

Teaching an Old Dog New Tricks?: Romance, Ethics and Human-Dog Relationships in a Rural Australian Novel

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Abstract: Rachael Treasure is Australia's most popular author in the mainstream rural romance genre. Her novels combine bush or agricultural landscapes with gutsy heroines who are keen to transcend the context's sexist pecking order. This article focuses on the representation of working dogs, romance and the ethics plot in Treasure's first novel, *Jillaroo* (2002). Dogs, particularly the heroine's well trained kelpies, progress and hinder the novel's romance; they play a central role in some of the romantic elements yet are conspicuously absent in others. Relationships between humans and dogs unlock the novel's ethics plot. This plot emphasises certain behaviours and attitudes between humans and non-humans and aligns readers' sympathies with particular characters while encouraging disidentification with others. *Jillaroo's* heroine Rebecca Saunders and her dogs undertake typical farm jobs efficiently and economically thereby securing her entry into spaces usually reserved for men. Rebecca shows herself to be equal, if not superior, in action and knowledge to the men who populate such contexts. Dogs therefore assist in constructing Rebecca as an example of Sherri Inness's 'tough woman', heroines who use their "body, attitude, action, and authority" (Inness 24) to challenge the dominance of male heroes in popular culture and disrupt gender roles and stereotypes. Dogs also complicate Rebecca's gender construction by undercutting and disturbing her feminine gender performances. For the novel's male characters, interactions with dogs indicate their mental health and their "interspecies competence" (Fudge 11). A close reading of the relationships between *Jillaroo's* main characters and dogs reveals that the narrative endorses and rejects particular human-human, human-animal and human-environment behaviours, ultimately positioning readers to value the ethical treatment of others (human and non-human) and the environment. Overall, *Jillaroo's* romance narrative and representation of working dogs emphasises contemporary gender, environmental and animal rights issues in rural Australia, imparting a vital lesson to readers about the ethical treatment of others.

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If he is not to stifle his human feelings, he must practise kindness towards animals, for he who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men. We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals.
-Immanuel Kant

In the Australian cultural imagination, men have been the dominant participants in representations of rural or remote life. While men have "battled" against the land "as an object to be mastered and controlled" (Schaffer xiv), women have often slid into the recesses of country life and its representation; either they have been absent from depictions of rural life or boxed into stereotypical roles such as that of "farm wife".[1] A short story by acclaimed Australian poet Henry Lawson goes so far as to state, "They blamed me, but I didn't want her to come; [the bush] was no place for a woman" (As quoted in Schaffer 194).[2] While Lawson may be read as being glib for trying to rhyme "I didn't want her to come" with "no place for a woman", his quote reflects a common historical assumption that women are incompatible with or in need of protection from Australia's rural environment.[3] Although such a sentiment stains the reality and depictions of rural Australian life, a recent flurry of representations of women as active participants and contributors in rural settings has appeared on screen and in print. The television program *McLeod's Daughters* (2001-2009) is perhaps the best known contemporary depiction of women running farming properties and working the land, however the genre of mainstream Australian rural romantic fiction is where some of the most exciting and progressive representations of rural women are emerging.[4]

The contemporary rural romance is a publishing phenomenon of the new millennium. As reviewer Carol George notes, the appeal of the genre is strong enough for some readers that, "By the end of them you yearn for a ute, a pair of boots and wide open spaces" (As quoted in Dunbabin 4). The genre arguably emerged in the wake of Rachael Treasure's debut novel *Jillaroo* (2002) which has reportedly sold more than 100,000 copies ("Steamed Up" 39).[5] Having published five novels, two short story collections and two e-books up to 2013, Treasure is now regarded as the "queen" of Australian rural romance,[6] a genre that now includes authors such as Nicole Alexander, Karly Lane, Fiona Palmer and Fleur McDonald. The genre's success is evidenced in the dramatic growth in book sales from 56,609 in 2004 to 138,261 in 2010 ("Steamed Up"39). The rural romance's appeal to readers must be partly attributed to the complex representation of rural life, one that is at times gritty and others romanticised. While other sub-genres of romance utilise dogs and other animals as pets and companions, the rural romance is bound to its context where animals appear as pets and companions and in a functional sense as products for meat, fleece and breeding or to assist in the day to day workings of farms and stations.[7] Novels such as *Jillaroo*, reflect on what it means to live, act and love in a context where synergistic relationships between humans, animals and the environment are vital to financial success,

survival and contentment. As this paper argues, rural romances are also interesting in their use of romance plots to represent heroines battling for their “place” in rural life.

This essay textually analyses Rachael Treasure’s novel *Jillaroo* (2002) with a focus on the interconnectivity between the romance narrative, human-dog relationships (especially between heroine Rebecca Saunders and her kelpies) and understandings of ethical behaviour. I argue that dogs play an intrinsic role in the heroine’s life and work, in the development and delay of the romance with her hero, Charlie Lewis, and ultimately in the resolution. Firstly, I apply Pamela Regis’s theory of the romance novel including her definition, three social trends that shape the construction of romance heroines and the essential romantic elements. I do so to understand *Jillaroo*’s narrative progression to the heroine’s freedom. More than just the heroine’s freedom is at stake because the community and environment, including the animal stakeholders, depend on the heroine overcoming impediments to her quest and her romance so that all can share the happy ending. Secondly, I examine the role of kelpies in the construction of Rebecca’s gender identity. Her dogs enable her to navigate highly masculine spaces in the rural setting and subsequently transmit her specialised knowledge of kelpie breeding and training to men. Rebecca and her dogs challenge the hermetic seal of these spaces as closed to women and as sites where hegemonic masculinity is cultivated and reinforced. Thirdly, I describe the relationships between the central male characters and dogs. Symbolically, dogs are employed to indicate the mental health and “interspecies competence” (Fudge 11) of central male characters, namely the hero Charlie and Rebecca’s father Harry Saunders. These male-dog relationships reflect Kant’s admonition that how a man treats animals determines the health of his heart. Overall, I argue that *Jillaroo* emphasises certain ethical behaviours to readers via its romantic structure. The novel explores intraspecies competence between rural men and women and reflects on “interspecies competence” between humans and animals, particularly through the heroine’s quest and her relationship with working dogs.

