

AFFECTIVE AND TRANSNATIONAL: THE BOUNDING KANGAROO

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The word kangaroo is an early example of Australian English. The following article is an attempt to think about the word kangaroo as an affective construct, or, better, as an affective intervention in relation to English, in the context of poetry written in the long colonial era.

Once constituted, the word-image of the 'kangaroo' quickly bounded into Australian poetry, but also appeared in other English poetries. It appears in a number of guises, perhaps suggesting an aspect of textual, representational agency beyond that of any single occurrence. My readings are concerned with poetic uses of the word 'kangaroo' locally and transnationally, with particular notice given to affective aspects of this use, as well as the associated figuring of racial and/or national divisions. Attention to such relational aspects inevitably means attention to kangaroos not just as a linguistic term, but, also, as represented beings. In what follows we will meet happy kangaroos, sad kangaroos, terrified kangaroos and awesome kangaroos. Given that Michael Ackland refers to the kangaroo as 'a metonym for the [Australian] landscape' (25), I consider what these representations have to say about how land is represented in the Australian poems of Barron Field and Charles Harpur, as well as in a poem by D. H. Lawrence. What do kangaroos do, what are they doing in American poems? In texts by Emily Dickinson and Frank O'Hara, they have been appropriated respectively for purposes of metaphor and metonym.

According to the *Macquarie*, the word 'kangaroo' derives from the Guugu Yimithirr word 'gangurru' (617). In the 'Preface' to her novel, *The Timeless Land*, Eleanor Dark notes, citing Watkin Tench, that the word, as distinct from the animal, was unknown to Port Jackson aboriginals 'and they naturally assumed it was a white man's word' (10). The use of the word kangaroo in English translation emphasises it as a strange English word, rather than the absurd concept it is in Field's well-known poem, discussed below. Katharine Susannah Prichard begins her novel *Coonardoo* with the title character repeatedly singing a song in her native tongue about kangaroos: 'Towera chinima poodinya/ Towera jinner mulbeena,/ Poodinyoover mulbeena'. Without identifying the specific language being translated from, Prichard gives these lines in English prose as 'Kangaroos coming over the range in the twilight, and making a devil dance with their little feet, before they begin to feed'. The phrase recurs throughout Prichard's novel, its affect different at different times (playful, urgent, angry, dreamy). It is not clear which word would translate into kangaroo. The glossary provided by Prichard contains none of the words in these lines. The kangaroos' 'little feet' would logically be their forepaws; a dance, therefore, something like an orchestra conductor's hand movements. Prichard writes that Coonardoo sings 'as if she were whispering to herself, exclaiming, and in awe of the kangaroos' (1). Though this image corresponds with Field's image of the kangaroo as a fun animal, elsewhere in the novel kangaroos are mentioned matter-of-factly, as game to be hunted (73, 75).

The verb ‘bounding’ has turned the word ‘kangaroo’ into its collocation; it is used in the early, much-anthologised poem ‘Kangaroo’ by Barron Field: first published in 1819, two years after the English Field’s arrival in Australia (Kinsella 26-28, 406). The word ‘bounding’ is suggestive in its relative position to words such as bound (bound both as in secured, and with a settled direction, for example, ‘for Botany Bay’), as well as boundless (as an adjective used, for example, in describing the imagination). As a leaping verb it seems it was waiting for the kangaroo’s arrival in the lexicon. In a note to his use of the adjective in the long narrative poem ‘The Kangaroo Hunt’, Charles Harpur writes:

We say the *bounding*—the *bounding* horse and so forth; but how peculiarly emphatic is the epithet when applied, as here, to the motions of the kangaroo! No doubt the running of most animals at the top of their speed is a bounding forward ... but in none is it ... so markedly and specifically a *bounding*, as in the running of the kangaroo. (494)

