

**GRANT WATSON'S *WHERE BONDS ARE LOOSED*:
A STIMULUS FOR LAWRENCE'S 'AUSTRALIAN PERIOD'
WITH PARTICULAR RESONANCES IN
*THE BOY IN THE BUSH***

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In January 1916, Lawrence, while in Cornwall, corresponded with Catherine Carswell. He was in the thick of the controversy over *The Rainbow* and he communicated to Carswell his regret that her review of his novel had cost her her position with the *Glasgow Herald*. Lawrence was also depressed by the war and was looking beyond England for hope. The month before, he had written of his desire to travel to Florida with a small group “to make a new life in common” (2L 486). It is against this background that, in the third paragraph of his letter to Carswell, Lawrence tells of his response to a novel he had just read – Grant Watson’s¹ *Where Bonds Are Loosed*, published in 1914:²

I read *Where Bonds Are Loosed*. It has got some real *go* in it. But it is based on a mistaken idea that brutality is the desideratum. But let us hope the war will cure him of this idea. He seemed in his book to have real courage and vitality, but to be a bit *stupid*. But I forgive stupidity, for strength of feeling. Do keep on knowing him, if you can, and if you really like him, let me know him too. Don’t let him slip. Tell me about him, if he is any good, and if you think well, ask him to write to me. (2L 502)

Where Bonds is set in a fictional north-west Western Australia called New Ireland.³ It tells the story of an Englishman, Sherwin, who has emigrated to Australia to seek his fortune. Following his display of toughness in a brawl, he is recruited as an overseer in

charge of Australian Aborigines who have been interned on two barren and remote islands off the north-west coast of Western Australia. The Aborigines have been segregated because they are apparently infected with syphilis. The plot is first driven by the rivalry between the two Australian doctors in the settlement, Hubbard and Hicksey, who have different treatment methods, and later by the contest between Sherwin and Dr Hicksey for the affections of a nurse, Miss Desmond. The novel also condemns the casual brutality of the regime under which the Aborigines suffer. In so doing, it redirects implied reader assumptions about the idea of savagery, from the Aborigines to their white masters. Sherwin degenerates into a misanthropic Conradian Kurtz-like character who brutalises his servant, and Dr Hicksey gradually neglects his work as he succumbs to the charms of Miss Desmond. The narrator, as the title of the novel suggests, explains that when civilised people leave their normal surroundings, “there is left only that stripped and raw nucleus of life which is so close to the brute from which it was evolved”.⁴ The novel concludes disquietingly, however, with Sherwin having won Miss Desmond and their settling down to raise a family, suggesting that his vicious methods have been vindicated.

Judging from his letter, Lawrence clearly found the novel at once engaging and irritating. It is also apparent that, given how strongly he pressed Carswell to act as an intermediary, he was drawn to the possibility that he and Watson might have something in common, and might meet. There is no record of any contact between the two men, but, as I hope to show in this essay, Lawrence seems never to have forgotten Watson’s novel about Australia. His interest in *Where Bonds*, I contend, helps to explain the otherwise apparently random insertion of Australian characters into *The Lost Girl* (1920) and *Aaron’s Rod* (1922) before his visit to Australia in 1922, and before he had written *Kangaroo* (1923) and *The Boy in the Bush* (1924). Moreover, the appearance of Australian characters in the two novels he wrote immediately before his visit points, I suggest, to Watson’s novel generating in

Lawrence a wider interest in Australia, which by late 1921 appears to have been sufficiently developed to have influenced his decision to alter his route to America, in order that he could see Australia first. And Lawrence's memory of *Where Bonds* may also have stimulated his interest in Mollie Skinner's 'The House of Ellis', which he rewrote as *The Boy in the Bush*, offering a largely regenerative vision of Australia, in contrast to Watson's tale of degeneration. Much of *The Boy* is set in the north-west of Western Australia – close to the offshore islands which form the locale for *Where Bonds*. Finally, if we include *St. Mawr* (1925), with its Australian characters, Rico and the Manbys, as a partially Australian novella, *Where Bonds* might perhaps be seen as a stimulus for an extended 'Australian period' in Lawrence's *oeuvre*, reaching well beyond his three months' visit in 1922, commencing with the publication of *The Lost Girl* in 1920, and concluding with *St. Mawr*, published in 1925.

Grant Watson was born in England in 1885, the same year as Lawrence. Watson travelled to Australia twice as an adult, in 1910-11 and in 1912.⁵ Although from vastly different backgrounds, both writers moved, at times, in some of the same circles. Watson reports in his autobiography that, with the assistance of Edward Thomas, he had his first story 'Out There', set in Australia, published in the *English Review* in 1913, and that he had met Ford Madox Hueffer.⁶ Lawrence's career had been launched by Hueffer in 1909,⁷ and he had met Violet Hunt at the same time. Another social contact Watson and Lawrence had in common was Lady Ottoline Morrell, although Watson appears to have been less important to her than Lawrence.⁸ In an amusing juxtaposition of Australian Aboriginal and English aristocratic cultural practices, Watson recalls in his autobiography:

That I have seen stark young women streaming with the blood of a yet living turtle which they were laboriously dismembering with a stone knife, is a picture every bit as significant as the

intellectual tea-parties I have attended at Lady Ottaline Morall's [*sic*].⁹

The protagonist in 'Out There', Jeffries, an Englishman, runs a cattle station "in the wild Kimberley district of North-West Australia".¹⁰ He lives with seven native women and has "'gone black'" and "cursed civilisation" and "found God in the wild bush".¹¹ Given Lawrence's association with the *English Review* during this period,¹² and given also his exploration of polygamy and of the regenerative possibilities offered by north-west Australia, which he was to subsequently depict in *The Boy in the Bush*, it is tantalising to think that he might have read 'Out There'. Lawrence, however, at this time found the *Review* "piffling" and wrote from Italy in December 1913 that "we don't see the *English Review*" (2L 21, 115). In addition, he would surely have recalled the story, had he read it, in his letter to Carswell in 1916. Despite the striking thematic similarity between 'Out There' and *The Boy*, that of a young Englishman forsaking civilisation for a life in the Australian bush, it would appear, therefore, that there is no link between these two works.