Dogs, Romance, Ethics and the Rural

In *Jillaroo*, the elements of romance, the presence of dogs and notions of what constitutes ethical and unethical behaviour are firmly bound together. *Jillaroo*, the quintessential Australian contemporary rural romance, spans ten years in the life of its heroine, her family and their farm, Waters Meeting. Eighteen year old Rebecca Saunders wishes to take control of the property from her father and restore it to its former glory via sustainable practices and natural husbandry methods, including those she has used to train her dogs. However her father, Harry, denies her that right. Harry believes that a woman’s place in rural Australia is as a wife, mother and worker in an off-farm occupation such as nursing or teaching. For Harry, farms are controlled by men through patrilineal inheritance[8] from father to son representing a narrow, though terrifyingly common, view of rural women.[9] However, Rebecca grew up with a superwoman mother who raised three children while working full-time as a vet and a grandfather who taught her how to farm by reading the landscape and working *with* animals rather than only *working* them. Thus, Rebecca grew up believing that her sex played no part in her farming abilities or in developing her ‘natural’ instinct with animals and the land. With her grandfather long dead

and her mother fleeing her marriage, children and property to work in the city, Harry's mismanagement catastrophically affects the land, the family and himself, the hubristic patriarch. Determined to succeed her father, Rebecca realises she needs experience and qualifications to convince Harry of her capabilities and prepare for the immense task of restoring the farm. The narrative spans her quest to restore Waters Meeting alongside her romantic relationship with the likable hero, Charlie Lewis. Through her quest, Rebecca, with the help of her kelpies, challenges traditional expectations of rural women, subsequently becoming a heroine for every country girl who dreamed of doing more than standing on the fence watching the men.

Jillaroo is a novel primarily about the pursuit of freedom at a narrative and representational level. At the narrative level, in following Pamela Regis's approach to romance in *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (2003), the heroine and hero overcome various obstacles that eventually enable their union. Regis defines romances as "a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines" (Regis 19). She asserts that eight elements (the society defined, meeting, declaration, attraction, barriers, point of ritual death, recognition, betrothal) are essential to all romances. The eight elements form part of Regis's defence of the genre against critics, including feminists, who argue that romance prolongs the enslavement and bondage of women (Regis 3-4). Instead, Regis argues that romances progress towards a heroine's freedom, the primary stimulus for reader's enjoyment. Indeed, as Regis states, "[t]he genre is popular because it conveys the pain, uplift, and joy that freedom brings" (Regis xiii). To demonstrate how heroines experience freedom and readers experience joy, Regis proposes the eight essential elements which together span the entirety of a work. While it is impossible to analyse every narrative detail, Regis's key elements support the notion that heroines change and grow, often for the better, by novel's end. Her theory enables a reading position that accounts for the complex transformations of heroines and issues over a narrative rather than isolated in single scenes. In *Jillaroo*, as I show below, while Rebecca and Charlie's romance is central to the story, three key elements, the society defined, point of ritual death and barriers reveal much about the gender, animal and environmental rights in this context. As I argue, *Jillaroo* exemplifies the allegorical function of romance; the novel emphasises the heroine's pursuit of equality in a rural context with the help of her dogs and her search for positive change and the ethical treatment of others in her family and towards the environment.

Before examining the role of working dogs in the essential romance elements in *Jillaroo*, it is important to contextualise the narrative in relation to what Regis describes as the three dominant social trends that "meet and clash on the pages of the romance novel" (Regis 55). Regis names these, "the rise of affective individualism, the importance of companionate marriage, and English Law as it applied to married women" (Regis 56). While Regis discusses these three trends as they appear prominently in English romances from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they have relevance for the context represented in *Jillaroo*, especially to understand the treatment of women and animals. Being a contemporary romance, the three social trends should be automatically in place for Rebecca Saunders. However, as a rural romance, traditional patriarchal understandings of gender still shape men and women's actions and thoughts. Rebecca is an affective individual who is self-driven, motivated and longs to run her family's farm. Legally she has property rights, however her father Harry believes that women, especially his daughter,

have no right to work the land, symbolising what sociologist Margaret Alston argues is men's historically entrenched view across the agriculture industry (Alston "Gender Perspectives in Australian Rural Community Life" 152-4). Rejecting her offer to run Waters Meeting, Harry Saunders instead advises Rebecca to "do a teaching or nursing course, then...marry a nice farmer who isn't up to his neck in debt or paying his way out of a bloody divorce" (Treasure 7). While no legal impediment prevents her running or owning the farm, she is impeded by social and cultural mores. For the third social trend, Rebecca believes in companionate marriage, particularly that she will find a partner who shares her love for the land, animals, community involvement and is willing to work equally alongside her. While a contemporary heroine should automatically have the right to property, Australian rural society, particularly represented by her patriarchal father, restricts her appropriation of this right. The tension over Rebecca's desire to run Waters Meeting and the outdated understandings of women's "place" in rural life clearly colours the romantic elements and their progression towards freedom.

The relationship between the heroine and her dogs plays a key role in both her romance, her construction as a rural heroine and the novel's wider meditation on the ethical treatment of others. I now wish to read the novel through Regis's elements of romance to determine the role her "crew" of dogs play in the progression towards freedom and the deeper critique of rural gender inequality. Regis's first romantic element, the "society defined", indicates the "flawed", "incomplete", "superannuated" or "corrupt" attributes of the context in which the courtship occurs (Regis 31). The relationship between humans and dogs symbolically assists in defining this society, one dominated by hegemonic masculinity. In the novel's first chapter, dogs establish a binary between Rebecca and her father, Harry. Rebecca is introduced as she musters a herd of sheep with her "little kelpie", Mossy (3). To manoeuvre Mossy, Rebecca "whistled to her dog" and told her to "go way back" (3) emphasising an economy in communication and the exertion of little effort to have the dog perform the required tasks almost "motionless" (3). Even a reader with little first-hand experience of kelpies will realise this relationship between owner and working dog results from extensive training and a strong mutual rapport. Just as Rebecca is about to secure the sheep in a pen, this scene is broken by an "outburst of barking and the rush of hooves raising dust" (5). Her father rushes to control "[h]is crew of motley dogs [who] were working in a pack, singling out a sheep and chasing it to the fence, biting as they went" (5). Rebecca's Mossy struggles to keep the sheep together while Harry's dogs cause "chaos" (5). Harry violently picks up one of his dogs by the collar to discipline him where, "The young pup's eyes were fixed on the sheep and his tongue lolled to the side of his mouth as he panted. So keen to work, Mardy was oblivious to the fact he was being choked" (5). This action indicates Harry's excessive force alongside the dog's inadequate training; the dog is so obsessed with tormenting the sheep it is ignorant of being strangled. These initial human-dog relationships position readers to connect with Rebecca who is clearly more capable and knowledgeable in this context and disidentify with Harry. This initial scene can be read through Michel Foucault's understanding of governance in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* where he links "taking care of oneself" to the "exercise of power" where, "One cannot govern others, one cannot govern others well, one cannot transform one's privileges into political action on others, in rational action, if one is not concerned about oneself" (Foucault 36). Harry's inability to control his dogs or his own

actions suggests both an inadequate level of self-care and self-knowledge while implying his inability to govern or run the farm effectively.

