

## Setting fire to the poetic correspondence of troubled multispecies relationships

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### Introduction

This poetic work is a multispecies love letter seeking to make the reader aware of the strange aporia of human ‘love’ for animals.<sup>1</sup> Contradictory human expressions of love, care, indifference, and harm towards animals can be seen in words that change perceptions of animals (as individuals, groups or in general). Consider the changing status of a ‘pet’ cat being discarded and becoming ‘feral’. Is ‘it’ a ‘pest’ to be ‘culled’, not even ‘killed’ or ‘put to sleep’ or can ‘they’ be ‘rescued’? This work explores multiple and conflicting affective outcomes words have on building compassion, understanding and support for animals, or adding to misconceptions which can result in disregard or violent treatment. The words we use to represent animals and express our relationships to them can reduce animals to iconic national symbols and supportive anthropocentric tools, or to draw out the diversity, multiplicity and intrinsic value of animal being and create space for animals in the text.

The poem focuses on the contemporary Australian context for the aporia of human love for animals. It grounds the work in place and time by using Australian phrases, idioms, slang, associations, terms and names for animals, plants, and places while concentrating on recent events of bushfires, droughts, floods, and pandemic isolation. It references ongoing Australian settler-colonial practices where human animal entanglements and conflicts are highlighted, including horse racing, hunting, bushwalking, fishing, and farming.

Repetition and wordplay are used to amplify, destabilize, complicate, confuse and decentre human perspectives. The method is informed by the fictocritical work of Ania Walwicz in *horse* utilizing ‘The process of associative thought and reflection. Improvisation and analysis. The flight of thought, a trajectory and reflection, retrieval, recoil. The use of multilevel text comprising poetics, theory and appropriated text’ (5). The poet aims to draw attention to the ways our relationships with animals are constructed and circulated through our use of language which forms an inherently anthropocentric frame of reference. Unresolved contradictions between intimacy and distance in human animal relationships are used to create a space of questioning to provoke thought.

Walwicz, Ania. *horse: A Psychodramatic Enactment of a Fairytale*. Crawley, Western Australia: UWAP, 2018. Print.

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<sup>1</sup>Although encompassing both, ‘animals’ is used here to differentiate ‘animals of different species’ from ‘human animals.’ Terms like ‘nonhuman animals’ and ‘other animals’ are definitions centring humans, in terms of what *is not* human rather than what *are* these beings. Words like ‘beast’ also have othering meanings.

**We love, animals****a multispecies love letter**

We love multispecies we many dear deer were introduced welcome feral to the hunt kangaroo we love you we want you most largest indigenous pest boundary fences cannot stop them hold them cute koalas and smile for the picture for us us deforest donate mate mr miss we miss targets miss our national emblems emissions burning in our eucalyptus dry tinder hopeless icon by the lake running dry we're hopelessly late as murray darling sweetheart cracks she's golden wattle we do we do we cocked it up man what ill we do cockatoo oh man we stockman we taking stock man cheers champ champers and she hat trick just the ticket kick it kick it kick the horse race disgrace what a fine coat of arms we sing and rejoice australia break a leg it's just unlucky just an animal annual freak occurrence it's our annual animal line-up it's good as gold mate gold mine it it's mine how could we see foresee forewarned is forgotten a broken foreleg beggared don't beg killing is a kindness it rises up like a flood because we love we we love we we we all the way home and it floods away tears tears and we love and toil for boundless bounding kangaroo meat for the dog meet our dog meat him we don't I they shoot horses they don't shoot by spotlight night in the bush set alight it's your right fighting chance you're a sport spot can you spot it where the duck lands in the wetlands it's it's lying dying like a dog spot the dog are you uncollected you lying in agony aren't you angsting you over over you which cut is the deepest cheapest buy their love it's a strange love duckie are you chicken chicken chicken coop stooping push them closer in in sardine tins can you push them hold them close closed in tin tin shack rusty corrugated corrupted come on chicken shed contamination share it be kind nobody likes the daily grind it's not fit for the sandwich she says grind them up and feed them to the plants plant them in no shade cows range free under the sun nothing is free we huddled under one tiny tree in the sun we try they under one sun no trees nowhere to flee boundaries he fleas and flies flick the channel eagle eyes wedgetails wedged in piles as predatory pests raised wild raise outrage and rage out of bounds directionless empathy endangered extinct gone bye the by and you buy rare steak but we bloody love you in the zoo it's its habitats habitats painstakingly staked out boundaries a reduced reproduction producing reproducing reproduction they will produce tasmanian tigers a replication erasing erasure to resurrect or SOS the tasmanian devils in the detail a devilish replication copulation biting fighting transmission of tumorous contagion we're managing them managing the wild population uncaged unlovely unfit for tv posters ads unmarketable disease parasitic pests smoke them out smoked ham devilled eggs honeyed ham pig out stop hogging it you swine squeal piggy in the middle bacon pork piglets they're happy as a pig in mud sweating like a pigs don't sweat cooling mud it builds a nest she sings to her piglets honey honey bee gone honey bees rob sticky flowing gold and green iconic tree frog trapped in a sticky situation kookaburra beak snaps laugh kookaburra laugh laughter follows sorrow borrow burrow undermine under wombat bat crack it it it sounds sonar whale it wail beached as bro run run overs run over overrun

