

University of Canberra

Sandra Burr

Love Myst and other poems

Biographical note:

Sandra Burr was an honorary academic at the University of Canberra where she taught creative writing, and creative/cultural research. She was on the editorial board of the journal *Axon: Creative Explorations* and Project Manager for the Australian government Office of Learning and Teaching-funded *Examination of Doctoral Degrees in Creative Arts: process, practice and standards*. The holder of a PhD in creative writing, Sandra was a member of the Centre for Creative and Cultural Research at the University of Canberra, and managed the ARC-funded project *Understanding Creative Excellence: A Case Study in Poetry*. She was also a longstanding member of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs and had been a key part of the committee organising two of their annual conferences. Her research interests focused on the cross-disciplinary field of human-animal relations.

Keywords:

Creative writing – Poetry – Animal studies – Women/horse bond

Love Myst

You are waiting at the paddock gate
as I arrive and when I call – you call
we sing together

walking by my side head low
your nostrils blow warm across my wrist

the roundness of your barrel swells
against my inner thigh
muscle against muscle
I feel the lift,
the tiny outward swing and little drop
of my legs
in time with your legs

the view ahead
is framed by your fluted ears
broader at the base,
inward turning at the top
as you listen out –
for me

sticky grasses sweep your fetlocks
and mustard-coloured
flower heads rebound
as you carry me
two as one

damp fronds brush my boots
tiger-stripping their elastic sides
and your dappled breast

the dry slither of a startled lizard
darting to the sanctuary
of a fissured granite crack
sends a tremor scything through you
and my nerve ends flutter

for one moment
we are not synchronized
until I place my palm
against your shoulder
and we exhale
in unison

Mares in Spring

Overnight the apple tree blooms fists of white and flossy pink
At last my winter feet wear sandals.
Roadside grasses stand tall, fields of ripening wheat beckon in the wind
while safe behind their paddock fences mares browse
fit to burst, tugging blissfully at abundant clover,
fuelling hormones, feeding urges.

Remnant wisps of winter fluff adorn their rounded bellies
where secret follicles like buds unfurl.
Soon they will back up to puzzled geldings and beg,
with soft eyes and soundless mouths
for the one thing that the horses cannot give.

Kookaburra

At dawn, currawongs and magpies gargle in the treetops
their song lines plummet and drown in a half filled water trough
where a disintegrating kookaburra silently floats, beak down
Touched by his waterlogged beauty
I lift his hollow bones from the treacherous pond
and placing him in a grassy nest,
smooth his fading plumage with its tinge of iridescent blue
He is ready for the ministrations of ants and beetles,
dust and time.

Research statement

Sandra Burr died at the end of September 2014. For this submission, her colleagues have compiled a brief statement of her research ethos and epistemological basis from her notes and other writings.

Sandra worked in conventional modes and in creative practice on the issue of the relations between human and non-human animals. As a lifelong horsewoman, she maintained a particular focus on human/horse relationships, and contributed knowledge to the apparent bond between women and horses. She said of her research into the issue:

My interrogation of the horse-woman bond is situated in the expanding field of animals and society (Franklin 2006). I was concerned not to objectify the horses in my research, and to afford them an ethos of respect that reflects my own thinking about human interactions with horses. This sentiment is echoed by US sociologist and horsewoman Kerri Brandt, who advocates redressing the ‘pervasive specieism that values human life over non-human animal life’ (Brandt 1995: 13). It is always confirming to find other researchers who concur with your point of view.

Acknowledging the importance in her research and creative practice of embeddedness, and the value of accommodating a subjective position as a researcher, she quotes poet Alicia Ostriker’s claim that ‘the self in its innermost regions is plural’, that ‘the “I” is a “we”’ (Ostriker 2005: 78); and that in consequence, her research was committed to ‘reinforcing the notion of research as a personal, professional, methodological and theoretical journey’ (Fisher and Phelps 2006: 153).

The products of this journey were essays on human/animal interactions, artist books comprising photographs and other visual explorations of animals in the national capital and, always, poems. Her poetry aspired to what she particularly admired in other writers: ‘their use of the conversational tone which is simultaneously personal, subjective, self-reflexive and intimate’. Through this tone, she observed:

They achieve a sense of fellowship with readers through the use of informal language and structure and are often quirky and funny with an off-beat approach to their subjects. I like those undercurrents of gentle persuasion, their humour and self-deprecation and respect those inflections of authority which I believe result from lived experience, observation and intelligent reflection.

Her many colleagues, students, family and friends can attest to the fact that in her work and in her life she reflected these same qualities.

Works cited

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