The narrative further demonstrates the “flawed” and “corrupt” aspects of this society through the dynamics of human-dog and human-human interactions. The scene with the dogs foreshadows a heated argument between Harry and Rebecca where she expresses her wish to devote herself to sorting out the “mess” of the farm, a mess created by Harry’s mismanagement. Flashbacks from Rebecca’s point of view reveal that she “had been her grandfather’s girl” (9) where he had taught her about “the world around her, about the animals and the trees and how to find a beast and how to work a dog” (9). The memory contrasts her relationships with her father and grandfather where she remembers Harry as “never...being there” (9) or teaching her farming practices. She traces his withdrawal of love to her “passion and a connection with the land that he never seemed to grasp even after years of farming” (10). During her childhood years she escaped into the “world of her dogs”:

She trained them, loved them, talked to them, studied them. She peered deep into their brown eyes and reached their souls. Her dogs were a way of escaping her father’s seething undercurrent of anger and his inability to show her love” (10-11).

This play on presence and absence in her relationships with male authority figures and the learning of essential knowledge of the land and dogs assists in positioning the reader’s sympathies while emphasising society’s flaws, many of which appear to stem from historically entrenched gender inequality represented through isolated characters like Harry. Harry immediately rejects Rebecca’s offer to help restore the land telling her there is “no future in [farming]” (6). To add insult to injury, he cruelly tells her he never wanted her as a child, particularly as a girl child, and threatens to shoot her “wretched” (10) dogs unless she immediately leaves. Rebecca warns him that he risks “losing the lot” (10).[10] Harry’s threat of violence against her dogs can be read as a metaphor for the status of women in this flawed society. Erica Fudge, in her essay on the construction of a history of animals, links discussions of animal rights to those of women’s rights. She argues that women who think about animal welfare can be seen as considering “their own degraded places in society [where] the dog is a representation of the human; it is not, paradoxically, a dog” (7). Fudge’s observation applies to *Jillaroo* in that while laws prevent Harry physically hurting Rebecca, the close relationship she has with her prized dogs, where they perform as if almost a part or extension of her, means that the threat to the dogs is literally a threat to her. She has no choice but to pack her swag, clip her three dogs to her ute and leave in a self-imposed exile. These initial scenes indicate society’s problems that Rebecca faces locally as well as the context’s larger structural inequalities, mainly in terms of gender inequality.

Although Rebecca’s dogs are pivotal in constructing the problems of the society, they play a more subdued role in her romantic relationship with Charlie Lewis. Once Rebecca departs from Waters Meeting, her trusty dogs help her find work as a jillaroo and she later meets Charlie. It is important to note that dogs are absent from the initial scene where Charlie and Rebecca meet. *Jillaroo*’s meeting, attraction and declaration scenes extract Rebecca and Charlie from their daily lives through Regis’s optional romantic

element, the wedding, dance or fete. This optional element offers celebration, “inclusion” and community engagement (Regis 38) removing heroines from society’s normal constraints. Rebecca and Charlie meet on a rare weekend away from their families and farms at the “B and S Ball” a notoriously fun, and sometimes feral, event.[11] They meet late that evening after Rebecca has consumed numerous drinks. She stumbles across a naked Charlie Lewis who is performing a daring, drunken stunt. The narrator describes the meeting from Rebecca’s viewpoint:

Bec looked up and saw in a halo of light against the night sky a naked young man. He was wearing a red plastic bucket on his head and standing on top of the guttering. The light cast shadows over his tall, muscled frame...If Sal had been there, Bec thought, she would’ve said out loud, ‘He’s got a big wanger!’ ...She...felt a tingle of desire run through her. He had a damn good body (80).

Charlie then launches himself from the roof in a shopping trolley, crashing onto the floor at Rebecca’s feet, announcing, “I think I love you” (81) before introducing himself. Charlie’s friends carry him away into the night before he and Rebecca can speak properly. In this single scene, Rebecca and Charlie meet, express their instant mutual attraction as “love at first sight” and Charlie drunkenly declares his love. The next day they have a fleeting river kiss, further deepening their attraction. The intense combination of these three romantic elements (meeting, attraction and declaration) fast-tracks their relationship before they must return to their normal lives. The absence of Rebecca’s dogs in this scene restricts the focus to the couple only, allowing Rebecca to experience her attraction to Charlie alone, untainted by any response from her dogs.

While her dogs are absent from the initial meeting scene, they play a much greater role in the relationship’s development. The narrator reinforces the couple’s mutual attraction once they separate after the B and S ball; they face a geographical barrier as Rebecca returns to jillarooing on Blue Plains station and Charlie to his family’s farm. Despite the initial attraction’s intensity, progress towards a longer term relationship is slow and complicated. Occasionally the third person narrative point of view reveals Rebecca’s fantasies where she “dreamed of the river kiss” (92), “smiled as she thought of Charlie, up there in a big John Deere [tractor]. Naked” (92) or how Charlie remembers Rebecca as a “stunner” (104). Further confirmation of their attraction occurs when Rebecca believes herself to be “in *lerv*” (original emphasis 160) while Charlie fantasises “about a girl with blonde hair, the bluest of eyes and a cheeky grin” (209). The similarity of their fantasies portrays their attraction as mutual and companionate. Rebecca’s work on Blue Plains sees her travelling to agricultural shows to exhibit pedigree rams. These trips enable Rebecca to enter her young kelpie “Dags” in dog trials. Such competitions involve the dog being instructed by its owner via voice and body language to herd sheep into a pen. According to kelpie specialist Tony Parsons, dog trialling requires a dog with “keenness tempered with pliability [and] the ability to accept a high degree of discipline while still retaining the desire to work” (Parsons 74-75). Similar to the novel’s first scene where Rebecca and her dog Mossy herd the sheep, Rebecca’s participation in the dog trials demonstrates the dog’s skill under instruction. Although she enters many dog trials, Rebecca’s first trophy win happens the day Charlie Lewis visits the same show. Charlie’s

congratulatory comments to Rebecca reinforce their mutual attraction as they gush over meeting each other at the ball while simultaneously enabling Dags to meet and respond to Charlie. Although Rebecca scoffs at winning a trophy, saying it will “make a good dunny-roll holder” (154), Dags “relishes the attention” from Charlie who congratulates him and scratches his ears, leading the dog to “lean...his body against Charlie’s leg, wagging his tail” (155). Rebecca confirms the dog’s instinct and her own attraction to Charlie by saying, “He likes you. He only does that to people he trusts” (155). Charlie’s enthusiastic interaction with Dags serves as a foil to Harry’s earlier treatment of dogs at Waters Meeting. Although this encounter between Rebecca and Charlie is brief, it indicates his suitability as a hero and the hope they may have more time together in the future. Because dogs are so important in Rebecca’s life, it is crucial that her lover have a sympathetic and non-violent relationship to them also.