Watson and Lawrence are not commonly associated with each other. Surprisingly, Catherine Carswell refers neither to Lawrence's letter nor to Watson in *The Savage Pilgrimage*, and Watson is not mentioned in any of the three volumes of the Cambridge biography of D. H. Lawrence. There has, however, been some comparative criticism on the two authors. Dorothy Green remarks in her study of Watson's works that "the empathy and humility" which Watson feels towards the Australian bush in certain parts of his autobiography *But To What Purpose*, where Watson equates the virgin bush with the unconscious, "are far more profound than anything D. H. Lawrence was able to achieve during his visit to Western Australia in 1922, and the symbolism of the unconscious points forward to Patrick White's *Voss*".¹³ Green's dismissal of Lawrence's evocations of the Australian bush in his two Australian novels ignores the seriousness and intensity of Lawrence's attempts

to render what was for him a new landscape, which he ultimately found among the most compelling he had ever experienced. In *Kangaroo* the narrator reports Richard Lovatt Somers's experience of the bush. It was

... as if angels had flown right down out of the softest gold regions of heaven to settle here, in the Australian bush. And the perfume in all the air that might be heaven, and the unutterable stillness, save for the strange bright birds and flocks of parrots, and the motionlessness, save for a stream and butterflies and some small brown bees. (K 355)

As Michael Bell observes, for Somers the "meaning" of Australia and its wondrous landscape "cannot be assimilated to the human",¹⁴ but Lawrence's attempts should not be dismissed. J. J. Healy, in *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia*, concurs with Green that Watson foreshadows White's *Voss*.¹⁵ He does, however, rightly query Green's excessive praise of Watson, seeing White's "intricate speculations" as "richer", and cautions against her "corrective over-praise" of Watson which he suggests is not borne out by examination of his *oeuvre*.¹⁶ Importantly, Healy, through a comparison of passages from essays by Watson and Lawrence, identifies a Nietzschean metaphysical link between them, based upon their broadly corresponding meditations on the difficulty in defining and achieving freedom, regardless of the society in which one lives.¹⁷ Healy, however, in considering Watson's Australian fiction, does not consider Lawrence's, and consequently, like Green, makes no connection between *Where Bonds* and Lawrence's Australian works. In addition, both Green and Healy mistakenly diminish Lawrence's contribution to the imagining of the Australian bush in favour of Patrick White's, an undoubtedly major Australian author, but one who himself, as Michael Hollington shows,¹⁸ is deeply indebted to Lawrence.

Lawrence's brief discussion of *Where Bonds* in his letter to Carswell is important because it represents one of his few

engagements with Australian literature, or literature about Australia. There are, however, other examples. Lawrence mentions Henry Lawson's stories, *Children of the Bush* (1902), in a letter of 1912, as well as the work of "Ralph Boldrewood" (*sic*), most probably his *Robbery Under Arms* (1888),¹⁹ in a letter of March 1916, two months after his letter to Carswell.²⁰ In this second letter, to his friend S. S. Koteliansky, in reply to Koteliansky's query about children's books suitable for translation into Russian, Lawrence wrote that Boldrewood keeps company with R. L. Stevenson and Captain Marryat, whom he thought "very good", as well as R. M. Ballantyne, W. H. Kingston, Henty, and Melville (2L 588). He tells Koteliansky that he "used to *love*" reading "*boys*' books of adventure" (2L 589). Watson's novel is an adventure story, although not for children, and exemplifies a genre which appealed to Lawrence. He thought *The Boy* "might be popular", perhaps because it too displays many of the hallmarks of adventure fiction (5L 121).

Where Bonds would also have attracted Lawrence because of its exploration of both utopian and dystopian visions of Australia. He read other utopian literature – for example, Butler's *Erewhon* (1872) and Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890).²¹ Mollie Skinner recalls in her autobiography that during Lawrence's brief stay in Western Australia, he was captivated by the spirit of the founders of the colony, stimulated by his reading of the *Western Australian Year-Book For 1902-1904*.²² Skinner reports Lawrence's evocation of them in the course of his urging that she write about the colony's foundation: "The settlers—men and women with their children arriving here, dumped on the sand with the surf behind them, a few merchants, a few soldiers, a few packing cases into which they crept for shelter after chucking out the pianos ... What kept them there [?]"²³ As Paul Eggert observes, Lawrence's utopian sentiment is apparent in his imaginative recounting of the first English landing in Western Australia.²⁴ He was to carry this element into Jack Grant's regenerative experiences in *The Boy*.

Neither Watson nor Lawrence acknowledged a connection between *Where Bonds* and *The Boy*. Watson mentions Lawrence only in passing in his autobiography, writing that while visiting Florence around 1913 he “met Vernon Lee and the hospitable English lady who lived at the Villa Medici” whom he understood “was much abused by D. H. Lawrence in his novels”.²⁵ Watson published his autobiography in 1946, twenty two years after *The Boy*, and presumably he either did not read Lawrence’s novel, or was not interested in it. Lawrence’s discussion of *Where Bonds* in his letter to Carswell is his only reference to Watson. Lawrence was fastidious in acknowledging M. L. Skinner’s role in *The Boy*: “I set about and re-wrote the whole thing, every word ... But the material is hers, and she should get her dues” he wrote soon after it was published (5L 120). If Lawrence *did* recall his reading of *Where Bonds* while writing *The Boy*, should we not expect a similar acknowledgement? Or perhaps at least a swipe at the earlier novel in a letter? Perhaps, but not necessarily. The relationship between *Where Bonds* and *The Boy* is more subtle than the relationship between Skinner’s ‘The House of Ellis’ and *The Boy*. *Where Bonds* did not serve as a foundation text in the same way as Skinner’s manuscript of ‘The House of Ellis’. Rather, Lawrence seems to have absorbed some of the ideas contained in Watson’s novel in a generalised way over a long period, and reworked them to his own liking. We would not expect Lawrence to acknowledge this publicly, or necessarily even privately. Whether consciously conceived as such or not, *The Boy in the Bush* reads as a riposte to the theme of European degeneration Watson offers in *Where Bonds Are Loosed*.