In Field’s earlier poem, ‘Kangaroo’, bounding is derived first from the hart, and then reproduced in the kangaroo; and arguably suggested also by the savouring of the word’s rhythm and the exclamatory punctuation of the poem’s beginning: ‘Kangaroo, Kangaroo!/ Thou spirit of Australia’. As in the also alluded to platypus (as a ‘duck-mole’), the kangaroo is presented as a trans-species assemblage:

She had made the squirrel fragile;
 She had made the bounding hart;
 But a third so strong and agile
 Was beyond ev’n Nature’s art;
 So she join’d the former two
 In thee, Kangaroo!
 To describe thee, it is hard:
 Converse of the caméopard,
 Which beginneth camel-wise,
 But endeth of the panther size,
 Thy fore half, it would appear,
 Had belong’d to some “small deer,”
 Such as liveth in a tree;
 By thy hinder, thou should’st be
 A large animal of chace,
 Bounding o’er the forest’s space;—
 Join’d by some divine mistake,
 None but Nature’s hand can make—
 Nature, in her wisdom’s play,
 On Creation’s holiday.

The perhaps rather contrived rhyme of ‘fragile’ and ‘agile’ adds pathos to Field’s description, yet leaves us wondering how the ‘join’[ing] of ‘fragile’ and ‘bounding’ makes ‘strong and agile’. Ultimately the affect of the kangaroo in this stanza corresponds to a fun menagerie: made during the play of Nature’s wisdom ‘on Creation’s holiday’. The poem concludes

For howsoe'er anomalous,
 Thou yet art not incongruous,
 Repugnant or preposterous.
 Better-proportion'd animal,
 More graceful or ethereal,
 Was never follow'd by the hound,
 With fifty steps to thy one bound.
 Thou can'st not be amended: no;
 Be as thou art; thou best art so.

When sooty swans are once more rare,
 And duck-moles the Museum's care,
 Be still the glory of this land,
 Happiest Work of finest Hand!

Bounding is, apparently, for many colonial writers, the happiest verb to describe this 'work'. That the kangaroo 'can'st not be amended' suggests that the kangaroo is bound to be what it is, as well as hard to catch: that is, it *cannot* be bound easily. The kangaroo is 'not incongruous,/ Repugnant or preposterous' but 'graceful and ethereal' (as befits the 'Spirit of Australia'); it is also a 'glory' and 'Happiest Work of finest Hand': as well befits 'a metonym for landscape' (Ackland 25). The affect of happy has a subtle range of meanings, 'felicitous' perhaps being the one closest to Field's use, along with 'lucky' and fortunate': yet it's hard not to avoid the common contemporary definition of 'glad or pleased'. 'Happy' suggests a grinning kangaroo; however, in this early poem, the kangaroo is constructed naturally as game, and is compared favorably to all other animals 'follow'd by the hound'. Field both seems to celebrate possibility in all the elements that make up the kangaroo, while at the same time closing down agency by putting hounds on its trail.

Happiness is associated with the hunters, rather than the kangaroo in Harpur's 'The Kangaroo Hunt'. Harpur makes a point of distinguishing the different nationalities that make up the hunters (there are English, Scots and Irish), in order to differentiate the Australian born (Harpur was himself the Australian-born son of Irish and English convicts; Normington-Rawling 2):

most in number ...
 Men born and nurtured in the land.
 'Neath clustered locks, and swelling o'er
 Young faces, high their foreheads tow'r
 So giving a command to eyes
 Clear beaming as their native skies.
 Taller and straighter than the rest,
 With lanker loins and looser thighs,
 And rounder in the upheld breast,
 Their air is full of youthful zest,
 Their carriage, springing from the knees,
 Free and flowing as a breeze,

When stooping from some mountain crest
It sweeps the open leas. (465)