As Rebecca and Charlie’s relationship develops, dogs play a more central role in its progress. Rebecca reveals she will soon depart from Blue Plains to attend agricultural college. She manages to arrange for her dogs to have pens at the college and rents a house with her friends where she is also allowed to keep the dogs. While geographical separation has hindered their relationship, Charlie conspires to attend the college and shows up at a party to usher in the new semester, much to Rebecca’s delight. After they dance at the party, Rebecca introduces Charlie to her dogs, an internal monologue revealing to the reader in a moment of youthful exuberance, “If Dags reacted the same way as last time to him, she knew he was a good person, and in this drunken moment she’d give her whole soul to him” (241). While Dags’ response to Charlie is only implied, Rebecca’s attraction to Charlie continues through the party, implying the dogs approve of her match. Charlie reveals to Rebecca that his decision to study at the college was purposely to be with her and planned so his graduation would coincide with hers. The night ends with Rebecca offering to show Charlie her “train set” (246) that she happens to keep in her bedroom, a euphemism for “let’s go to bed”. They do not consummate their attraction that night due to their drunkenness however the next morning when they wake up feeling “crook as a dog” (247) they begin to make love only to be interrupted by Rebecca’s roommate letting her dogs into the room playfully stating, “Thought you guys might like to do it doggy style” (248). The interruption enables Rebecca to again introduce Charlie to her “crew” of dogs and see their response, again a favourable one. Rebecca suggests that they go out to “grab some grease to fix the hangovers and take the dogs out to the river” (248). There they frolic in the water, the dogs “[swimming] in circles about them” and then they properly consummate their attraction on the river bank. The dog’s ongoing involvement in these key romantic scenes creates a tension because at times they delay the relationship’s progression and in others, they are actively involved in its progression. Nevertheless, the dogs’ positive engagement with Charlie suggests he is a suitable hero for *Jillaroo’s* heroine.

Dogs become a point of conflict and a comfort as new barriers emerge to disrupt Rebecca and Charlie’s union. Although they are together mid-way through the novel, of course Rebecca still has not fulfilled her quest to assume control of Waters Meeting from Harry, start the much needed restoration and exert an ethical influence over characters, such as her father, to change their behaviour for the better. Charlie and Rebecca’s fairly carefree time at college ushers in a period when internal and external barriers emerge that stymie their romance. When college finishes, they have no home of their own signifying an external barrier to their relationship. Although Rebecca now has the experience and

knowledge to restore Waters Meeting, her father still blocks her return. With no other choice, she, Charlie and her dogs move to the Lewis cropping farm. Rebecca is horrified to discover it is flat, animalless, riverless and treeless (275) with its “manmade and sinister” artificial waterways (340). There the romantic relationship frays under the watchful, disapproving gaze of Charlie’s parents. Charlie’s father refuses to employ Rebecca, believing similarly to her own father than she should be a homemaker or work off-farm in a pink-collar job. As well, Charlie refuses to confront his parents about how he really feels living and working on the farm. His inability to speak his mind becomes his own internal barrier signifying that he is not ready to love the independently minded Rebecca. Charlie also promises to build Rebecca a proper kennel and run for her dogs so she does not have to keep them tied up all day in the skillion shed (328). However, he never makes the time, putting the crops and machines first (328). During the time on the Lewis farm, Charlie and Rebecca fight regularly, including about Charlie’s inability to build the dogs a serious home or obtain sheep for Rebecca to practice trialling. During this difficult time, her dogs become a confidante (310) and a comfort, Dags, “push[ing] a wet nose under her hand” (311). Rebecca’s internal barrier becomes her need to be honest about her relationship with Charlie and recognise she loves the confident Charlie she kissed in the river not the muted man incapable of speaking up around his family. Wider barriers in Rebecca’s family and at Waters Meeting also build against the relationship. Until they are resolved, Rebecca cannot be free, the couple cannot be together, the society cannot be reformed and the reader cannot feel the relief of resolution.

The internal and external barriers eventually accumulate in “the point of ritual death,” which Regis defines as “the moment...when the union between the heroine and hero, the hoped-for resolution, seems absolutely impossible” (Regis 35). This element includes mainly figurative or symbolic death, but can also show real death (Regis 35). Because dogs provide loyal companionship and reliable working partners to numerous characters in *Jillaroo*, they are also present in the ritual death scene. Symbolic and actual deaths build from the beginning of the novel including the failed marriage of Rebecca’s parents Harry and Frankie, Rebecca’s exile from her home and the slow creep of drought and depression that envelops Waters Meeting. The farm’s ongoing failure and increasingly strained family relationships see Rebecca’s brother Mick and his wife Trudy also flee the property. Like Rebecca and Frankie before them, Mick and Trudy move to the suburbs away from the “now-stooping” (231) Harry. The day they leave, Harry projects his anger physically, verbally and emotionally onto Tom (Rebecca’s brother), the only human member of the Saunders family left on the farm. Harry’s wrath leads Tom to move from the family homestead with his horse and dog Bessie to the farm’s remote mountain hut. Rebecca only has sparse communication with Tom at this time, telling him she has been “dog-sick worried about you” (256) in one message. The sense of death intensifies as Harry turns to alcohol and suffers depression that “settle[d] over [him] like a black cloud” (254). The family’s departure and Harry’s alcoholism sees Tom unable to leave “frozen with fear, a deep fear of the outside world” (254). Tom journeys from hut to farmhouse leaving food for Harry, feeding the remaining animals and paying the bills; the narrator observes that the farm, “now in the dry, [...] looked barren and heartless” (253). When Tom attends his mother’s city wedding, another optional romantic element according to Regis, which should be a happy occasion, Rebecca observes, “how his shoulders sloped downwards and

his clothes hung from his skinny frame" (278). Drunkenly, Tom creates a scene, telling Rebecca:

The waters haven't met in over a year—both rivers have run dry! There's no stock left, 'scept for Hank and your lonely old horse, and Dad's shot all the dogs. Didn't even bury the bastards. Just left them on the end of the chain to rot (281).

In Tom's desperate words, readers sense the encirclement of death around and through the farm, grimly warning of the ritual death scene. Tom's words reveal the life ebbing from the river juxtaposed with the more disturbing images of "starving stock", the animals bearing the burden of human and natural folly. The dangerous state of Harry's now alcohol-addled mind is eclipsed by the murder of his dogs that is made worse by their bodily desecration in still being chained in death and denied even a hasty burial. Again, dogs become literal and figurative victims of Harry's extreme actions and the ill-health of his heart. Figuratively their deaths symbolise the deeper social and ecological devastation at Waters Meeting and the quickening rush towards the hopeless point where resolution, harmony and restoration seem impossible. While the reader is positioned to think that Harry's ignorant crimes against the land, animals and people warrant a sentence of his own narrative death, the invocation of death alongside deep suffering instead anticipates Tom's suicide.

