

David Game. *D.H. Lawrence's Australia: Anxiety at the Edge of Empire.*

Farnham: Ashgate, 2015. 348 pp.

£75.00

ISBN: 9781472415059 (Hbk)

<http://www.ashgate.com/isbn/9781472415059>

David Game's exhaustive scholarly account of D.H. Lawrence's engagement with Australia starts with a citation from the writer's letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith, penned on board the R.M.S. *Orsova* on 22 April 1922 under steam to Perth from what was then Ceylon. The letter touches on Lawrence's theories of the degeneration of the Western races: 'Now we're going to fall. But you don't catch me going back on my whiteness and Englishness and myself' (1). Game thus foreshadows themes that drive Lawrence's work under examination—themes of degeneration and regeneration which show the poet and novelist to be a person of his time, reacting, with his own unique resilience, to and against the aftermath of Social Darwinism in the second half of the nineteenth century and also to the widespread pessimism at the end of World War I. This pessimism is summed up in Oscar Spengler's influential *The Decline of the West* (1918). Game's citation raises many of the difficulties that contemporary readers have with Lawrence, the man of his time—his self-confident whiteness, Englishness and maleness, his readiness to exert a certain patronising gaze upon the foreign, odd, if kindred, former colony, awaiting him when the *Orsova* berthed in Perth. He was a man of his time and this voyage took place nearly a century ago.

Perhaps because of the sheer bulk of material he addresses, Game's approach is to desist from lengthy analysis of such questions but to cite skillfully from a wide array of critical commentary including, when necessary, his own. As he states in the introduction, Game's interest in Lawrence is contextual, offering a detailed historical and sociological background to his chronological study of Lawrence's own diverse and developing body of works and ideas, notably the themes of regeneration and migration. A scholar dedicated to Lawrence for more than 10 years, Game's aim is to show, in this 'first attempt to analyse all of Lawrence's writing about Australia' (3), that 'Lawrence's engagement with Australia forms an important part of both his intellectual and physical journey in search of regeneration' (1).

Game's approach is much broader than his predecessor Robert Darroch, who focused on the time Lawrence spent in Australia, and Game admits to not addressing biographical aspects of Lawrence in Australia because of a 'paucity of material' (7). The following highlights some of Game's impressive and extensive work. One of the disadvantages of Game's chronological approach is it runs the risk of repetition as he gathers together themes, arguments or *topoi* accumulated from earlier chapters. But the greater goal certainly achieved is scholarly solidity.

Many statements made by Lawrence and his characters pose difficulties for the contemporary reader. This probably explains why Game provides a comprehensive survey of attitudes to Social Darwinist thinking, theories of degeneration and eugenics in Chapters 1 and 2, in order to try to situate Lawrence in the context of and differentiate him within the mood of his age. This helps explain Lawrence's interest in regeneration. Drawing upon the arguments of other Lawrence scholars, notably John Worthen, Game argues valiantly to contextualise and diminish Lawrence's several perhaps random but 'unsettling' eugenicist statements (e.g. 'I would build a lethal

chamber'¹) as 'callow' or a 'pose' (42–43). However, Game is not wholly convincing here: his question as to whether his evaluation might be 'hairsplitting' suggests his own uncertainty (44).

Chapter Two documents in detail the evolution of Lawrence's utopian and regenerative concept of 'Rananim,' drawing on the utopian ideas of Samuel Butler and William Morris, which Game shows are used 'intermittently in his letters but not at all in his fiction' (49). Game cites an important allusion in Lawrence's letter to his friend William Hopkins as early as January 1915 where he refers to: 'gathering together about 20 souls' to found 'a colony built on the assumption of goodness in the members, instead of the assumption of badness' (50). In the context of the chaos and fears of an England under assault in World War I, and Lawrence's increasing sentiment of feeling 'an alien' in his own homeland, Game traces the shifting imaginary location of Lawrence's utopian community starting from 1915 (America) through to 1917—Cornwall itself, in the brief but unsuccessful community experiment there with Middleton Murry and Mansfield, in late 1917—the 'Andes,' 'Paraguay or Colombia' and by late 1919—'the Pacific,' 'Africa' and 'Zululand,' and by mid-1920, the 'South Seas.' Game argues that the planned visit to Taos, New Mexico was then postponed in January 1922 because of Lawrence's desire to approach America 'from the east,' 'because Australia now formed part of Lawrence's regenerative vision' (54).