As the poem continues, Harpur also refers to kangaroos as ‘foresters’ (467) and ‘flyers’ (471) and compares them to ‘dream-born spirits’ (467) and describes a flock as ‘a knotted patch of grey’ (475). He also notes numerous other creatures that the hunters see or might see in the course of the hunt (467-68). The hunters become confused, wondering if a ‘grey Object’ is a mob or fog? (475-76). The hunt itself is replete with affects, suggested by words such as ‘terror’, ‘urgent’, ‘perplexed’, ‘vexed’, ‘blame’, ‘slink’, ‘fretful’, ‘affright’, ‘doubts’, ‘disappointment’, ‘dread’, ‘hope’, ‘puzzle’: these all from one page (477), though only ‘terror’ is associated with the kangaroo; the rest are attached to the ‘eager hounds and ardent men’ as Harpur describes them on the following page, where the hunt turns ‘cheering’ and ‘jolly’ (478). Harpur then returns to his nationalist theme: five of the six men in the lead are ‘sons of this sunny Land,/ All fleet of foot and strong of hand./ The sixth is one with a foreign name’ (481). Of the five, his description climaxes with ‘Their limbs are thunder, their souls are fire!’ (482). Harpur naturalises them with metaphor. In a note to the poem he defends this ‘*quasi* national glorification’, saying ‘there is a bright bead of truth sparkling through the spirit of it, and mantling to the surface, like an evidence of good liquor.’ He further appeals to ‘Phrenology’ and insists ‘For we are neither English, nor Irish, nor Scotch;—but Australians’ (506). Harpur begins now to individualise them, Linus, for example:

... never was there Bard, but well
He loved in all things to excel.
—Sweet is the woodland voice of Spring;
but sweeter can young Linus sing:
How bright a painter is the Morn?
Yet brightlier can *his* light adorn
Whatever he loveth—soul or thing (482).

Linus is, then, an exemplary hunter-poet, not content to describe nature, or his own feelings: presumably ‘whatever he loveth’ includes kangaroo hunts. The five also includes another poet, ‘Ossian’, who ‘Littered the forest with [the] dead’ of ‘Dark savages, like demons dread’ (484; note that neither Linus nor Ossian are considered ‘foreign names’). Harpur notes that ‘Under this name the Author has characterised a very dear friend’ (507). With such specimens on his trail, the kangaroo is now ‘fagged and desperate’ (485). Harpur admits that the drawn-out day of the poem is not generally how a hunt goes, and that success or failure usually happens much more quickly. He adds an affective note twenty years later, reflecting on his attempt to preempt criticism that ‘no writer could be more conscious than I *now* am of the somewhat lonely-feeling fact, that I have long since left all my Australian critics many spiritual leagues behind me,’ (508-09) seeming to contrast the camaraderie of the fictionalised hunt to the unrecognised fact of Harpur’s lonely superiority in Australian letters. In the final section of the poem ‘the Flyer hath lost his pride/ of speed’ and a ‘woodland Spirit might seem to say ... Child of the Forest, renew thy speed’; the ‘Child of the Forest’ is now a ‘desperate wretch’ (486).

The kangaroo now happens on a copse of ‘maroo’ (‘a sort of brush iron-wood’ 509) and the ‘jaded Flyer’ has renewed ‘hope’. The birds ‘seem ... to sing’ of the men and hounds as ‘yon creatures of evil’, but:

Quick as thought his quarry is caught
 ... soon the flaying is begun,
 ... and the quartering
 As deftly also done:
 Then harken how the mountains vast
 Through all their echoey gorges ring
 With calls that tell the slaughter’s past. (489-90)

That is, the slaughter *is* past. What or who is making the ‘calls’ is not definite. Though an amount of agency might be attributed to the land in this poem, it seems rather that the land—including the breeze—come together as a cast for the performance of the hunt; and when it’s over ‘The slopes and glens seem all swimming away’ (490). The telling of this theme is not quite over with though. There is another, children’s version of a kangaroo hunt, in Harpur’s oeuvre: ‘The Kangaroo—A Ballad for Washington’ (679-80; Washington is Harpur’s son). The poem begins:

A pretty playful Kangaroo
 By a River side dwelt he
 There drinking of its waters
 And bounding in his glee.

The kangaroo speaks:

So to himself one day he said
 In a proud and pleasant mood:
 No beast more beautiful than I
 Ere bounded through the wood.