Before examining the two novels in detail, it is useful to briefly explore Lawrence’s attitude to, and understanding of, Australia, beyond the few literary references noted earlier, and before his reading of *Where Bonds* in 1916. This will help to account for Lawrence’s attraction to the novel. Ten years before his visit, Lawrence expressed enthusiasm for Australia as a place of renewal.

In July 1912, writing from Germany, where he and Frieda were living in Icking, he commenced a letter to May Holbrook thus:

What an exciting letter that was! 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. But which of the States? – you don't say – N. S. Wales or Queensland? I shan't come back to England for a long time, if I can help it. (IL 425)

Subsequently, however, Lawrence appears to have been less enthusiastic about Australia. In 'The Primrose Path', written in July 1913, and later revised,²⁶ Lawrence savagely critiques Daniel Sutton's emigration to Australia to make his fortune. Sutton is based on Lawrence's uncle, Herbert Beardsall,²⁷ and in condemning Sutton, Lawrence condemns his uncle's apparently scandalous elopement to Australia. For Daniel Berry, the Lawrence character, the opportunity in Australia adverted to by his uncle is negated by his uncle's self-absorption and overwhelming concern with money:

"Oh, but I'm going back out there. I can't stand this cankering, rotten-hearted hell of a country any more.—You want to come out to Sydney with me, lad. That's the place for you—beautiful place, oh, you could wish for nothing better. And money in it, too.—How's your mother?"

"She died at Christmas," said the young man. (EME 123-4)

Importantly, though, both Lawrence's letter to May Holbrook, and the reproduction of the experience of a member of his own family in 'The Primrose Path', point to his awareness of Australia as a destination for emigration from Britain. Moreover, given the instance of emigration to Australia in Lawrence's family, Lawrence's own interest in and eventual visit to Australia may be seen at least partly as that of a prospective migrant. The reality of

that prospect, however, is expressed bitterly by Somers in *Kangaroo*.²⁸

Lawrence's next mention of Australia occurs through his intense study of aspects of Aboriginal culture obtained through his reading of anthropological works by Sir James Frazer and Jane Harrison, who draws on Frazer. This was some three years before he read *Where Bonds*. Of Harrison's book *Ancient Art and Ritual* (1913) Lawrence wrote in December 1913: "You have no idea how much I got out of that *Ritual and Art* book – it is a good idea" (2L 119). Frazer's work seems to have made an even greater impression. In December 1915, after referring to Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915) and *Totemism and Exogamy* (1910), Lawrence wrote:

Now I am convinced of what I believed when I was about twenty – that there is another seat of consciousness than the brain and the nerve system: there is a blood-consciousness which exists in us independently of the ordinary mental consciousness ... And this is the origin of totem: and for this reason some tribes no doubt really *were* kangaroos: they contained the blood-knowledge of the kangaroo. (2L 470)

For Lawrence, therefore, Aboriginal Australia is symbolic of a unique "blood-consciousness". Lawrence also outlines what this sort of consciousness means to him and to modern society:

This is very important to our living, that we should realise that we have a blood-being, a blood-consciousness, a blood-soul, complete and apart from the mental and nerve consciousness.

Do you know what science says about these things? It is *very* important: the whole of our future life depends on it. (2L 471)

We may infer from Lawrence's fascination with the spiritual aspects of Aboriginal anthropology that by the end of 1915 his understanding of Australia as a site for conventional, material well-being had been supplemented by a sense of its desirability as a

place of spiritual regeneration. If we add Lawrence's interest in popular adventure novels, including the Australian *Robbery Under Arms*, we begin to understand his attraction to Watson's exotic novel of adventure. *Where Bonds* is set in a remote Aboriginal settlement, which would have stimulated Lawrence's anthropological interests. Crucially, Lawrence was reading *Where Bonds Are Loosed* about a year after he had first written to his friend Koteliensky about "Rananim", Lawrence's dream of a utopian community.²⁹ The year leading up to his reading of Watson's novel had been extremely difficult. He had written to Bertrand Russell excitedly about the possibility of "an aristocracy of people who have wisdom" (2L 364), only to have a major falling out just before a planned combined lecture series.³⁰ In November 1915 the police had raided the publishers of *The Rainbow*; Mark Kinkead-Weekes observes that "it is impossible to exaggerate the effect of this on Lawrence".³¹ On 6 November 1915 Lawrence informed his agent, J. B. Pinker: "It is the end of my writing for England" (2L 429). These were catastrophic events and are an important context for Lawrence's hopes for Florida and his reading of *Where Bonds Are Loosed*. On 7 December 1915, Lawrence wrote to Lady Ottoline Morrell, Russell's lover: "Let all knots be broken, all bonds unloosed" (2L 468), which points to Lawrence reading Watson's novel at that time, in the lead up to his letter to Carswell of 11 January 1916. The day after his letter to Morrell, Lawrence wrote his letter about blood-consciousness (it was to Russell, and illustrates the polarity in their social outlook). Soon afterwards Lawrence moved to Cornwall – his first attempt at Rananim, but with Australia and Aboriginal blood-consciousness fresh in his mind.

Watson's interest in Australian Aborigines was, like Lawrence's, loosely anthropological, shading into the mystical. Watson had met the renowned anthropologist A. R. Radcliffe-Brown while still at Cambridge: "He was planning an expedition to North-West Australia, and it was mooted that I might possibly go with him as Zoologist to the expedition".³² He accompanied Radcliffe-Brown on this expedition to north-west Western Australia

in 1912,³³ and it is this journey which provided Watson with his material for *Where Bonds Are Loosed*. In his autobiography Watson writes of the Western Australian government's cruel attempt to control syphilis amongst the Aboriginal population:

The idea was to collect all possible cases, and isolate the men on Bernier Island, and the women on Dorré Island, two uninhabited islands which lay some thirty miles from the mainland in Shark's Bay. Here hospitals were built, and a doctor was appointed to travel from one island to another, and tend the patients. The method of collecting the patients was not either humane or scientific.³⁴

Sven Lindqvist, in his recent account of the brutality inflicted on Australian Aborigines, reports that eventually it was realised that the Aborigines on the islands were suffering from "framboesia", a "tropical skin disease" associated with malnourishment and poor hygiene, and that the islands were abandoned by 1918.³⁵ In contrast to the depressing picture of Aborigines detained on the islands, Watson also writes of "the power of magic" possessed by the Australian Aborigines in their undisturbed state:

The social consciousness of these simple and friendly people was a concrete reality, and if I did not actively fear their magic I respected it, *and* I came to believe in it; and, as I came to fall under the spell of these people, so many thousands of years distant from our European conventions, so did those same European conventions suffer from an objective *devaluation*, if I may use such a phrase. I was coming to stand not only three hundred years, but perhaps three hundred thousand years away.³⁶

Watson's exploration of the "social consciousness" of Aborigines, although articulated after Lawrence's death, may be compared to Lawrence's fascination with Aboriginal blood consciousness.