To explain this turn, Game traces the increasing presence of Australia in Lawrence's consciousness that intersected with and became bound up in his search for Rananim. This is through an account of Lawrence's reading—notably Boldrewood's *Robbery Under Arms* (1888), as well as anthropological perspectives on Indigenous Australia in Jane Harrison's *Ancient Art and Ritual* (1913), and J.G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890)—the concept of 'blood knowledge' (57) which would have fed Lawrence's ideas on blood consciousness. Lawrence's reading on American literature, especially Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), underlines the important if underestimated trans-Pacific perspectives and bonds of the new English-speaking worlds. Game shows how the novelist and traveller, from his essay on *Moby Dick* (*Studies in Classic American Literature*, 1923), saw, in his journey to Australia, his own Melvillean voyage: 'Well I have seen an albatross too: following us in waters hard on the Antarctic, too, south of Australia' (60).

In Chapters 3 and 4, Game explores the 'tilt' to Australia in Lawrence's letters in his less well-known novels *The Lost Girl* (1920) and *The White Peacock* (1921), which were written immediately before he and his wife Frieda embarked from Naples for the southern hemisphere on 26 February 1922. From Lawrence's favourable depiction of Australia and Australians in the correspondence and in these two early Australian novels Game deduces that Lawrence's trip to Australia was well to-the-fore in Lawrence's mind at the end of 1921.

Chapter 4 is interesting for Game's meticulous tracing of emerging Australian elements in Lawrence's early fiction either as *topoi* or characters. His first example the 'mystery and aloofness of the sea' occurs as early as 1907 when drafting his early short story 'The Vicar's Garden' (1909). Game perceptively links this motif with Lawrence's childhood visit to Whitby, the writer's life-long fascination with Captain Cook (who trained there), and the much later reference in *Kangaroo* (1923) in the description of the Pacific as 'a Whitby sea' (74). Other characters linked with the theme of migration to Australia include the young Midlands miner Joe Gascoigne in Lawrence's early play 'The Daughter-in Law' (1913) who, Game suggests, may

have been inspired by Lawrence's friend May Holbrook, who was then considering migrating to Australia. Lawrence wrote to her: 'The emigration idea is, I should say, a fine one. Australia is a new country, new morals: it is not a split from England, but a new nation' (77). Game emphasises the important fact that, at the time of writing this play, Lawrence was already a temporary emigrant to the continent (Germany and Italy) following his elopement with Frieda.

Game also shows how emigration was a powerful subtext even before World War I within the Lawrence family itself, in the shape of his 'prodigal uncle Herbert Beardsall,' who inspired a character in Lawrence's short story 'The Primrose Path' (1913). 'Like [the fictional character Daniel] Sutton, Beardsall had left his wife to immigrate to Australia, returning to run a taxi business in Nottingham' (80). Game cites Lawrence scholar Tony Pinkney on how the later novel *Kangaroo* portrays Australia as 'a much accelerated [modernized] version of the contemporary times in the home culture' (81). The examples firmly support Game's thesis that, even before the outbreak of World War I, and thus before Lawrence's overwhelming disappointment with England during and after that period, Lawrence 'was evaluating his own impulse to leave England in the widespread emigration from England to the new world' (83).

Evidence is also provided on noteworthy but overlooked Australian characters in the last two of the prototype Australian novels written just before his departure from Naples for the southern hemisphere. The 'dark' Australian doctor Alexander Graham (*The Lost Girl*, 1920) who Game sees as a precursor to the 'dark God' (alluded to in *Kangaroo* and 1924's *The Boy in the Bush*) and the 'well-coloured' Francis Dekker (*Aaron's Rod*, 1921) both evince a spirit of dark vitality missing in Europe.