While Regis argues that symbolic or literal representations of death are essential to romance, *Jillaroo's* engagement with existential realities including real death is perhaps best explained by the rural setting where death is a reality of daily life. Christoph Armbruster notes how some Australian literature turns to the morbid realities of contemporary rural life linked to existential realities such as death, despair, meaninglessness, denial of agency and belonging (Armbruster 128-150). Armbruster's comments particularly resonate with Tom and Harry's situation on Waters Meeting. Powerless to stop the farm's deterioration, his father's alcoholism and his own mental decline, Tom leaves groceries on his father's car bonnet and scrawls a message in "red raddle" (287): "Will this make you see, dad?" (287) before hanging himself as one might hang a meat carcass. Tom's dog Bessie alerts Harry to Tom's suicide by first whining at the homestead's back door, "leap[ing] over the gate [and] disappearing into the garage" (286). Bessie then sits and barks once at Harry. He follows the dog, noticing that Tom has left him a box of groceries, a last desperate gesture of care towards his father, and hung a side of lamb from the beams. Criticising Tom in a drunken slur for not using the "killing shed" (287) for the lamb carcass, Harry's closer inspection reveals it is not a side of lamb, but Tom's body. Harry cannot contain his shock and fear of the situation, screaming and fleeing the garage into the house. Yet, it is Tom's loyal animal companions that stay with him even in death; Bessie sits at Tom's feet and his horse Hank strolls into the garage then also rests near the body. While Harry cannot fathom the immediate horrors of Tom's death, Bessie and Hank stay nearby, mourning in their own animalistic way, unperturbed by the inert body. Tom's death is the extreme point of ritual death where a happy ending is jeopardised because although Rebecca is strong, she, like most romance heroines, as Regis suggests, cannot undo real death (Regis 35-36). Indeed, Rebecca's grief creates uncertainty that she can ever be free to complete her quest or establish a permanent relationship with Charlie.

While Tom's death sends Rebecca into a deep depression initially, it also ignites a chain of recognitions towards the romantic resolution. Although Regis argues that heroines

are central to recognition scenes (Regis 36-37) in *Jillaroo* Harry begins the series of recognitions that ultimately lead to the novel's conclusion. Tom's death acts as a circuit breaker for Harry to transform himself and his world view. He swears off alcohol and starts restoring the farm (315), seeking help from Landcare to better manage the river vegetation and reaches out to his neighbours to sell him hay for the cattle (335) thereby indicating a changed attitude to the environment, the animals in his care and the people around him. He even recognises Rebecca for who she really is: someone capable of healing the farm and decides to ask her home. However, before he has a chance to ask her, he loses an arm in a machinery accident, a symbolic castration. His accident provides the chance to speak to her when she visits him in hospital. Harry apologises and Rebecca decides to return to Waters Meeting. Harry's accident and changed attitude is perfectly timed for Rebecca who despises the Lewis farm and longs for the "weight of the mountains" at Waters Meeting (340). When she and Charlie arrive back at Waters Meeting, the years of neglect are immediately apparent. From Rebecca's perspective the whole farm appears to have just "given up" (379) however she is determined to stay and put her new experience and knowledge into action. Charlie immediately opposes the idea, pessimistically telling her "It'll take a lifetime to fix this mess" (393). Rebecca accuses Charlie of being a "mummy's boy" and he dismisses the idea of helping her because he refuses to "drop everything [he has] at home" (395). Rebecca responds, "Charlie, you don't have *anything* at home. Your dad controls it all and your mum controls you!" (Original emphasis 395). Rebecca defends her decision to stay at Waters Meeting and never leave again (396) arguing:

You're just like all the other bastards! You think I don't have a right to work the land, but because you're a man, you do! You're entitled to your bit of flat, chemical-and-salt-infected dirt, but I'm not entitled to my rundown, destocked bit of mountain country. Don't you stand there and tell me there's nothing here for me. I've got a chance to fight for this place...I'm entitled to it! (396).

Rebecca's determination to stay at Waters Meeting is threatened by Charlie who suggests she cannot restore the farm singlehandedly and accuses her of choosing her father and farm over him. In response he again declares his love for her and his intention to ask her to marry him; yet the cost of his love is that he wants them to live on the Lewis farm. Of course, Rebecca rejects his proposal which subsequently causes Charlie's departure from Waters Meeting and their relationship to momentarily end, an elongation of the ritual death element. Her dogs again provide comfort, "lick[ing] her tear-stained face" (397) in her moment of devastated rage. Furious at the situation she decides, "like a madwoman" (398) to lop the huge pines that surround the Waters Meeting homestead. The dogs, normally co-conspirators in her work endeavours, "slunk away and sat at the back door looking fearful" (398). The romance and happy ending are again jeopardised, however at least Rebecca and her crew of dogs have returned home.

The novel delays the full romantic resolution by first emphasising Rebecca's quest to restore the farm. Although she has some help from her family, Rebecca exerts most of the effort needed to restore the farm, at times feeling "the debt to the bank...would crush her" (439) until eventually she turns the farm's debt into profit. Although her financial luck starts to turn, to be a romance, the narrative must resolve her tumultuous relationship with

Charlie in the form of a “betrothal.” As Rebecca repairs the farm through sustainable management practices and organic methods, the point of view remains with her revealing her and Charlie’s mutual longing for each other as letters from Charlie “slowed to a...trickle and then suddenly stopped” (440). Rebecca assumes he has met someone else (440). To maintain Waters Meeting’s success, her rural advisor urges her to hire an irrigation and plant-cropping manager to grow feed for her stock and enable her to take time to rest. Coincidentally, Charlie has become desperate to leave his family farm, yearning for Rebecca and “even miss[ing] her dogs” (461). He sees an article about Rebecca in a glossy magazine, complete with pictures of her and her dogs. After absorbing the article and pictures recounting her successes, he notices an advertisement for the job at Waters Meeting. When he applies for the job, it creates the opportunity for a romantic reunion. The possibility of working alongside Rebecca in a cropping and irrigation role creates the recognition that Charlie can equally contribute to life at Waters Meeting.

The presence of animals is sustained into the final idyllic images of the novel. In the last chapter, sometime later, Rebecca and Charlie are swimming in the Rebecca River, playing and splashing together with their horses. They ride out of the water into the paddock with its new irrigator and lucerne crop. Charlie turns the irrigator on and the novel concludes with the image of them together, “[t]hen Rebecca pulled Charlie down into a soft forest of sweet smelling lucerne that grew at the foot of the mountains. Waters Meeting. Their place” (468). While dogs are not mentioned in this final chapter, their unwavering presence throughout the novel leads readers to assume their involvement in the final scene. Their absence may indicate, like Rebecca and Charlie’s original meeting, the sense that a focus on the couple only is needed in this final scene. Although Rebecca and Charlie do not marry, readers are positioned to believe they have an enduring love, providing the certainties of resolution.[12] What is important in this final chapter is the ethical positioning of the characters and reader. Through the successful completion of her quest and her “betrothal”, the novel endorses certain kinds of relationships between humans, animals and the environment, particularly those that are non-violent, organic and companionate. The endorsement of such values and the positioning of the reader to identify with the heroine who displays them, thereby imparts a powerful lesson about the ethical treatment of others.