A further interesting link between Watson and Lawrence is their response to Darwinism. Watson, like Lawrence, had considerable exposure to Darwinism, and like Lawrence, came to question its orthodoxy. Watson writes that his mother made him take off his hat to Darwin “as a sign of reverence”; he “read more of Darwin and Huxley than was normal for a small boy”, and asserted that he was “an atheist”.³⁷ As a graduate, returning to Cambridge after the war and after his marriage, Watson recalls that in place of the “facile Darwinian Theory of Evolution” he came to realise that he “saw more clearly than before that to understand Nature, we must make our contemplation of the observed object a creative act of imagination”.³⁸

Lawrence had read Darwin, and the Social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer, by 1907. He wrote to the Reverend Robert Reid of the profound effect of these writings: “Reading of Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Renan, J. M. Robertson, Blatchford and Vivian in his *Churches and Modern Thought* has seriously modified my religious beliefs” (*IL* 36-7). John Worthen observes that despite Lawrence’s reading of Darwin, Huxley and Haeckel, there is “little trace of Darwin and Huxley in Lawrence’s subsequent writing”.³⁹ This is because Lawrence is highly critical of Darwinism. While Darwin was crucial in shifting Lawrence’s spirituality away from Christianity, he, like Watson, contested Darwinian orthodoxy. Darwinism served as a foil to enable Lawrence to develop his own ideas about human development, such as those he articulates in his ‘Foreword’ to *Fantasia of the Unconscious*: “I do not believe in evolution, but in the strangeness and rainbow-change of ever-renewed civilisations” (*PU* 64).

Both Watson and Lawrence eschewed prevailing racist attitudes towards Australian Aborigines which were frequently bolstered by Darwinian assumptions about racial hierarchies and fitness. In *Where Bonds* the callousness of Darwinian orthodoxy is contested through the novel’s condemnation of the inept Dr Hubbard, who “looked upon the natives as a dying race, and would often say, the sooner they died out the better”.⁴⁰ At Sherwin’s revelation of the

"fly-blown natives" Dr Hubbard is "shown up" before both Sherwin and the relieving doctor, the younger and more modern Dr Hicksey.⁴¹ In *The Boy*, although Jack Grant, through his revulsion at the thought of sexual relations with the Aboriginal Lily, seems to be reflecting Lawrence's own race anxiety,⁴² there is no suggestion that Aborigines should be treated less humanely than other people, or that they are passing from the Australian landscape. Rather, they participate in the daily life of the rural properties, and Jack eventually develops "a kind of free-masonry" with "the blacks" (*BB* 194).

The appearance of positively rendered Australian characters in Lawrence's fiction post-dating his reading of *Where Bonds* suggests that Watson's novel provided a stimulus. The first Australian character to appear in Lawrence's fiction is Dr Alexander Graham in *The Lost Girl*. Alvina Houghton's consideration of marriage to Graham, and future emigration to Sydney, could signify Lawrence's own speculation about the possibility of beginning a new life in Australia. The dark-featured "primitive" Dr Graham stands out amongst the insipid English provincial men who surround Alvina (*LG* 27). And Graham's having "dark blood in his veins" (*LG* 22) suggests that Lawrence felt, before his actual experience of Australia, that Aboriginality might be both a distinguishing and regenerative element in Australianness. In Lawrence's subsequent novel, *Aaron's Rod*, Lawrence introduces his next Australian character, Francis Dekker, "son of a highly-esteemed barrister and politician of Sydney" (*AR* 197), who, like Dr Graham, is "well-coloured", presumably darkish coloured since he "might be Italian". He is robust and attractive. By contrast his English companion, Angus, has a "pale thin face", wears a "rimless monocle in his eye", and "was surely one of the young officers shattered by the war" (*AR* 186) – a forerunner of Clifford Chatterley. Dekker displays "colonial newness and adaptability", knows "that class superiority was just a trick", and is so "modern altogether" (*AR* 197-8). It is the Australian Dekker who will inherit the post-war world, not the English Angus. Significantly,

Lawrence's view of Australia was to change after his visit, and in *Kangaroo* in particular Australian characters are not portrayed sympathetically, reflecting Lawrence's disillusionment with the actual country when he saw it.

A core similarity between *Where Bonds Are Loosed* and *The Boy in the Bush* is their locale. Both novels explore the consequences of an Englishman's experience of north-west Western Australia, remote from civilisation. Watson had been moved by his actual experience of this region. The idea of a remote north-west, derived from both *Where Bonds* and his meeting with Mollie Skinner, seems to have had a great impact on Lawrence. Three weeks after his arrival in Australia, and already disillusioned, Lawrence wrote to Robert Mountsier: "The sense of futility grows – and it's nice to know there is this country – the North West particularly – where one could lose oneself away from the world" (4L 245). Lawrence may have been reflecting on his recent meeting with Mollie Skinner, with whom he had stayed at Darlington, near Perth, Western Australia. He later criticised one of Skinner's manuscripts which he had read during his visit, including her handling of events in "the N. W." of Western Australia in a letter he wrote to her from California in 1923 (4L 496). The manuscript was an early version of Skinner's *Black Swans* (1925), and Lawrence referred to her unsatisfactory "pirate-castaway-Swiss-Family-Robinson-Crusoe-Treasure-Island in the North West" in the unused introduction to her novel (BB 295). It is possible, therefore, that Lawrence, while rewriting Skinner's 'The House of Ellis' as *The Boy in the Bush* at this time, drew on the locale and the themes he recalled from *Where Bonds*. The existence of Watson's novel enables a comparison of the two novels, whereas this is not possible with 'The House of Ellis', since that manuscript no longer exists. Watson's novel, however, points to another inspiration for *The Boy* and to an even more extensive shaping of Skinner's manuscript by Lawrence. Both novels are sustained by similar polarities: England and Australia; European and Aboriginal; civilisation and frontier; man and woman; and traditional marriage and non-traditional