Addressing *Kangaroo* (1923), Game's main purpose is to show how Lawrence's idealistic Rananim-inspired approach to Australia is aligned with 'one of the major regenerative currents of his time, migration' (98) Game's playful title "'Pommy", "Pomegranate" and "Pommigrant"' draws on the nick-name the reader understands has been given to new chum Somers by his Sydney neighbour Jack Callcott. As Game indicates, this demonstrates Lawrence's frequent inspiration and collage-work from *Bulletin* articles. An important footnote describes the extensive research of Bruce Steele, the Cambridge editor of *Kangaroo*, on the role of the *Bulletin* in informing Lawrence about Australia, following Robert Darroch's initial 1981 work (pages 131–32). The use of the *Bulletin* as a Lawrence source gains importance because of the apparent lack of Australian human contacts argued by Game. However it is a pity that Game hardly comments in his text and doesn't cite Steele more extensively on Darroch's central hypothesis that Lawrence based Callcott and Cooley on people he had met and with whom he had exchanged ideas (7). As in the first two chapters, Game prefaces his approach to the immigration interest with historical and sociological studies of the period, including official bipartisan immigration policies of the Empire, British and Australian. A letter from Lawrence in Australia to Frieda's sister gives more evidence than Somers yields on Lawrence's utopian emigration plans for the country: 'if one could have had a dozen people perhaps, and a big piece of land of ones [sic] own' (121). (Somers's confession to the Cornish immigrant William James (Jaz) Trehwella at the end of the novel is confined to 'land' rather than 'people.')

Game does not depart from biographical orthodoxy in reporting Lawrence's ambivalence towards Australia, remarking: 'In one breath he finds it degenerative and threatening, in another regenerative and impossibly beautiful' (71). This is explained as a 'clash between his

preconceptions of Australia and the realities of the Australian society he found in 1922' (71). Game demonstrates that, in contrast to the idealistic projections of the earlier novels, Lawrence's own experience of Australia, reflected in the character Somers, is that of disillusion, at least in the initial chapters. Sydney, rather than being a new metropolis, is derivative: 'London without being London' (111). While Chapter 1 is eminently quotable for expressing Somers's very English discontent with Australian democratic behavior, Game perhaps sources a little too much of his evidence from it in building up essentialist sketches of racial types typical of the time (mainly negative to Australia) which Lawrence constructs, but, it should be stressed, continues reworking, through the ongoing discussions between Somers and the other key characters, Jack Callcott, and especially the Cornish immigrant Jaz Trehwella.

Somers's ideas on Australia and his English identity evolve significantly from the moment he steps off the boat as a 'thought adventurer' (*Kangaroo*, 245, 257)² until the end of the novel. There is a similar trend for the immigrant Jack Grant in *The Boy in the Bush* (*The Boy*) which Game also describes as Lawrence's *bildungsroman*. The Somers character is notoriously fluid and difficult to pin down, either as Somers's/Lawrence's original English self, his at times desired primitive Celtic self (mirrored in Jaz Trehwella and drawing on Lawrence's Cornish experience), or even the happy-go-lucky Australian self. Even within his own culture Somers is both gentleman and a working class man. This becomes clear at the novel's end when, after expressing concern about how migration might make 'his blood thin,' Somers expresses what he is really searching for, beyond national stereotypes of being, the idea of the individual within the 'deep consciousness in man' (*Kangaroo*, 407). In this Lawrence seems to shift towards a post-national consciousness, though adhering to the importance of region.

In Chapter 6, Game presents the central if overlooked theme of degeneration in Lawrence's work (125). In doing this, he provides a somewhat overdue survey of the critical reception of *Kangaroo*, both contemporaneous and current. This includes hostile reviews by A.D. Hope and K.S. Prichard (irritated by comments reflecting Lawrence's limited knowledge of Australia); and more sympathetic reviews by Nettie Palmer, and Michael Wilding, who praised Lawrence's innovative form. This survey helps to contextualise Lawrence in the not very lengthy timespan of the Australian novel at the time of its publication. Nevertheless, given that some critics have found Lawrence's depiction of Australia to be problematic, it would have been useful to flag earlier the difficulties Lawrence raises, with a brief reference to his reception in the introduction. As Game argues, though, 'it is time for Australian readers to take criticism on the chin and take *Kangaroo* for what it is' (131).

Game makes interesting connections in tracing evidence of the theme of degeneration in *Kangaroo*, the probable influence being Egyptologist Flinders Petrie. Game identifies a very creditable parallel in the haunting regression to primitive landscapes described by Somers in *Kangaroo* and by Marlow in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). In Marlow's words the riverine central Africa is like 'the earliest beginning of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth, and the big trees were king' (133). On the central New South Wales coast, Somers describes 'jungle, impenetrable with tree ferns: the previous world! The world of the coal age' (133). In Chapter 7, Game underlines the important link between the Sydney zoo-inspired portraits of the kangaroo in *Kangaroo* and Lawrence's only Australian poem 'Kangaroo which was published in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923). Game stresses the important north/south dialectic inspired by this animal from the southern hemisphere, with its 'heavy, elemental

groundedness' (154). 'The kangaroo in both texts represents the pre-European, Aboriginal Australia . . . and a uniquely Australian consciousness which precedes modernity' (156).