I have a lovely Wife, and she
 Hath borne me a lovely child,
 So that never a happier Creature
 Was free of the Forest wild.

Note that the kangaroo refers to himself as one who ‘bounded’; and who, like Field’s kangaroo, is happy, as well as ‘free’. The kangaroo family’s harmony is soon destroyed, however: a hunter’s dog ‘smote him through with terror/ And dashed his forest pride’. He ‘fled away in mad dismay’. The conventional representation of the happy family is displaced by that of the hunt. The kangaroo’s assemblage of affects is quickly dismantled. The kangaroo seems to mimic the assemblage quality of affect itself in exemplary fashion. Summarising affect theorist Silvan Tomkins, Sianne Ngai writes:

Indeed, it is affect's parasitical ability to 'co-assemble' with drive, cognitive, motor, perceptual, and other functions that distinguishes it from these other functions ... which do not perform the same work of combining and connecting others. [Ngai adds] Affect's 'very great combinational flexibility as a 'co-assembler', however, is the principle on which Tomkins' theory of affective amplifications most significantly relies. Tomkins stresses that the co-assemblages which affect fosters between itself and other mechanisms do not depend on exact matches or correspondences. Affect's combinatory function frequently hinges on an imperfect fit; in fact, 'looseness' and 'play' actually facilitate its role as co-assembler ... Tomkins: 'affect is a loosely matched mechanism evolved to play a number of parts in continually changing assemblies of mechanisms'. (53, 55)

Following Tomkins we might then insert the assemblage of fear affects left undescribed by Harpur: 'eyes frozen open, pale, cold, sweaty, facial trembling, with hair erect' (74). These are clearly human affects but conceivable enough in such poetic representations of the kangaroo: we might wonder how human and how animal is this particular kangaroo. The obvious identification of the kangaroo family is that of a replication of the Harpurs. The final words of the poem are those of the Kangaroo's Wife:

And sorely then the Wife did weep
 And to her Child complain:
 My pretty one, we'll never see
 Thy hunted Sire again.

For those destroying things who kill
 The quiet of the Wood,
 Will chase him to a cruel death,
 And lap his glowing blood. (679)

The poem appears in its sentimental extremity to participate in melodrama as in children's literature. The earth is not quite a backdrop: its 'quiet' can be killed, but it serves as a passive resource for kangaroo and poet; and just as in 'The Kangaroo Hunt' we have the bush animal perspective of humans—and their dogs—as destructive, a division of warring cultures if not nations.

Despite the negating formulations of Field's 'not incongruous,/ Repugnant or preposterous' kangaroo, these qualities seem exactly what Emily Dickinson gestures towards in referring to herself as 'the only Kangaroo among the Beauty' (Keller 217). Karl Keller adopts this line for the title of a critical book on Dickinson with the apparently incongruous subtitle of 'Emily Dickinson and America'. Keller pays little attention to the actual phrase in his book, yet his introduction recalls Field's attempt to describe the kangaroo. Keller quotes from a story by Jorge Luis Borges where Shakespeare is in dialogue with God; and God affirms that Shakespeare, like God, is 'many and no one'. Following this quote, Keller writes that

Dickinson is ‘everything and nothing’, adding that she is ‘to a great extent ... unknowable’. The motive of his book he claims is ‘to restore her multiplicity, ambiguity, complexity, even as I hold out for something intrinsic’ (1-2). This then is the apparent reason for the title: Dickinson’s self-description ‘the only Kangaroo among the Beauty’ metonymically stands in for the ‘multiplicity, ambiguity, complexity’ of Dickinson and her poetry while perhaps containing a trace of the ‘intrinsic’, paradoxically furthering Dickinson’s own metonymic use of the kangaroo’s perceived relation to singularity.