run over roadkill pouch empty gone empathy is disturbing we rescue preserve conserve  
 your contradictions of direction our dereliction in shelter they starve unwell and swell  
 smelling wild smell they smell death sell death execution exile never smile at a crocodile  
 crocodile tears fake fears fake tears it's a croc it's all a crock a crook crooked  
 coldblooded coal stealing years sealing fears but it's only here no hear you're here no see  
 we're here no speak don't don't don't speak only for the death roll of slaughter house  
 working in intimacy compassion our intimate connection intimate for you forgetting  
 forgotten concern forgot to feed me feed me scraps waste wait weight we donate check  
 out our charitable humanitarian humane human animal entanglements entitlements entail  
 tail tale we tell we for diverse love love sing song singular devastating fire burning  
 conflagration human congregation exploration excavation eroding your land our land on  
 the brink the bramble cay melomys is extinct exhume decay dismay display a  
 photograph holding a photograph as evidence witness I touched it it touched me it I  
 touching proof published in journals evidence you care about caring you statistically love  
 you statically love statistics you care in inaction of distant compassion in communities a  
 poor aporia a paw pause take up the cause for animals love humans love animals it's  
 animal nature get out in nature go bush bushwalk bushfire where there's smoke there's  
 fire smoke them out slide slither snake sunbake break brake to show you care for wildlife  
 out in the wild shooting wildly wild animal animal crossing crossing borders boundaries  
 for care for kind for our kind in kind humankind in urban suburban wilderness magpies  
 caw feral foxes run fine frilled and bluetongue lizards bask dog bites man bites woman  
 bites wild rural run brumby run culling gun there's no silver bullet solution fire the gun  
 jump the gun false start liar lyre lyrebird feathers on fire out of control mismanagement  
 manage our resources managing them it manages it planning promise it intersects insect  
 spray poisonous delay eating fate freight to plate high steaks searing browning beef cow  
 how now what's the beef brown cow can I eye rib-eye aye aye distrust you u ewe chew  
 and threw throw a shoe throw her to the wolves throw down and thoroughly digest this  
 through and through though you know this thorough anthropocene is anthropocentric an  
 anthropomorphic ant owes anthropology zoology an apology for love letters to study is  
 human attachments of people in paper sheets shear sheep sheared in sheer fear rearing  
 offences resulting in rabbit proof fences rabbit on rabbit on is it proof sitting on fences  
 intimate distance less is more contained more provided provisions cold meat dinner meat  
 meeting dingo outside out west outward interest and inward reward forward forewarned  
 distrust thrust out of place outward spaces shifting urban places I I ibis moves I bliss kiss  
 love cats interrupt zoom zooming fast jumping predator hunting cap cap a lid on it it cap  
 it put it make sauces and sources public revealed news is new global isolation relation  
 diverse diversity diverted attention give me company my companion my pet I said pet oh  
 pet I said pet I said love I said pet I said speak friend and he knew the emu new fresh  
 knew emu eggs feather the nest oil the wheels of commerce caught in live report live  
 export we court courting live relay delay restricted ship caught in port rort caught animal  
 vessels caught in-between heat the worst thirst overheating heat no escaping the heat no