marriage. There are also some similarities in plot lines and artistic devices. Importantly, both novels explore male quests for regeneration outside the conventions and constraints of “civilised” society. Lawrence, however, inverts Watson’s vision of an Englishman rejecting civilisation, degenerating, and “going native”, in favour of a more utopian exploration of regeneration. *The Boy* is the more radical and the richer novel: it more thoroughly critiques Australian society and its institutions. *The Boy* is also the more complex and carefully written of the two novels, and the protagonist, Jack Grant, for example, is a fully developed character, whereas Sherwin in *Where Bonds* is more one-dimensional. Both the similarities and the differences between the two novels suggest that Lawrence, in rewriting M. L. Skinner’s ‘The House of Ellis’ as *The Boy in the Bush*,⁴³ also in a sense “re-wrote” Watson’s vision of the Australian frontier which he had read in *Where Bonds*. The result is that in *The Boy* Lawrence, although dealing with similar themes, stemming from similar anxieties about the state of western civilisation, articulates a different vision of the possibilities and consequences of an Englishman’s experience of Australia.

Where Bonds opens in a frontier hotel where “under the iron roof the heat was stifling”, in an unspecified coastal frontier town somewhere in “New Ireland”, which the novel soon confirms is Australia.⁴⁴ In the hotel, “among the rougher looking of the men was a red-haired, red bearded Englishman” – Sherwin, the protagonist.⁴⁵ Sherwin’s offer of employment on “Kanna and Fenton Islands”, where native hospitals are to be built, further defines the principal location of the novel as off the north-west coast of Western Australia.⁴⁶ These islands parallel Bernier and Dorré islands which Watson had visited on his expedition with Radcliffe-Brown.

Sherwin is in Australia with his brother, and they are “sons of a small farmer in England”. They have come as adventurers

... partly in the hope of a quick fortune, having heard extravagant stories of the gold fields, and partly from love of

adventure and new experience. The two men had gone straight into the interior and there had fallen under the spell of the bush, had been bitten by the lust for gold ... They had endured many hardships and spent much energy and all their money in the search.⁴⁷

Lawrence, setting a similar scene of adventure, including a quest for gold, begins *The Boy* with Jack Grant's disembarkation at Fremantle, in Western Australia. Jack is introduced as having been "sent out of England" to "the newest of new colonies" and "in his heart" he feels "a certain flutter at being in a real new land, where a man could be *really* free" (*BB* 7). It is the 1880s

... when it was still a long way to Australia, and the land was still full of the lure of promise. There were gold and pearl findings, bush and bush-rangings, the back of beyond, and everything desirable. Much misery too, ignored by all except the miserable. (*BB* 7)

Both novels assert the supremacy of the British over colonial Australians. The opening drama in *Where Bonds* introduces clear racial categories, and a hierarchy. A drunken Australian shoves Sherwin in a food queue at the hotel, snarling: "Yer bloody Britisher, think yourself damned superior. What do yer take me for? – a bloody aborigine?"⁴⁸ Sherwin knocks down the drunk with one punch but is then challenged by another Australian who accuses him of cowardice. A bloody fight ensues and Sherwin is pulled off his opponent after landing repeated blows on his enemy's "dark blood-stained face".⁴⁹ A Mr Stair, whose task is to establish "a Government Hospital for Sick Natives",⁵⁰ witnesses Sherwin's victory, and identifies in him superior characteristics associated with his Englishness:

Mr Stair had been directed to look out for a man who would look after stock, and who could if necessary take on and knock

to pieces any refractory nigger. In Sherwin he saw precisely what he needed. A man with that amount of physical strength and nervous force should, if he could gather sufficient self-assurance, be well fitted for the work. Besides, being an Englishman, he would be more likely to take up work involving loneliness and isolation, such work as a New Irelander would naturally shy at.⁵¹

Sherwin, being an "Englishman", will establish English superiority over both colonial Australian and "bloody aborigine".

In *The Boy*, Lawrence also presents a similar racial hierarchy between the Englishman and the Australian colonial, while avoiding any sense of insult towards the Australian Aborigine. Jack's superiority is partly intellectual – he has an "old English alertness" (BB 139) – but, like Sherwin, Jack has a deadly physical contest with an Australian, Easu Ellis. In the lead up to their duel, Jack and the Australian Tom Ellis attend a wedding in a remote settlement, and Jack undergoes a regeneration of his sense of Englishness, something he will draw on in his later conflict with Easu:

"I am an Englishman," he thought with savage pride. "I am an Englishman. That is the best on earth. Australia is English, English, English, she'd collapse like a balloon but for the English in her. British means English first ..." (BB 206)

Jack's self-affirmation of his Englishness sharpens the racial basis of his climactic duel with Easu. When they meet for the last time Easu is married and has degenerated, "begun to belly, inside his slack black trousers". Jack speaks to him in a "cold, clear, English voice which he knew infuriated Easu unbearably" (BB 279).