One of the most problematic issues in Lawrence's writings about Australia involves his depictions of Indigenous Australians in *Kangaroo* and *The Boy*. Lawrence relies on an anthropologically-derived but essentialist view of Aboriginal identity and the idea of an Indigenous 'blood consciousness.' Stepping deftly through the mine-field of contemporary postcolonial perspectives, Game keeps closely to his plot of explaining Lawrence's thinking about the regenerative potential of the primitive consciousness for degenerate post-WWI European man, as well as fictional models, and the sources of Lawrence's often-questioned knowledge about Australian Aboriginal culture (Jane Harrison and J.G. Frazer). The important connection Game makes between these Australian novels is how they were being revised or initiated in America in 1923, soon after Lawrence's completion of his iconic essay 'The Spirit of Place.'³ With this example alone, Game demonstrates how vital Lawrence's experience of Australia was in firming his precocious 'overarching belief in an essential relationship between particular people and particular places' (172).

In Chapter 9, Game points to Mariane Dekoven's identification of 'ambivalence' between Lawrence's 'masculinist misogyny' and a strong identification of an empowered feminism' (199–200). Game argues that Lawrence's vision of matriarchy is founded on 'an essentialist view of the feminine' as a 'counter to the corruption in modern marriage which in Lawrence's view stifled men's vitality and denied women their role as head of the domestic sphere' (203–04). Game emphasises Lawrence's belief in the 'primacy of sexual relations in social and personal regeneration which includes the possibility of multiple relationships' (205). While the scenario for such social experiments would have been far from mainstream, and also of dubious outcome in the bigamous project foreshadowed at the end of Lawrence's inconclusive novel *The Boy*, it is interesting to note that Lawrence's then-utopian arguments for marriage were being closely watched in Australia by emerging art patrons John and Sunday Reed, whose marriage and home 'Heide' would become the centre of an important avant-garde artistic community outside Melbourne.⁴

In dealing with possible textual influences for *The Boy in the Bush* (1924), in Chapter 10 Game does well to respect Roland Barthes's argument that 'a "text" is a multi-dimension space in which a variety of writing, none of which original, blend and clash' (218).⁵ Game then discusses a range of probable and possible sources of influence on the above-mentioned novel. However, to consider the basic text for Lawrence's 're-writing,' Mollie Skinner's non-extant manuscript text 'The House of Ellis,' in the same category as Barthesian subliminally-absorbed cultural texts, is an injustice and evasion of the key if missing source, whose brief discussion in Game's third-last chapter is long overdue.⁶ Game makes a brief mention of the manuscript question, linked to a brief extract from Paul Eggert's scholarly discussion in the introduction to his edited version for Cambridge University Press⁷ but without introducing questions that have been raised and remain unresolved. Game moves perhaps too swiftly to Eggert's rather more complex 'conclusion' that the result of the re-writing 'is a Lawrence novel' (218). Skinner's 'erasure' seems unnecessary because certain parts of *The Boy* have been incontrovertibly linked to Lawrence's authorship (Eggert, xlvi) and other sections can almost certainly be traced to Lawrence, which makes the text fully accessible for discussion as part of the Lawrence *oeuvre* without overshadowing the role of Mollie Skinner. It would have been helpful for Game to add to this section his careful

analysis and extrapolation in Chapter 12 of Lawrence's later collaborative effort with Skinner in 1928 on her 'Eve in the Land of Nod' in which an extant typescript shows the nature of Lawrence's amendments and on which Game can convincingly conclude: 'Lawrence's passages lend a lyricism to Skinner's flat prose' (262).

Game's oversight here of life as an influence in preference for possible literary models means neglect of the model for Mollie Skinner's text, her adventurous brother John (Jack) Skinner, again described comprehensively by Eggert in his note on the text, and whose life story is the basis for Lawrence's 're-writing' or 'writing out' of the Skinner manuscript. Given Game's interest in the theme of emigration in Lawrence's life and work, the omission of this detail about the Irish emigrant Skinner is surprising. If in *Kangaroo* Lawrence is a travel writer recording his own real and imagined adventures, in *The Boy* he remains a travel writer, but is gifted with a family memoir on which to embroider his own brief memories of Western Australia as well as his own ideas about pursuing a vital life principle. The importance of the imagined North West for Lawrence seems to derive less from what Lawrence read of J.G. Frazer's writings about Aboriginal life there than from the more immediate experience of Jack Skinner as recorded by his sister in her manuscript. Jack Skinner offered to Lawrence a number of Australian or new world archetypes—the questing young emigrant hero, the jackaroo, the gold prospector, the war-hero, and those heroes of the outback genres, the pioneer farmer (especially the failed) and the bushman. Lawrence must have valued the latter two archetypes, given the opportunities they offered for the descriptions of nature in which he delighted.