Dickinson makes her marsupial metaphor in a letter to editor Thomas Higginson:

Perhaps you smile at me. I could not stop for that—My business is Circumference—
An ignorance, not of Customs, but if caught with the Dawn—or the Sunset see me—
[I am] Myself the only Kangaroo among the Beauty. (Keller 217)

In his biography of Dickinson, Thomas Johnson characterises this passage in both racial (or speciesist) and affective terms. Describing Dickinson as ‘ever facetious’, he adds that the ‘Kangaroo’ reference ‘strongly impl[ies] a consciousness of her skin and features’, going on to refer to her ‘plainness’ (23). In a second interpretation, Johnson refers to the awe that Dickinson felt (in relation to the Dawn and Sunset), and writes that ‘The extent to which she was subject to such an emotion she fully recognized as an affliction’ (135). In Johnson, then, the ‘Kangaroo’ reference is apt in describing Dickinson, supporting Keller’s ‘multiplicity, ambiguity and complexity’, with a pun on the complexity of Dickinson’s complexion. They both support Dickinson’s contradiction of Field: ‘not incongruous,/ Repugnant or preposterous’. The image of the kangaroo is, naturally enough in an American context, exotic, yet its singularity evokes an odd, rather than glamorous exoticism. Dickinson is writing in the 1860s, yet this sense of the incongruousness of the word-image of kangaroo was, apparently, still current in 1980s America. In Tracy Kidder’s *House*, for example, lawyer Jonathan says of a builder who would build him a ‘modern’ stair in a new ‘old-fashioned’ house: ‘He might as well offer me a kangaroo’ (209). Given the context, there is a sense in this remark, also, of the new-fangled, which chimes with the commodification of the kangaroo in O’Hara’s ‘Today’ (discussed below).

Dickinson’s ‘Kangaroo’ reference represents the kangaroo as an affective and facial affliction, in contradistinction to ‘Beauty’. But perhaps she is only being facetious (another face pun). Keller reports that when the letters were first published, Dickinson’s brother Austin claimed that Emily ‘had been *posing* for Higginson’ (italics in Keller; 213). Austin is suggesting that Emily poses facetiously as afflicted and distinct from ‘Beauty’. Yet though ‘facetious’ is Johnson’s term, Austin also notes Dickinson’s plainness. By using the qualifier ‘*only* Kangaroo’, Dickinson insists on singularity, an effect paradoxically produced *through* ‘multiplicity, ambiguity and complexity’, and thereby rendering the Beauty she is ‘among’ as banal. Is this posing? What could it mean if she meant to be taken literally? Keller introduces the ‘Kangaroo’ reference by saying Dickinson ‘was secure in her eccentricity, her naiveté, her excitements, her abilities, her (to him [meaning Higginson] “unregenerate”) self’. These are her kangaroo qualities. According to Paula Bernat Bennett, who argues for more consideration of Dickinson’s ‘American women poet peers’, in the *Cambridge Companion*, Dickinson scholars ‘have treated her as an anomaly’. Bennett cites the kangaroo reference as

the author's own support for this treatment (215). Bennet's use of Dickinson's reference to support her argument suggests an image of the kangaroo in the *field* of beauty, the field of nineteenth century women's poetry, and of Dickinson studies. Though this self-portrait suggests nothing of movement, the contradiction between plainness and specialness, singularity and multiplicity give the term an unfixed agency, perhaps all the more so if this conceptual movement is not thought of as bounding: which apart from being the ultimate in conventional movement in representations of the kangaroo, a convention which Dickinson notably avoids, also seems to imply being hunted by hounds.

A kangaroo is only eccentric in comparison to other animals, and D. H. Lawrence outdoes Field's cataloguing in his poem of 'The Kangaroo', introducing it with references to seventeen distinct animals before mentioning the kangaroo itself. Lawrence's kangaroo is a mother, both 'delicate' and 'huge' ('huge' compared to a rabbit). Lawrence—like Johnson—brings in both affective and racial aspects, as well as the colonial/colonised body:

Lifting her face to nibble at a round white peppermint drop, which she
loves, sensitive mother Kangaroo.

Her sensitive, long, pure-bred face.
Her full antipodal eyes, so dark,
So big and quiet and remote, having watched so many empty dawns in
silent Australia.