The novels differ in their presentation of Aborigines. In *Where Bonds*, the novel initially invites sympathy for the Aboriginal inmates of the hospital, who are in a wretched state, neglected by the resident doctor, and suffering under the tyranny of their

overseer, Sherwin, who “knew how to treat niggers”.⁵² Their overall function in the novel, however, is as a metaphor for the savagery and degeneration which threatens the white man who leaves his civilisation. Half way through the novel, Sherwin begins to feel his isolation: “Sherwin knew that somehow he had lost caste, lost his distinction as a white man”.⁵³ At this point, Sherwin is feeling very much as his creator did. Watson, after his first journey to the remote regions of Western Australia, wrote:

The process went so far during those fifteen months amongst the Aborigines that I only just snatched myself back in time to be able to half-believe ever again in the conventions of Europe ... I had entered the animism of the savage mind ...⁵⁴

Joseph Conrad provided comments to Watson on the manuscript of *Where Bonds*,⁵⁵ and this may help to explain the Conradian dimension to the novel. J. J. Healy observes that in *Where Bonds* “the Aborigines ... become part of the fantasy world of sub-conscious terrors” just as “the African tribe became for Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* an exploited fact and a menacing metaphor”.⁵⁶ And, like Kurtz, Sherwin degenerates in his remote and uncivilised environment:

It thus came about that Sherwin degenerated from the keen hopeful man who twelve months earlier had landed upon the island, to the gloomy and savage being who from time to time let show fierce strains of cruelty and lust. The bonds by which society had held him were being loosened and would soon fall away.⁵⁷

Sherwin becomes alienated from European society, having “promptings of murder and rape in his heart”.⁵⁸ Jack, by contrast, in *The Boy*, consciously strives to rise above his environment. While Jack feels that after a time “his body, the English cool body of his being, [was] slowly melting down and being invaded by a new

tropical quality" (BB 139), he resists "out of very obstinacy", clinging "to his own integrity: a small, dark, obscure integrity" (BB 140). And Aborigines, rather than representing to him Healy's "fantasy world of subconscious terrors", represent a positive force. Jack, consistent with Lawrence's attraction to Aboriginal "blood-consciousness", shares with the Aborigines a "deep, generous anger of the blood" (BB 194).

The negative, Conradian element in *Where Bonds* would have annoyed Lawrence, and this is reflected in his creation of Jack Grant. In 1912, Lawrence wrote of his disappointment with what he saw as Conrad's (and others) "giving in before you start"; he described Conrad as one of the "Writers among the Ruins" (IL 465). Although there is no direct evidence that he read the novel, there is, however, an unmistakable suggestion of *Heart of Darkness* in *The Boy* in Lawrence's evocation of the entry to the otherworld of his "lords of death":

But onward ahead is the great porch of the entry into death, with its columns of bone-ivory. And beyond the porch is the heart of darkness, where the lords of death arrive home out of the vulgarity of life, into their own dark and silent domains, lordly, ruling the incipience of life. (BB 296-7)

If we assume that this potential allusion to *Heart of Darkness* is not coincidental, Lawrence, in *The Boy*, can be seen as also dragging Conrad out of "the Ruins" and inverting Conrad's degenerative notion of darkness into a positive. As a result of his desperate encounters, Jack is transformed into a lord of death – experienced and spiritually enlightened – not into a degenerate. Thus, the narrator in *The Boy* repudiates a Conradian notion of reversion, and embraces in its place "the dark sumptuousness of the halls of death" where "The Lord of Death is the Lord of Life", urging that:

Unless we see the dark splendour of death ahead, and travel to be lords of darkness at last, peers in the realms of death, our life

is nothing but a petulant, pitiful backing, like a frightened horse, back, back to the stable, the manger, the cradle. (BB 296)

In both novels, after physical contests the English protagonists claim Australian women as their own. Sherwin claims Miss Desmond from Dr Hicksey and Jack Grant claims Monica from Easu. Both women are cast as submissive. After Miss Desmond bares her breasts to Sherwin, who has just murdered Dr Hicksey, in her successful bid to reconfigure Sherwin's blood-lust as sexual lust, we learn that "she was content to believe herself in the arms of her true master and mate".⁵⁹ In a similar vein, Monica concedes to Jack, saying "I won't oppose you" (BB 300), and while Monica's "wildness" is not completely broken, she, like Miss Desmond, is also "mastered" by her new mate (BB 307). Significantly, both novels see remoteness from civilisation as promoting challenges to conventional marriage. Sherwin and Miss Desmond in *Where Bonds* cohabit but do not marry. In *The Boy*, Jack, while marrying Monica, challenges convention through his bigamous proposals to Mary and Hilda. He detests conventional "one-couple-in-one-cottage domesticity" (BB 333).

Another correlation between *Where Bonds* and *The Boy* concerns the status of doctors. Both novels impugn the authority which is conventionally accorded members of the medical profession. In *Where Bonds*, Dr Hicksey works to establish his dominance over the incompetent Dr Hubbard, who has neglected the health of the Aborigines, and "two months later Hicksey's rule was well established".⁶⁰ Hicksey, however, because of Miss Desmond's resentment at the time he spends pursuing his professional passion, becomes distracted and is swayed "for the time to give up research".⁶¹ Dr Hicksey has questionable habits – he uses "strychnine".⁶² Similarly, in *The Boy*, Jack has a "vague idea" that Dr Rackett takes "opium" or "some chemical stuff" (BB 132). In both novels doctors perform brutal amputations without chloroform. In *Where Bonds*, through Dr Hubbard's neglect, Sherwin has a severely infected finger. He must lose "his first

finger on his right hand" and Hicksey removes it without chloroform.⁶³ In *The Boy* Jack's maternal grandfather is the doctor who "cut off" Gran Ellis's leg with "no chloroform" (BB 75). And most remarkably, in a curious parallel with Sherwin's loss of his first finger in *Where Bonds*, Jack, in *The Boy*, loses his "fore-finger" (BB 281) during the fight with his antagonist, Easu.

