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## Mollie Skinner: D. H. Lawrence's Australian Catalyst

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### Abstract

This article is about Lawrence's co-author of *The Boy in the Bush*. It tells the story of the Volunteer Aid Detachment Nurse who, in spite of her handicaps, broke out of her role in society to become a travelling nurse as well as a novelist and journalist. She became a permanent name in literature as the result of a chance encounter with Lawrence in 1922, and the article shows what sort of a person she was, and what there was about her background that went into the makings of the book.

HARRIET GAY

## Mollie Skinner: D. H. Lawrence's Australian Catalyst

Edward Garnett of Jonathan Cape, Ltd., had before him on his table the manuscript of Mollie Skinner's *Black Swans*. She had first shown this to D. H. Lawrence in Australia in May of 1922, when he had encouraged her to write *The House of Ellis*. Now, two years later, *The Boy in the Bush* (Lawrence's rewriting of this book) had just been published and Mollie, badly in need of money, hoped this would help with *Black Swans*. She wasn't sure what to expect of Mr. Garnett, "large, clumsy, kindly and sincere," and "looking like a white bulldog:"

He began at once to roar and growl and thump the table. "This book," he said, "is so damn, damn bad that it sends me crazy because it is also— Whatever are you crying for?" He took a huge handkerchief from his pocket and wiped my tears away. "Look here, I was going to say it's so damn damn good as well we are going to publish it."

Garnett, with what his son David had called his "love for the ugly duckling," had smothered what few practical notions he had in taking on *Black Swans*.<sup>1</sup>

He found it hard to believe that so unsophisticated a person had written about three-fourths of *The Boy in the Bush* . . . and he was even more surprised that 'David' had collaborated with a simplicitas who had wept and had to have her tears wiped away with his own handkerchief. . . . That lion of literature . . . how I disappointed him!<sup>2</sup>

Garnett described to her a Lawrence who, during his visit to the family had played havoc with the village girls and "victimized" the





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