Her little loose hands, and drooping Victorian shoulders. (393)

There is a lot of feeling attributed to the kangaroo in this passage. The word 'sensitive' after 'loves' in relation to the peppermint drop, emphasises that this love is not merely a vernacular displacement for a love of eating. It is about taste, sensibility, and eccentricity. She seems more affected than naïve, however, with her 'Victorian shoulders'. This deft metaphor makes the kangaroo both a colonial possession and a quaint leftover from the nineteenth century. She is not quite modern. But she is not merely an old-fashioned individual either; being *the* kangaroo, and *the* antipodean: an ancient and paradoxical witness of a version of terra nullius ('empty dawns'). The insistence on the kangaroo's being sensitive, as well as pure bred, projects an English decorum and passivity in the face of colonisation.

There, she shan't have any more peppermint drops.
So she wistfully, sensitively sniffs the air, and then turns, goes off in slow sad leaps
(393)

Lawrence's narrator isn't playing the objective observer here, but treating the kangaroo like a pet. He is present in the poem as the giver and withholder of sweets. This part of the poem reprises a scene from Lawrence's novel *Kangaroo*, where Richard Somers visits a zoo and sees two kangaroos that he describes as 'a married couple'. In the novel it is the male who eats the 'hot, strong' peppermints: 'The female wouldn't come near to eat'. Somers's

sympathy with the kangaroos is emphasised: ‘It wasn’t love he felt for them, but a dark, animal tenderness, and another sort of consciousness, deeper than human’ (339-340). In the novel, Lawrence writes that at night ‘the continent of the kangaroo reassumed its strange, unvisited glamour, a kind of virgin sensual aloofness’ (32). Remarkably, the novel uses the word ‘bound’ thirteen times, in the senses of guaranteed, directed etc., but not once in the sense of kangaroo movement. As Brian Elliott notes, *Kangaroo* has been lastingly influential on Australian poetry, due to Lawrence’s ‘extraordinary sensitivity in his appreciation of the Australian landscape image’, which Rex Ingamells ‘accepted ... as a revelation’, and motivated him to form the Jindyworobaks (237-39). This influence may seem to have waned in the wake of (largely American) postmodernisms such as the New York School, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, Oulipo and conceptual writing, however the conceptual—if not the postmodern generally—opens up the possibility of re-evaluating ‘Australiana’; further, the new consciousness with relation to the ecological generally has meant that we look again at how the animal has been written, specifically the animal on Australian land. It is perhaps the very decline of the national ideal within poetics that enables a review of the Australian. Michael Gardiner writes of *The Return of England in English Literature*, of a ‘literature of England ... local, experiential and national’. According to Gardiner this literature manifests most strongly between 1990 and 2010 (Smith 63). Perhaps a similar effect can be seen happening here, in the writing of Martin Harrison, Peter Minter, Stuart Cooke, Bonny Cassidy, Duncan Hose and others.

Why is the kangaroo so sad, so ‘unbounding’? Lawrence’s ostensible reason for the poem kangaroo’s sadness is the refusal of sweets, yet his description of her bodily affect of sensitive face, full eyes, loose hands and drooping shoulders suggest she was already sad. She lives (is ‘bound’) in a zoo after all. In the poem the kangaroo turns back, is ‘inquisitive’; her joey looks out of the pouch ‘a bit dismayed’. Lawrence repeatedly links affect with looking in this poem.

Still she watches with eternal, cocked wistfulness!
 How full her eyes are, like the full, fathomless, shining eyes of an
 Australian black-boy
 Who has been lost so many centuries on the margins of existence!

She watches with insatiable wistfulness.
 Untold centuries of watching for something to come,
 For a new signal from life, in that silent lost land of the South.

Where nothing bites but insects and snakes and the sun, small life.
 Where no bull roared, no cow ever lowed, no stag cried, no leopard
 screeched, no lion coughed, no dog barked,
 But all was silent save for parrots occasionally, in the haunted blue bush.