Both novels share a common vision of the north-west frontier of Australia as a site of adventure and contest for an Englishman, and depict assertions of English male authority over colonial Australians. Ultimately, however, they differ in their visions of the impact of the frontier experience. In part, I suggest, this reflects Watson's and Lawrence's different understandings of, and therefore different responses to, Darwinism. As Leo Henkin points out, "Evolution lends itself to a pessimistic as well as to an optimistic interpretation". Moreover, as Henkin also observes, both clerical opponents of Darwinism and opponents of Christian doctrine held up Darwinism's apparently "repellent dreariness" to bolster their respective arguments in favour of, and against, the existence of a "benevolent Creator".⁶⁴ And Gillian Beer notes that "even now, the articulation of Darwinian theory is fraught with multiple meanings that Darwin himself fought to control".⁶⁵ It is not surprising, therefore, that Watson and Lawrence should contest Darwin in different ways. In *Where Bonds*, Sherwin's removal from "the advance of a young colony"⁶⁶ produces an unfettered and corrupt taste for violence. His contemptible "survival" at the conclusion of the novel signifies Watson's contestation of received Darwinian notions of the "survival of the fittest". The narrator sums up Sherwin's killing of Dr Hicksey in the following way: "The most primitive instincts of his manhood had prompted him to do the deed".⁶⁷ His killing of Dr Hicksey marks the acceleration of his slide into Kurtzian degeneracy. In *The Boy*, however, remoteness from civilisation engenders in Jack a renewed awareness of his Englishness. His slaying of Easu is a rite of passage and marks the culmination of his regeneration. Jack feels that he has "done a supremely good thing" and that "Life could flow on to something

beyond" (BB 282). As he wanders half dead in the bush, Jack ponders his recovery: "It had something to do with birth. And not having died. 'I have not let my soul run like water out of my mouth'". Thus Jack does not survive in Darwinian terms as the "fittest" and most adapted individual, but rather, in spiritual terms, he is "born again", with new knowledge as "a lord of death" (BB 291). As I have noted, Lawrence, in his letter to Carswell, took issue with Watson's "mistaken idea that brutality is the desideratum" (2L 502). In place of Sherwin's rank brutality, Lawrence invests Jack with a noble fighting prowess. He remarks that "Easu hadn't one grain nor spark of a warrior in him. He was absolutely a groping civilian, a bully. That's why he wanted to spoil Monica" (BB 284). Lawrence, however, in distinguishing between degenerative and regenerative violence, sails close to the wind in *The Boy*. Jack is permitted the satisfaction of his kill, and his jealousy towards Easu is assuaged: "Jack thought of Monica. Monica, with her little flower-face. All messed up by that nasty dog of an Easu. He should be twice dead" (BB 283). But the distinction is important. Lawrence asserts Jack's English warrior wildness over the "mistaken idea", as he described it to Carswell, of the savage brutality epitomised by Watson's Sherwin (2L 502). Sherwin is the antithesis of a Lawrentian seeker hero, and represents what in *The Boy* the narrator describes as a "tame dog" who is "playing wild" (BB 307). Jack, therefore, in overcoming Easu, overcomes, as it were, Watson's Sherwin and Conrad's Kurtz.

In a similar vein, Lawrence overturns the materialistic symbolism of gold employed by Watson. Sherwin's greedy quest for gold is another emblem of his degeneration, whereas for Jack, the search for gold is regenerative. Sherwin and his brother are "bitten by the lust for gold" and come to an agreement that Sherwin will work for wages while his brother searches for the precious metal.⁶⁸ Sherwin hopes that gold will give him "power", including "power to buy women, any woman he might wish for", but the search ends in failure.⁶⁹ It is precisely this sort of naked quest for power which Lawrence rejects in *The Boy*. Although Jack must be "master too of

gold", he does not "want to master anything". Lawrence ennobles not only Jack's fighting spirit, but also his quest. Jack wants:

Not gold for the having's sake. Nor for the spending's sake. Nor for the sake of the power to hire services, which is the power of money. But the mastery of gold, so that gold should no longer be like a yellow star to which men hitched the wagon of their destinies. (*BB* 296)

Jack ascribes to gold a mystical quality which will enable him to "start the river of the wealth of the world rolling in a new course" (*BB* 308). Unlike Sherwin, Jack succeeds in finding gold, which suggests, at this point in the novel, that his regenerative vision in the north-west of Western Australia is also achievable.

Despite Sherwin's degeneracy, Watson's novel does not conclude with his complete Kurtz-like collapse and death. Rather, a contented Sherwin lives, somewhat ominously, with Miss Desmond, blessed with a child, in charge of a sheep run on the island, his murder of Dr Hicksey undiscovered.⁷⁰ A visiting government inspector ponders what is missing in his own civilised life and considers that Sherwin and Miss Desmond, who have not married, display "the naïveté and self-sufficiency of wild animals",⁷¹ leaving the better informed reader to measure the apparently Edenic nature of their situation against the grim processes which underpinned it. Jack's own quest is also problematised, but for a different reason, stemming from its (and Lawrence's) utopian outlook. Unlike Sherwin's stable domestic situation at the conclusion of *Where Bonds*, Jack ultimately has difficulty in realising his vision of a new community in the north-west. "What a fool!", he laments to himself bitterly: "A little world of my own!—As if I could make it with the people that are on earth today!" (*BB* 337-8). Jack rides off alone into the bush at the end of the novel.

The presence of an Australian character in two of the novels Lawrence wrote before his visit to Australia – *The Lost Girl* and

Aaron's Rod – and the brief mention of Australia in a third, *Mr Noon*,⁷² suggests that Lawrence was developing an interest in Australia in the period between his reading of *Where Bonds* in 1916, and his visit in May 1922. It is possible that Watson's novel, in combination with his reading of Australian anthropology and adventure fiction, contributed to this interest, as well as providing inspiration for his eventual visit. It is not clear when Lawrence decided he wanted to travel to Australia. However, just before embarkation on the *Osterley* from Naples, en route to Ceylon, he informed Frieda's mother, without elaboration, that "The ship goes on to Australia" (4L 199), indicating that Australia was on his horizon before he had left Europe, and before he had mixed with Australians on board ship (4L 208). It is possible, therefore, that the opportunity to visit Australia was a factor in Lawrence's late decision to delay his plans to visit Mabel Sterne in America, and to "go east, intending ultimately to go west" (4L 90).

Lawrence was bitterly disappointed with his experience of British Australia. In *Kangaroo*, Somers finds Sydney a "London of the southern hemisphere ... a substitute for the real thing" (K 20). Both Watson's novel and Skinner's manuscript, however, stimulated another, more positive vision of Australia. Although nearly eight years separate Lawrence's reading of *Where Bonds Are Loosed* from the composition of *The Boy in the Bush*, Watson's novel appears to have been an important yet overlooked source for one of Lawrence's major fictional engagements with Australia. It may be that the echoes of the former novel in the latter are mostly coincidental or subconscious. As I have shown, however, it appears more likely that Lawrence was in some way reworking Watson's novel, inscribing the possibility of regeneration over Watson's portrayal of "devaluation" and corruption, while he rewrote 'The House of Ellis' as *The Boy in the Bush*. We might say that the particular relationship between *Where Bonds Are Loosed* and *The Boy in the Bush* is suggested by an intriguing slippage of nomenclature, by which Jack Grant's "Aunt Matilda" becomes a "Mrs Watson" (BB 29).

