

## KANGAROO

Kangaroo is a novel about politics in Australia after the First World War; but it is also about the marriage problem. However, the problem is not question of sexual adjustment as it is in many novels; it is a conflict between love and social activity. This conflict arises when a man, forced by his "societal instinct", participates in political movements, and shuts his wife from his political interests. The disturbance of personal relationship by social activity is dramatized in the relations between Richard Lovat Somers and his wife, Harriet.<sup>286</sup>

Having been asked by Jack Callcott to join the Diggers movement—the political movement of the ex-service men, Somers, a free-lance English writer, accepts and finds a challenge in that kind of social activity. He has been isolated with his wife for twelve years, denied all contact with other people, a wanderer on the face of the earth with no job, no children, and no place in society. Thinking that he must be a man of action, Somers determines to join the Diggers. "I feel," says he to his wife, "I must fight out something with mankind. I haven't finished with my fellow men. I've got a struggle with them yet...As a man among men I just have no place."<sup>287</sup> To Harriet whose experience with other people has given her a "real instinctive mistrust of people,"<sup>288</sup> this is "silly." She knows that Somers is not the sort of man who can live in the world of men and affairs, and that the participation with

any action will interfere with his power as a writer, which requires pure individualism and isolation. She despises his ambition: she knows that he will be only disappointed in his efforts for mankind, and then turn back again to her as he did before: "You don't like people. You always turn away from them and hate them...They are only something you delude yourself about. And then you'll fall back on me. Just as it always is."<sup>289</sup> In his heart of hearts Somers knows she is right, but he still desires to be somebody, to make a final attempt for the benefit of mankind. To Harriet's remark that his writing is also a kind of social activity, he answers: "I want to do something with living people, somewhere, somehow, while I live on the earth. I write but I write alone. And I live alone. Without any connection whatever with the rest of men."<sup>290</sup> And "he felt preaching and teaching were both no good, at the world's present juncture. There must be action, brave, faithful action; and in the action the new spirit would arise."<sup>291</sup>

In spite of Harriet's strong protest, Somers engages himself in a political project, a "conspiracy", with Jack Callcott, one of the Diggers, and Harriet sees "by the shut look on his face" that he is not going to tell her what it is. It seems to her unnecessary, and a breach of faith on his part, wounding her. "If their marriage was a real thing, then anything very serious was her matter as much as his, surely. Either her marriage with him was not very important, or else this Jack Callcott stuff wasn't very important which probably it wasn't. Yet she hated the hoity-toity way she was

shut out."<sup>292</sup> She feels that in "turning away from the personal life to the hateful male activity, and shutting her out from this,"<sup>293</sup> is a means used to cut the inner bond between them. She wants him "inwardly to keep a connection with her, and maintain the flow between him and her, and safeguard it carefully."<sup>294</sup> For the first time Harriet feels that Somers is betraying her love: "I give you my energy and my life, and you want to put me aside as if I was a charwoman. Acknowledge me first, before you can be any good."<sup>295</sup>

Somers himself "knew that her greatest grief was when he turned away from their personal human life of intimacy to this impersonal business of male activity for which he was always craving."<sup>296</sup> But he feels that his political involvement is a "pure male activity" which "should be womanless, beyond woman"<sup>297</sup> not "a woman's matter." "No man was beyond woman. But in his one quality of ultimate maker and breaker, he was womanless. Harriet denied this bitterly. She wanted to share, to join in, not to be left out lonely...It is a knot that can never be untied; it can only, like a navel string, be broken or cut."<sup>298</sup> The struggle between male activity and unanswerable emotional ties with his wife is revealed in his dream, in which the people he had loved-- his mother and his wife - combines into one woman who accuses him of betraying her love for him. They both believed in him terribly, in his personal being. "But in the impersonal man, a man that would go beyond them, with his back to them, away from them into an activity that excluded them, in this way they did not find so easy to believe."<sup>299</sup> However, Somers

still believes that he has to do what he wants without caring for Harriet's opinion of it. "Once he had slowly and carefully weighed a course of action, he would not hold it subject to Harriet's approval or disapproval."<sup>300</sup> He does not want her love, which he senses behind a maternal possessiveness; but he needs to distinguish himself in society.

Harriet's insistence on his withdrawal from the Diggers makes Somers feel that the basis of marriage is not perfect love, but perfect submission of the wife to the husband. He wants her to yield to him-to his "mastery and divination." But Harriet, like many women, does not, and will not acknowledge him in this way. For her he is only a weak man with his "ungovernable furies and unclinical intimacies with other people,"<sup>301</sup> a man who depends entirely on her. "You can't live a moment out of me,"<sup>302</sup> she tells him. "How could one believe in such a man! If he had been naturally a master of men, general of an army, or manager of some great steel works, with thousands of men under him-then, yes she could have acknowledged the master part of the bargain, if not the lord... Whereas...he had absolutely nothing but her."<sup>303</sup> A man cannot be a hero if he has to depend on his wife. But Somers still attempts to put himself across to Harriet as an absolute lord and master to whom she must submit in the spirit of Milton's Eve: "He for God only, she for God in him"<sup>304</sup> They fight a battle for leadership in marriage: "They stood opposite to one another in such fury, one against the other, that they nearly annihilated one another."<sup>305</sup> However, when they become exhausted they finally realise that a healthy marital relation

must be based on an equal companionship; and they stop fighting for dominance. Harriet ceases to attempt to share his opinions, and he gives up the idea of leadership in marriage.

Thus Somers sees that the Diggers' idealism is not for him: Kangaroo, the leader of the Diggers movement, reveals himself as a false leader. He wants to keep people under his power, like a Kangaroo keeps its child in its belly. His authoritative love denies the essential separateness and individuality of human spirit, the Dark God, the God of the individual,<sup>306</sup> in whom Somers believes. Somers thus rejects Kangaroo, and determines not to involve himself with social activity again.

Through the relation between Somers and Harriet we see the conflict between love and worldly work: Somers wants to take part in a political movement, but his wife insists on his withdrawal from this "male activity." For Lawrence "love" and "work" must balance each other. "Assert sex as the predominant fulfillment," he wrote in Fantasia of the Unconscious, "and you set the collapse of living purpose in man...Assert purposiveness as the one supreme end pure activity of life, and you drift into barren sterility..."<sup>307</sup> "You have got to base your great purposive activity," he emphasized, "upon the intense sexual fulfillment of all your individuals."<sup>308</sup> Somers and Harriet do not realize this interdependence of "love" and "work"; he considers "male activity" much more important than personal relation with his wife, while Harriet believes that love is an end in itself. The conflict is inevitable when they do not try to balance these two necessary factors of life. In the next novel, The Plumed Serpent,

Lawrence deals fully with this balance between "love" and purposive activity."