Wistfully watching, with wonderful liquid eyes. (394)

Apart from the reference to being ‘pure bred’, there is a more explicit racial reference to the kangaroo having the ‘eyes of an Australian black boy’. This figure contributes to what has become a temporal assemblage: a kangaroo that is a boy, Victorian, and centuries old.

Lawrence is gracefully willing to combine genders in a way that is unimaginable in Field or Harpur. Her eyes are apparently full with emptiness, of wondering at absence. Lawrence repeats the term of wistfulness, of wanting something, while at the same time emphasising the theme of loss. But it is the kangaroo—and the land itself—that is lost, ‘from life’, or rather the northern hemisphere. It is not wistfulness or sadness, but shame that Tomkins emphasises in relation to the eyes. He writes

that the eyes both receive and send messages of all affects and thereby increase the ambivalence about looking and being looked at; that the shame response itself heightens the visibility of the face; that shame involves an ambivalent turning of the eyes away from the object toward the face and self. (142)

Kenneth Rexroth has referred to the ‘hallucinatory quality’ of Lawrence’s poetry; this kangaroo sounds stoned, on peppermint drops: a concentrated dose of northern culture after ‘centuries on the margins of existence’. The focus on the kangaroo’s eyes distracts us from Lawrence’s eyes looking at the kangaroo. According to Tomkins, ‘Man is, of all the animals, the most voyeuristic. He is more dependent on his visual sense than most animals ... in part because of this, there exists a universal taboo on looking ... The taboo on mutual looking has many sources. First, it is a taboo on intimacy’; and, as Tomkins adds, ‘Intimacy necessarily involves the sharing of affect’ (144). The Lawrence poem, of all the texts considered, constructs an intimacy with the kangaroo. Romantic as the scene is, despite the zoo environment, and the apparently inevitable emotional resignation, there are indications of agency in the kangaroo’s ability to turn away, to be ‘cocked’, and to sustain wonder. The earth though is merely a stage for the drama which has, ironically, already happened: that of colonisation. Has the kangaroo not noticed?

That sound is only made by northern animals is contradicted by ‘parrots occasionally’, and this casual reference seems to acknowledge that this silence is merely a convenient rhetorical device. The kangaroo looks and watches because there is nothing to listen to, yet there is nothing, apparently, to see either. Silence is also connected to affect: as Elliott records, Romantic English poet Robert Southey wrote similarly of Australia’s silence as early as 1796, yet he fancifully added the sound of the kangaroo to the herdless, flockless land: ‘Alone is heard the kangaroo’s sad note/ Deepening in distance’ (31). ‘What’, asks Elliott, ‘made the kangaroo sad?’; he then answers that it was the ‘gloomy strangers’ (i.e. convicts) also featured in Southey’s poem (32). Thomas Campbell, another English poet who, like Southey, never visited Australia, wrote in 1828 of a child that ‘twined his tame kangaroo with flowers’; Elliott notes Campbell’s ‘acknowledgment that colonial settlement must lead to a reorientation of sentiment’ (37).

Mid-twentieth century American poet Frank O’Hara’s short poem ‘Today’ lists kangaroos along with other things he finds beautiful:

Oh! kangaroos, sequins, chocolate sodas!
You really are beautiful! Pearls,
harmonicas, jujubes, aspirins! all

the stuff they've always talked about (15)