¹ Watson's work was published variously under the names Grant Watson and E. L. Grant Watson.

² Grant Watson, *Where Bonds Are Loosed* [1914] (London: Duckworth and Co., 1920).

³ New Ireland is a province of Papua New Guinea comprising several islands to the north east of the main body of land. It is not clear why Watson chose this name to represent Australia.

⁴ Watson, *Where Bonds Are Loosed*, 173.

⁵ *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, ed. William H. Wilde, Joy Hooton and Barry Andrews (Melbourne: Oxford UP, 2000), 800.

⁶ E. L. Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose: The Autobiography of a Contemporary* (London: The Cresset Press, 1946), 108.

⁷ John Worthen, *D. H. Lawrence: The Early Years, 1885-1912* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 215.

⁸ Watson, for example, is not mentioned in Sandra Jobson Darroch, *Ottoline: The Life of Lady Ottoline Morrell* (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, Inc., 1975).

⁹ Watson, *But To What Purpose*, 108.

¹⁰ Grant Watson, 'Out There', *English Review*, xvi (December 1913), 85-101; the quotation is from 85.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

¹² For example, Lawrence had 'Two Poems' published in the *English Review* of February 1914.

¹³ Dorothy Green, ed., *Descent of Spirit: Writings of E. L. Grant Watson* (Sydney: Primavera Press, 1990), 29.

¹⁴ Michael Bell, *D. H. Lawrence: Language and Being* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 159, 161.

¹⁵ J. J. Healy, *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia, 1770-1975* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978), 124.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 124, 131.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 129-30.

¹⁸ Michael Hollington, 'D. H. Lawrence in Patrick White', *D. H. Lawrence Studies*, 12.2 (2004), 219.

¹⁹ Correct name: Rolf Boldrewood, pseudonym of Thomas Alexander Browne (1826-1915). See Elizabeth Webby, 'Colonial Writers and Readers', in *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Webby (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 50-73. Webby notes

that *Robbery Under Arms* “was a bestseller in both England and Australia” (63).

²⁰ See *IL* 376 n. 1, and *2L* 588.

²¹ Rose Marie Burwell, ‘A Catalogue of D. H. Lawrence’s Reading from Early Childhood’, *DHLR*, 3 (1970), 208, 280.

²² The full details are *Western Australian Year-Book For 1902-1904*, ed. Malcolm A. C. Fraser (Perth, 1906). See *BB* xxiii.

²³ M. L. Skinner, *The Fifth Sparrow: An Autobiography* (Sydney: Sydney UP, 1972), 113.

²⁴ See *BB* xxiii.

²⁵ Watson, *But To What Purpose*, 148. Lawrence’s portrait of ‘Corinna Wade’ in *Aaron’s Rod* (see *AR* 269) is a recreation of Vernon Lee (pseudonym for Violet Paget [1856-1935], English novelist and essayist), who lived in the Villa Il Palmerino in Florence. In his reference to the “hospitable English lady”, Watson may have been thinking of the American writer and hostess Mabel Dodge Luhan (1879-1962) who for a while owned the Villa Curonia in Florence (which had links with the Medici family), and whom Lawrence also recreated in a number of places: see, for example, ‘The Wilful Woman’, *SM* 199-203. See too *7L* 546 and n. 2.

²⁶ *EME* xliii-xliv.

²⁷ See *ibid.*, 246.

²⁸ See, for example, the bruised reaction of Somers to the label “pommy”, the slang term for an English migrant, applied by the Australian Jack Callcott (*K* 147).

²⁹ See *2L* 252.

³⁰ See *ibid.*, 380-1.

³¹ Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D. H. Lawrence: Triumph to Exile, 1912-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 282.

³² Watson, *But To What Purpose*, 83.

³³ *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, 800.

³⁴ Watson, *But To What Purpose*, 112.

³⁵ Sven Lindqvist, *Terra Nullius: A Journey Through No One’s Land* (London: Granta Books, 2007), 110.

³⁶ Watson, *But To What Purpose*, 108.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 24, 60.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 216.

³⁹ Worthen, *The Early Years*, 179.

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- ⁴⁰ Watson, *Where Bonds Are Loosed*, 36.
⁴¹ Ibid., 72.
⁴² See *BB* 132.
⁴³ Ibid., li, lii.
⁴⁴ Watson, *Where Bonds Are Loosed*, 1, 3.
⁴⁵ Ibid., 2.
⁴⁶ Ibid., 13.
⁴⁷ Ibid., 3.
⁴⁸ Ibid., 5.
⁴⁹ Ibid., 10.
⁵⁰ Ibid., 11.
⁵¹ Ibid., 11-12.
⁵² Ibid., 153.
⁵³ Ibid., 167.
⁵⁴ Watson, *But To What Purpose*, 108.
⁵⁵ *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, 800.
⁵⁶ Healy, *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia*, 132.
⁵⁷ Watson, *Where Bonds Are Loosed*, 174-5.
⁵⁸ Ibid., 198.
⁵⁹ Ibid., 294.
⁶⁰ Ibid., 105.
⁶¹ Ibid., 136.
⁶² Ibid., 272.
⁶³ Ibid., 80, 83.
⁶⁴ Leo Henkin, *Darwinism in the English Novel, 1860-1910: The Impact of Evolution on Victorian Fiction* (New York City: Corporate Press, Inc., 1940), 221.
⁶⁵ Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), xxi.
⁶⁶ Watson, *Where Bonds Are Loosed*, 308.
⁶⁷ Ibid., 288.
⁶⁸ Ibid., 3-4.
⁶⁹ Ibid., 148, 248.
⁷⁰ Ibid., 309, 307-8.
⁷¹ Ibid., 310.
⁷² See *MN* 255.