Gender, Dogs and “The Health of Man’s Heart”

While dogs are integral to Rebecca and Charlie’s romantic story, the relationship between dogs and the heroine plays an important part in allowing her to navigate the patriarchal rural context and positioning the reader sympathies. Although Rebecca has stereotypical feminine qualities including her prettiness and care towards others, she has characteristics traditionally associated with men and masculinity that assist her entry and successful navigation of spaces stereotypically regarded as for men only. I argue that Rebecca exemplifies the characteristics of Sherri Inness’s ‘tough’ woman who express their toughness in four main ways: body, action, attitude and authority (Inness). Rebecca’s dogs work in conjunction with her toughness enabling her to enter male spaces and usurp male

authority. Her toughness also complicates her gender construction, subsequently challenging stereotypes about what rural women can do and where they can go.

Before I describe how Rebecca's toughness, with the help of her working dogs, enables her to disrupt the patriarchal spaces in the setting, it is worth outlining Sherrie Inness's theory of tough women and girls. In *Tough Girls*, Inness argues that toughness is usually associated with men and masculinity where the historical connection between men and toughness encourages the perception of men as the 'real' heroes and leaders in our culture (Inness 14-15). Popular culture, Inness asserts, that lacks tough heroines continues the stereotypes of what constitutes acceptable feminine and masculine behaviour while leaving stereotypes and domains of male privilege unchallenged (Inness 14-17). As Inness argues:

Because they adopt some characteristics that are coded as masculine in our culture, tough women challenge this division, which is central to how members of society think about gender and the differences, whether real or imaginary between men and women (Inness 15).

While Inness resists confining toughness to a single definition, she suggests that women express toughness through the body, attitude, action and authority. In *Jillaroo*, Rebecca's toughness, helped by her relationship with her dogs, can be read in each of these characteristics thereby seeing her transgress gender stereotypes.

The narrative demonstrates Rebecca's toughness via descriptions of what her body looks like, what it does and where it goes. According to Inness, the *body* houses obvious signs of toughness via muscles or athleticism. Muscles, as Inness suggests, are symbolic of "overcoming even the most overwhelming odds" and "physical and mental discipline" (Inness 24). Rebecca shows her toughness through her *body* and her muscles where hard and unforgiving station work has given her "golden brown" (71) arms, shoulders with "lean muscles" (72) and "cracked" dirt-encrusted skin. Her muscles and calluses testify to her ability to undertake dirty physical work such as mustering sheep, chainsaw hulking trees or lifting heavy mineral blocks.[13] Indeed, the first scene of the novel, mustering sheep, demonstrates her ability to economically use her body to direct the working dog whereas other moments show her working strenuously alongside men. Rebecca's muscularity and physical ability invite the reader's trust that she can surmount any obstacles including those to her romance and her quest to restore the farm.

Rebecca's dogs enable her to demonstrate toughness especially in her *actions* and *attitude*. Inness suggests that tough women show their intelligence through what they do, particularly using their judgement to know when and how to act and when to wait (Inness 26). In relation to attitude, Rebecca, is similar to tough women who, as Inness describes, "display little or no fear, even in the most dangerous circumstances; if she does show fear, it must not stop her from acting" (Inness 25). Inness' tough woman also "appear[s] competent and in control" (Inness 25). Rebecca's tough actions and attitude are striking when she retreats from Waters Meeting after fighting with her father. She drives northwest and after three days, with only fifty dollars in the bank, encounters a stock sale knowing it is her best chance of finding work. She observes men struggling to move a herd of sheep with a tired dog. Although she knows they are thinking how young and female she is (46), she offers to use her own dog to help move their mob. The men are wary, saying

that if her dog bites any sheep, she must pay for it, telling her “I hope you’ve got some cash on you” (46). A true tough heroine, Rebecca coolly replies, “Well. Actually I don’t...I’m flat broke, unemployed and homeless...but at least I know my dog won’t bite” (46). Confident in her ability and in her dog, she easily moves the sheep and is later offered a job as a jillaroo on Blue Plains Station. Even in the thick of a “male” space and under enormous pressure, she remains level headed and fearless, placing trust in herself and her dog.

Rebecca demonstrates her toughness in action and attitude by also not acting in particular situations. Inness emphasises that tough women must know when to act, when to wait and when reflection is required before acting (Inness 26). Rebecca shows her tough action and attitude when she rejects her father’s farming methods including questioning his purchase of a reproductively challenged ram (8), pitying his untrained dogs and declaring her desire to help run Waters Meeting (6). Although she argues with her father, Rebecca realises the futility of confronting a man prone to physical and emotional violence. She also knows the time is not right for her to assume control of the farm. Instead, she chooses to retreat from the farm to gain knowledge and skills so when the right time comes, she is ready. For Inness in *Tough Girls* and Gifford in *Pastoral*, not acting or retreating have positive implications; however, Diane Negra criticises the tendency towards the narrative trope of “retreatism” in postfeminist media texts, where heroines return to their home towns to fulfil stereotypical feminine roles (Negra). In *Jillaroo*, Rebecca retreats away from her home and the stereotypical expectations of women in the rural context. Her retreat demonstrates that there are different kinds of retreat, not just the postfeminist kind; for the tough woman she retreats because of bad timing or the need to prepare properly for the task ahead. Rebecca also retreats because of her father’s threat to murder her dogs. Later when Harry loses his arm and asks her to return, his threat of violence has dissolved and she has the experience and knowledge to ensure the farm’s restoration and financial success. Rebecca’s journey back to Waters Meeting therefore shifts her initial retreat to a “return” (Gifford) in turn demonstrating her good judgement.

Rebecca constantly demonstrates the fourth main characteristic of tough women, *authority*, particularly with the help of her dogs. Inness, quoting Richard Sennett, argues that authority relates to qualities such as “assurance, superior judgement, the ability to impose discipline, the capacity to inspire fear” (Sennett as quoted in Inness 26). Inness further states, “[t]he tough woman must have authority because she often acts as a leader, and a leader with no authority is not capable of leading, especially in times of great stress” (Inness 26). Rebecca develops and maintains her authority around men by being capable in ways they understand and by performing tasks they respect. For example on Blue Plains Station, she works as hard, if not harder, than the jackaroos, which goes against the expectation of women in this context. During her time on Blue Plains, readers learn about the reluctance to hire women in this traditionally male dominated context. Bob, the station manager, had reservations about hiring Rebecca because he worried about her romantic notions of rural life, however she gradually earns respect. She was “expected to do everything Dave [her roommate] did. From lifting heavy mineral lick-blocks for the sheep onto the ute, to banging steel droppers into the rocky ground” (72). The narrator also explains that Rebecca “Never once [leant] on a broom. The shearers noticed this and liked her for it” (92). Her ability to match the strength and tasks of the men, as well as the advantage her well trained dogs provide in this context, garners authority and respect. On

at least two occasions, Rebecca “talks dogs” (95, 327) with men in contexts usually dominated by men and masculinity. Through such discussions, she demonstrates her authority on dog breeding and training, one based on human-canine partnerships and communion, and transmits that knowledge to men. These scenes are invested with hope that her gentle but disciplined approach to dog training will reach a greater audience and the violent treatment of dogs, such as that enacted by Harry, will become a thing of the past. The examples of Rebecca’s toughness, helped by her canine off-siders, disrupt gender certainty and the binaries traditionally associated with masculinity and femininity. Her character shows that gender is not determined by sex; indeed women can have stereotypically masculine characteristics such as those associated with toughness.