rescue no tragedy just a waste what a waste you have to eat everything on your plate  
 ship shape ship shipping they escaped what liberation escape saved for death delayed  
 returned and death branded into the skin burning words burn in words in sound unbound  
 in our strange love language animal human language animal traces languish in language  
 what do we mean I mean pester me pest domestic pet wild and feral free uncaged monster  
 mother the other sources of contagion rage and raging vicious evil good boy best friend  
 a dependable worker tool transport flying home lost transmission of wonder our neglected  
 possible possums climb lines traffic signs we traffic them power lines swing low sing low  
 sweet ringtail and brush tail away trail away stranger strange tails of aporia entails tales of  
 love loving abounds wounds is wounded is wound down rounded up to equal plans a  
 human animal rights agenda is human animals are animal's natural habitat recreated in  
 miniature with concrete painted hard habits created pacing pruned permaculture  
 permafrost thaws ice melt warming waters coral bleaching turtles struggle starving  
 penguins and butterflies lost in the weather while we you are arranging micro ecosystems  
 for leisure pleasure in the garden we replacing nature you I part of it we apart from it part  
 it playing impatience platypus poisoned claw poison on its claws claw it close it claws its  
 way up for revenge it's leaking chemical poison probably a parable fable for the rabble  
 real dropbear I swear swear in protest it mourn it replicate and replace control the  
 reproduction of the rabbit population prevent it with a prophylactic test attest in animal  
 models test subject subjected to beauty product production produce milk milking it  
 consume the milk of human kindness consummating distrust at a discrete time point  
 out the disgraceful point of the human race over the race is over under wraps burns  
 hidden reports hiding rates of extinction hand waved reports casualties casually since  
 colony colonisation australia lost most of a lost world diverse mammal species lost 34 lost  
 lost and found numbers are declining really it's death they're dying kill or cull soften the  
 blow casualties of popularity line them up for extinction critically endangered critical list  
 triaging to lead with lead bullets leadbeater's possum betting they are just playing possum  
 spear-tooth shark feels the bite lost at sea missed armoured mist and spotted tree frogs  
 croaking it make a joke of it no fun fungi you gulbaru gecko don't let go you would love  
 it if you met it regent honeyeater is a flagship species flagging ship of a hierarchy regally  
 heralded by the herald petrel not really there but here hear this then there is no adopted or  
 made recovery plan for this species but back this up soon southern bent-wing bat an  
 incredible tiny micro best pest controller yaminon that's a northern hairy-nosed wombat  
 that's a yaminon ammonite pinwheel snail slowly sliding off the scale fish fishing  
 freshwater crayfish from a childhood catching yabbies in a river net not a nest a short-  
 tongued bee a native bee other than scientifically unnamed unknown unloved what's in a  
 name pick and choose from the critics critical 89 not so common names collect them all  
 we're counting down waiting for the cassowary to catch up and casually spin a leg spin  
 span and we cave spiders legs spinning for a thread weave a web it expands spans the  
 world over supply and chain under demand stop I will I'll be watching wallaby me  
 struggling through and you flooding floods you bloody fool bloody clear clearing the

land clearing up and clear skies dirt dries and crumbles tumbles it's clearly apathy from above but they love a poor farmer pouring out pouring down for aporia for animals we all love to be loved don't we lovey we love comfortably ugly ugg boots lovely warm woollen woolly wool sheep dipped in death disease disgust do we name it decaying carrion flesh or carry on blaming declaiming the predator is preying on flesh and blame it on eagle on dingo goanna or blame it on pain in the rain and we holding the reigns rain it in reign drop it pitter-patter it it it it it it's so strange so beautiful how beautiful you are pussycat faster faster where have you been seen the queen figurehead feeling fine feline a feminine pussycat on a lap I've seen the end scene she's dumped and alone no home its gone gone feral and feeds on feathers it's down it's falling down she falls down a hole wombat hole whole hearted let it sink sinking in burnt in your skin in the game gamey taste aftertaste taste this grub grab an aphid hidden in golden soil a swarming sum collectively greater than one itself is them they're biting chewing eating all of the garden insecticide spray they descend in waves falling crashing sea spray foam a great white wave of unfounded fear spear culling the shark net biting deep into fin dolphin floundering calling out his song for those who've come across the seas and free one with hands over heartland this fish out of water algal blooms over river kingfisher eyes fishing fisheyes beak grasps gasping tilapia a pretty introduction introduced threat and ornamental pest an unwanted aquarium pet cast a line and fish it out here's the byline fished out fish farm overruns overflow rushing by in a torrent of tormented slaughter fish feel pain and suffer struggling with the stress of painful death floods the body flesh spoils who knew a short life in pain tastes bitter it ruins meat market quality quickly killing them softly tastes better do you feel empathy pet are you stressed when fish die floating high and waters run dry white wine pours for your pains lift a glass a toast to our success in excess controlling interest is care a blessing yes I love you I'm above you like a dove let loose loving a rock dove is a pigeon it's their pigeonholed as a pest pestering you are you pestered do you feel fed up feed it unseasonably seasoned meat unreasonably rising heat melts ice caps with your hot seasons reasons lying denying repercussions listen we live to make a living make a life for yourself feeling alive living life in a cage is captivating entertainment to watch what you think I do protest love