denying both history and consciousness as unfolding in time.

That this sombre denial of the human has its ecstatic, incandescent moments when for Somers the intense communion with nature and its phenomena takes the place of the communion with the human beings testifies this wonderful passage:

It was a time of full moon. The moon rose about eight. She was so strong, so exciting, that Richard went out at nine o'clock down to the shore. The night was full of moonlight as a mother-of-pearl. He imagined it had a warmth in it towards the moon, a moon-heat. The light on the waves was like liquid radium swinging and slipping. Like radium, the mystic virtue of vivid decomposition, liquid-gushing lucidity.

The sea too was very full. It was nearly high tide, the waves were rolling very tall, with light like a menace on the nape of their necks as they bent, so brilliant. Then, when they fell, the fore-flush in a great soft swing with incredible speed up the shore, on the darkness soft-lighted with moon, like a rush of white serpents, then slipping back with a hiss that fell into silence for a second, leaving the sand of granulated silver.

It was the huge rocking of this flat, hollow-foreflush moon — dim in its hollow, that was the night to Richard. "This is the night and the moon", he said to himself. Incredibly swift and far the flat rush flew at him, with foam like the hissing, open mouths of snakes. In the nearness a wave broke white and high. Then, ugh! across the intervening gulf the great lurch and swish, as the snakes rushed forward, in a hollow frost hissing at his boots. Then failed to bite, fell back hissing softly, leaving the belly of the sands granulated silver.

A huge but a cold passion swinging back and forth. Great waves of radium swooping with a down-curve and rushing up the shore. Then calling themselves back again, retreating to the mass. Then rushing with venomous radium-burning speed into the body of the land. Then recolling with a low swish, leaving the flushed sand naked.

That was the night. Rocking with cold, radium-burning passion, swinging and flinging itself with venomous desire. That was

Richard, too, a bit of human wispieness in thin overcoat and thick boots. The shore was deserted all the way. Only, when he came past the creek on the sands, rough, wild ponies looking at him, dark figures in the moon light lifting their heads from the invisible grass of the sand, and waiting for him to come near. When he came and talked to them they were reassured, and put their noses down to the grass to eat a bit more in the moon-dusk, glad a man was there.

Richard rocking with the radium-urgent passion of the night: the huge, desirous swing, the call clamour, the low hiss of retreat. The call, call! And the answerer. Where was his answerer? There was no living answerer. No dark-bodied, warm-bodied answerer. He knew that when he had spoken a word to the night-half-hidden ponies with their fluffy legs. No animate answer this time. The radium-rocking, wave-knocking night his call and his answer both. This God without feet or knees or face. This sluicing, knocking, urging night, heaving like a woman with unspeakable desire, but no woman, no thighs or breast, no body. The moon, the concave mother-of-pearl of night, the great radium-swinging, and his little self. The call and the answer, without intermediary. Non-human gods, non-human human being. (374—375)

It is a telling fact about *Kangaroo* that this passage represents one of its climaxes. Contrary to the novelistic tradition where climaxes are reached as a result of the interaction of human beings when their destinies cross one another, this book reaches one of its characteristic climaxes as a result of Somers's response to the vast impersonal forces of nature. The dramatic agents in this passage which transforms traditional description into a piece of drama by infusing it with the dramatic intensity and dynamism are not human beings but the night, the moon, the sea, the waves, the sand, the land. The passage describes their interaction. In the general dynamic movement of the scene (notice the predominant use of the verbs of movement) which takes place in the preternatural brilliance of the moon-suffused night, the natural phenomena are endowed with a minimum of anthropomorphic life to heighten the dramatic interest. The waves have "light like a menace on the nape of their necks", they are metamorphosed into the *white serpents* that rush upon the shore and then retreat, there are references to the "body of the sand", "the flushed sand . . . (left) naked" after the waves had recoiled, the serpents of the waves rush into the *body of the land*. These anthropomorphic touches justify Lawrence's use of the language of the human sexual desire which is in this passage transferred on to the plane of the interaction of the natural phenomena. ("A huge but a cold passion swinging back and forth". "Rocking with cold, radium-burning passion, swinging and flinging itself with venomous desire". ". . . the huge, desirous swing, the call clamour, the low hiss of retreat. The call, call! And the answerer".) Lawrence thus gives dramatic vividness to the scenic action without humanizing or sentimentalizing the forces of