While Rebecca’s toughness is enhanced by her partnership with her dogs, ironically her femininity is also addressed in conjunction with her interest in dogs. Like her toughness, which disrupts spaces traditionally dominated by men, symbolically her dogs are repeatedly called upon to disrupt her femininity. For example, in preparation for the B and S ball, Rebecca engages in a rare evening of feminine adornment including painting her nails and donning a “short red dress” (72). The narrator pre-empts all this by stating that, “Rebecca wasn’t the kind of girl who usually had time to paint her nails, or would even bother. But she had the feeling tonight would be special” (63). Even her male room mate Dave notices her effort, making fun of her nail polish, suggesting, “You’re keen to get a bit, judging by those nails...You planning on breaking the drought tonight?” (71). These markers of femininity are disturbed by Rebecca completing her station chores, an allusion to the fairytale *Cinderella*. Rebecca’s chores include riding a four-wheel bike to kill a sheep, give offal to the pigs then feed her dogs, all of which must be completed before she departs for the ball. The narrative sustains the feminine symbolism of nail polish yet juxtaposes it against the reality of Rebecca’s jillaroo work and her interest in cattle dog training:

Bec’s nails looked so out of place on the handlebars...They reminded her of the cover of a Jackie Collins novel, not that she’d ever bothered to read one [preferring] kelpie training manuals and the Department of Agriculture’s guide to building better sheep yards (67).

The narrative interplay between Rebecca’s dressing up with her Jackie Collins nails, her completion of the farm jobs and the introspective revelation that she prefers reading about dog training over popular women’s fiction together destabilise gender certainty, showing the fluidity of gender as she moves in and out of stereotypical and non-stereotypical gender performances.[14] Just as the narrative establishes one gender stereotype, such as the use of nail polish, it is undercut by the quick shift to the reality of farm life. In another related example, when Rebecca appears in her short red dress, Dave wolf whistles (72). This example reinforces Rebecca’s ability to “dress up” and cater to the male gaze. However, the narrator does not leave this image unchallenged, undercutting her attractiveness by having Rebecca respond in a “blokey way” by saying, “Cheers, buddy,” as she opens a can of beer to drink (72). Both her words and action are traditionally associated with men. In another scene Rebecca travels to the city to attend her mother’s wedding and decides to stop into a town to shop for an outfit to wear to the ceremony. The narrative reveals her “looking heartlessly for a dress...mov[ing] amongst the shoppers as though she wasn’t there at all” (129). The shop assistant assumes she is a shoplifter due to her disinterest; however

Rebecca has two issues here. Firstly, the omniscient narrator states, “she hated shopping” (129) and secondly, she is distracted by her worry for her “good-looking” dogs chained up on the back of her ute: “they could be stolen easily” (129). Through the fluid narrative movement between gender stereotypes in narrative moments such as these, Rebecca’s character, “reveal[s] the artificiality of femininity as the “normal” state of women” (Inness 21). Indeed, her interest in dog training and breeding, stereotypically the domain of men, and her disinterest in stereotypically feminine rituals such as shopping, reinforces the fluidity and unfixed movement of gender attributes.

Rebecca’s gender qualities challenge stereotypical understandings of what women can do because she enters traditional “male” spaces and engages in processes and practices normally associated with dominant hegemonic masculinities (Alston “Gender Perspectives in Australian Rural Community Life” 141). While the fact she is a woman makes men initially suspicious of her presence, Rebecca’s toughness enables her to enter sites typically dominated by men as their equal such as livestock saleyards, pubs, and farm organisations. According to Alston (2005) and Campbell (2000), these are spaces where knowledge is constructed, particular truths “become privileged” and in turn “ensur[es] that a male view of the world dominates” (Alston “Gender Perspectives in Australian Rural Community Life” 143). Alston however argues that the production of hegemonic masculinity is “constantly open to challenge and is a site for struggle” (Alston “Gender Perspectives in Australian Rural Community Life” 144). Rebecca’s complex gender construction, particularly her fluid appropriation of masculine and feminine characteristics depending on the situation, shows that gender is unfixed. As well Rebecca shows that these sites as domains of male hegemony are in themselves constructions that can be resisted, challenged and changed. Indeed the partnership between Rebecca and her kelpies enables her not just to enter sites like stockyards, but to remain there and demonstrate her ethical behaviour towards animals as well as her superior skills and knowledge. The representation of a heroine capable of entering these locations and performing equally, in some cases better than men, challenges the conventional understanding of women in these contexts but also offers the hope that her treatment and knowledge of working dogs as well as her adherence to sustainable and organic farming will inspire or motivate others.

The relationship between Rebecca and her kelpies, a sign of impressive “interspecies competence” (Fudge 11) clearly mediates any reading of her as a romantic and tough heroine. However, Rebecca also plays a role in the positive development of human-animal relationships in other characters. Dogs in *Jillaroo* become a symbolic mechanism for assessing the “health of a man’s heart” as Kant suggests. Indeed, Charlie has a good-natured relationship with her dogs and they approve of him as a romantic suitor to their owner. Harry however has a more complicated relationship with animals where he clearly enacts his vitriol on his untrained dogs for much of the novel. While I have outlined these violent incidents already, part of the novel’s romantic resolution is another of Regis’s romantic elements, the optional element of the “bad converted”. Regis describes this as “a scene or scenes [where] one or more opponents of the marriage [is] converted to an acceptance of it and incorporated into the society formed by the union at the end of the novel” (Regis 39). After Tom’s death and Harry’s accident, Rebecca is invited to return to Waters Meeting enabling her to reunite with her land and later with Charlie. More importantly, Tom’s suicide causes Harry to change so much that he tirelessly helps Rebecca on the farm, despite his disability, and they begin to build their father-daughter

relationship from scratch. The indicator of Harry's ultimate transformation is his request to buy a puppy from Rebecca saying, "if I'm going to be any use to you with one arm, I'd better learn how to work one of your fancy dogs...I'd be better off doing [work] the quiet way. Horse and dog" (434). Rebecca's response is that Harry should start by reading a Tony Parsons kelpie training manual, saying, "Who said you couldn't teach an old dog new tricks?" (434) Once he starts to train the puppy, Cloe, the narrator describes how Rebecca "marvell[ed] at how much her father had changed...[having] at last found a companion and some compassion for working dogs" (442). Harry's behavioural and attitudinal transformation becomes most obvious in reading *Jillaroo* through Regis's elements of romance with a focus on the symbolic value of dogs within rural culture. Harry's new foray into dog training is the ultimate sign of his now positive participation in the new community created as a result of Rebecca's successful quest and her restored relationship with Charlie. Harry's transformation and shift in world view adds to the reader's enjoyment of this novel's ending suggesting that the romance plot and the ethics plot are intertwined.