Game's last two chapters are also full of information. Notable in Chapter 11 are Australian characters in the novella *St Mawr* (1925) written in America after the two Australian novels, the negatively-cast expatriates ('British Australians') living in England, Rico (a Gerald Crich type) and the Manby sisters, who Game argues reflect Lawrence's disillusion with 'English civilization' (240). These materialist Australian expatriates seem to illustrate the nativist sub-theme on which Lawrence boldly advised others, though ignored himself: 'Men are free when they are in a living homeland, not when they are straying and breaking away' ('The Spirit of Place' 1923). In Chapter 12, Game valuably documents the writer's links with the Australian P.R. Stephensen. Stephensen was working in London with Jack Lindsay on the Mandrake Press, which published Lawrence's paintings as an accompaniment to the August 1929 exhibition that was closed down for obscenity. Lawrence admired Stephensen's energy and fearlessness. Significantly, Stephensen would become a precursor of the Australian Jindyworobak movement, which (like Lawrence) was creatively inspired by Indigenous themes and *topoi*.

Game concludes his work with an aptly chosen observation about the wattle (*mimosa*) *topos* that reappeared, uncannily, in the days before Lawrence's death when in several letters to friends he described it blooming in Vence, Southern France where he was staying: 'There is a mimosa tree in blossom' (281). Game links it to the epiphanic scene in *Kangaroo* after the wattle gathering, when Harriet says: 'If I had *three* lives I'd wish to stay. It's the loveliest thing I've *ever* known' (281). Interestingly, one of Peter Sculthorpe's early landscape-inspired musical compositions, *Fifth Continent* (1963), uses short narrated excerpts from *Kangaroo* concluding with Somers's lyrical description of wattle in his last chapter, underlining as Game has done, the ongoing influence of this early twentieth century English travel writer in stimulating homegrown descriptions of an Australian spirit of place.

In this long overdue and scholarly work, Game has more than capably backed his arguments with a panoramic array of meticulously assembled evidence about the extent of Lawrence's interest in and comment on Australia as a regenerative force both in his literary works and letters. The book's chief virtue is that it allows the texts to speak for themselves. Game shows Lawrence's subtle and evolving love/hate relationship which tilts more to the positive than the negative. His identification of Lawrence's key Australian texts should open rich areas for investigation about Lawrence's engagement with the *topos* of Australia, the thematics of regeneration, place, home, presence, gender and identity from an array of theoretical perspectives—modernist and postmodern, postcolonial, the new sacred, the generic (notably travel writing), geographic and the spatial. Game illustrates that Lawrence was a writer who was many things—tourist, possible immigrant, travel writer, and above all, a thinker in his series of ongoing 'thought-adventures' (*Kangaroo*, 245, 257). In *D.H. Lawrence's Australia*, Game makes a substantial and authoritative contribution to Lawrence scholarship.

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ENDNOTES

¹ The 1908 letter cited by Childs featured a reference to a 'plan of extermination for society's outcasts' reinforced by sentiments expressed in the following line from Lawrence's late essay 'Return to Bestwood': 'I would build a lethal chamber, as big as the Crystal Palace . . .' in *Late Essays and Articles*. Ed. James T. Boulton, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.

² Lawrence, D.H. *Kangaroo*. Sydney: Collins, 2000.

³ Lawrence, D.H. *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), Eds. Ezra Greenspan, Lindeth Vasey and John Worthen, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003.

⁴ Harding, Lesley and Kendrah Morgan. *Modern Love: The Lives of John and Sunday Reed*. Melbourne: Miegunyah P, 2015.

⁵ Barthes, Roland. *Image Music Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. 146.

⁶ A 'collaboration' with Mollie Skinner is mentioned briefly in the introduction (page 6) but not expanded upon in Chapter 10.

⁷ Lawrence, D.H. *The Boy in the Bush*. Ed. Paul Eggert. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. xlv–liii.