After the weighty rhetoric of Lawrence's poem, O'Hara's may seem trivial: or refreshing. Here the word kangaroo is not required to represent Australia, only itself. It is not bound to the Australian landscape. In fact, in a reading which synecdochically makes Australia a random consumption item, Heikki Markus Kujansivu—in resisting Marjorie Perloff's 'Surrealist' reading (Perloff 43)—has referred to the poem as representing the post-WWII 'American idiom' of leisure. Kujansivu also notes Gregory Bredbeck's claim that 'the content of "Today" is its camp tone' (154). O'Hara appears to metonymically collapse commodification, the poetic image, and aesthetics into these brief lines. There is also perhaps knowledge of the Lawrence poem in 'Today's' unconscious, as it is linked to the sweet and oral reference of the peppermints by both chocolate sodas and jujubes; the kangaroo's tasting is displaced by O'Hara's taste(s), or as Kujansivu might say, lifestyle. There is camp too, perhaps, in Lawrence's kangaroo, with its combination of an Aboriginal boy's eyes with drooping Victorian shoulders. In the jauntiness of exclamation, 'Today' resembles Field's poem, where 'triviality is matched with genuine wit' (Elliott 48). O'Hara's poem has something of a bounding affect, as if the infectious kangaroo were not of the land but the trampoline; O'Hara's enthusiasm is not reserved for the kangaroo, yet seems derived from its 'oo' sound that corresponds with 'beautiful'.

The attraction of the word 'kangaroo' to Field, Dickinson, Lawrence and O'Hara (and Southey and Campbell) lies, I presume, not just in the image of the singular animal it represents, but in its singular (fun) sound as an English word. In O'Hara it barely functions as an image, but allows him to bound into the poem, following the conventionally Romantic 'Oh!' with words unconventional to that formula. Dickinson takes advantage of the word's 'oo' sound that chimes with the word 'Beauty': if she had really wanted to distinguish herself from Beauty she could have used 'wombat', or the American local 'skunk'. In his novel, Lawrence uses the word to signify a person, a leader with charismatic qualities, perhaps the 'spirit of Australia' to use Field's description; yet it also gives the book a distinctive title, that suggests a mystic knowledge of Australia (Elliott 237). It also suggests a move beyond the earlier comic and wistful sentiments of English poets of the previous century. Note that in the transnational poems, none use the word 'bounding' in relation to the kangaroo; only Lawrence depicts its movement, using the word 'leaps'.

The word 'kangaroo', despite its travels overseas, is not unbounded in Australia. It is a creolised word: as is any word derived from an Indigenous language that uses the English-Latin alphabet, and spread throughout Australia and the rest of the world as an English word. It is a pastiche of the original 'gangurru', and arguably, as an altered word, it is a parody: apparently changed in its initial sound from a 'g' to a 'k'. The parody goes both ways, in a sense, in that it in its singularity it appears to be a joke on the English language. It is an appropriated word, that due to its singular signification of a common indigenous animal, has been easily incorporated into Australian English. From the perspective of other Indigenous language users, then, it is a word appropriated via English: a foreign or transnational word. For example, the recent book by Kim Scott et al, *Noongar Mambara Bakitj*, a story told in Noongar language with English translation, begins with a kangaroo hunt; the word kangaroo appears as a translation from the Noongar word 'yongku' (4).

The word kangaroo has been used variously in the above texts, texts that arguably tell us little about the kangaroo as an animal, but rather what kangaroo as a word, a linguistic resource, tells us about the context of each specific writing and writer. Field's poem tells us what a good sport Field is; Harpur's how manly native-born humans are (and how lucky their children). Lawrence appears the most interested in the kangaroo as such: his poem is like a painting in values; paradoxically however, his vision of the kangaroo is of a creature in a static past waiting for a future that has happened. The kangaroo in Dickinson represents a secret, the secret of Dickinson's own singularity, while in O'Hara it has successfully bounded from the travails of the colonial into the camp, parodic candy store of mid-century America: dislocated not just from a textual relation to land, but towards the referenceless global. Attention to affective detail helps to delineate different uses of the kangaroo in these various texts, and may I think be useful in other transnational readings, while noting that affects are culturally and relationally specific, as the examples show. The word 'kangaroo's transnational appeal to other writers of English is in both the figure it represents and its unusual rhythm, not to mention its rhyming potential; it is a poem in itself. Yet it remains a distinctly Australian word, and perhaps Field is not wrong in calling the *word* kangaroo a 'glory' and 'Happiest Work of finest Hand', indicating as it does a distinctly un-English, un-colonial, and un-prosaic sound whenever it appears.

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