Conclusion

In Regis's defence of the romance novel, she emphasises the way that heroines and heroes overcome impediments to their relationship through the 'barriers' and point of ritual death. In overcoming the barriers and ritual death, once the heroine is free, "she chooses the hero" (Regis 16). Regis names the freedom of heroines as "two great liberations" (Regis 15) where surmounting barriers enables them to unite with their hero and through "cheat[ing] ritual death...[she] is freed to live" (Regis 15). In *Jillaroo*, Rebecca prevails against the literal and symbolic renderings of death including the death of her brother Tom, the disintegration of her relationship with Charlie and the decline in the land due to drought and mismanagement by her father. Choosing to be with Charlie is therefore one aspect of Rebecca's freedom as the narrative concludes; having survived everything else, she is now "free" to "choose her hero" and can then enjoy her love with Charlie. However, her freedom also springs from overcoming the external family barriers, such as Harry not allowing her to run the farm, and the wider traditional expectations of rural women that attempt to block her quest to acquire experience and knowledge. In contesting the expectations of women in rural culture by entering 'men's spaces' and succeeding in tasks they usually perform with the help of her kelpies, Rebecca challenges the gender inequality around her and models ethical non-violent behaviour towards others (humans, animals and the environment). Subsequently, she is freed (even if only momentarily) to run her farm and subsequently the reader "rejoices." The treatment of animals, especially dogs in this novel, can be read as a metaphor for the treatment of women, as Erica Fudge states, we can "learn new things about the humans if we look at the animals" (Fudge 8). While it is no secret in contemporary sociological research that significant gender issues shape life in rural Australia, *Jillaroo* assists in communicating those issues to a wider audience and providing fictional role models for rural women.

Dogs play a vital role at various textual levels of *Jillaroo*. While references to dog phrases such as "deserting bitch" (282), "been on my tail" (450) and "dog eared" (459) frequently appear in this novel maintaining the presence of dogs even when they are not

active participants in a scene, it is through their active participation that the most important ideas of communion between humans, dogs and ultimately non-human life are realised. In particular, Rebecca's depiction as a breeder and trainer of working kelpies is unique in representing a woman working with dogs in this way. This representation of a human-dog relationship disrupts any dominant discourse that suggests that men are the main dog masters in rural life and reflects Rachael Treasure's own life as a dog breeder and trainer.[15] While romance generally may not need animals, rural romance, with its focus on agriculture and farm life, cannot escape the presence of animals, especially those who toil for our food and wares. The representation of those animals and the wider environment can be a touchstone for gender and ecological issues in a time when there is much work to be done in terms of humans ethically engaging with each other, the world and other species.

[1] Margaret Alston argues that "it appears that women's work is being discounted and devalued, and certainly not recorded. Economic historians still appear to see men as the norm and women as the 'other'" (Alston *Women: The Hidden Heart of Rural Australia* 4-6).

[2] In her study of national character in relation to women and rural Australia, Kay Schaffer ascribes this comment (what she suggests is also a 'common refrain') to the title of a short story of acclaimed Australian poet Henry Lawson from his collection *Short Stories and Sketches: 1888-1922* (Schaffer 194).

[3] See Schaffer (1989) and MacKellar (2004) for discussions of representations of women in the bush.

[4] Juliet Flesch in *From Australia with Love: A History of Modern Australian Popular Romance Novels*, discusses a number of rural romances by Lucy Walker published during the 1950s and 1960s featuring women transgressing the gender expectations of the day. They include women who run large properties or work as rouseabouts, shearers and even loggers (Flesch).

[5] An overview of 'chook lit' novels by the Library News journal notes that the works of Lucy Walker published between 1953 and 1977 with their "suntanned, laconic Australians and huge outback stations" were suggestive of an early incarnation of rural romance. See "Chook Lit".

[6] Treasure's five books are *Jillaroo* (2002), *The Stockman* (2004), *The Rouseabout* (2008), *The Cattleman's Daughter* (2009) and *The Farmer's Wife* (2013). Treasure has also written a screen play *Albert's Chook Tractor* for SBS TV, a non-fiction e-book about dog training called *Dog Speak* and a collection of short stories, *The Girl and Ghost-Grey Mare* (2011). She was awarded the title of Tasmanian Rural Woman of the Year in December 2006 which included a \$10,000 bursary that she used to write *Dog Speak* and create a DVD. She has also published *Fifty Bales of Hay*, a collection of rural erotica inspired by the bestselling *Fifty Shades of Grey* novels.

[7] Dogs appear in novels by Janet Evanovich, Jennifer Crusie and Jayne Ann Krentz. Crusie has also co-authored a novel with Anne Stuart and Lani Diane Rich called *Dogs and Goddesses*.

[8] Margaret Alston uses the term "patrilineal inheritance" to describe the practice of sons inheriting farms from their fathers, a practice she describes as "ensur[ing] that farms

are owned and controlled by men.” See Alston, *Women: The Hidden Heart of Rural Australia* 7.

[9] See Alston (1995) for a detailed exploration of the traditional roles of men and women in rural Australia.

[10] This refrain of “losing the lot” in the novel parallels Harry’s futile attempt to retain control. According to Mayer, “losing a farm is more than losing a job. It is a way of life or a vocation...for a farmer all is lost, job, home- and perhaps that of many previous generations livelihood and very sense of self.” (Mayer as cited in Davies.)

[11] The B and S ball (otherwise known as the Bachelor and Spinster’s Ball) is a rural tradition in Australia. Young men and women gather to dance, drink and socialise away from the sometimes stressful life on the land. Such balls are also geared for community benefit as they bring income to host towns. Most importantly, they are an opportunity for young people to meet a potential partner. See “Bachelor and Spinsters Ball” for more information about B and S Balls.

[12] It is important to note that in 2013, Rachael Treasure released *The Farmer’s Wife*, the sequel to *Jillaroo*, its premise “She got her fairytale ending—but life had other plans...” (book cover). *The Farmer’s Wife* sees Rebecca in a hopeless marriage to Charlie and again battling to save her beloved farm from environmental desecration.

[13] Rebecca stands in contrast to other contemporary romance heroines who sometimes experience their body in a way that Michele Hammers has noted in television show *Ally McBeal* as a “barrier to women’s full effective participation in professional spheres.” See Hammers for a more detailed discussion of contemporary television heroines and the body.

[14] See Taylor for a more detailed discussion of gendered performances in relation to femininity and the “discourse of the new.”

[15] Treasure has written a non-fiction e-book about dog training called *Dog Speak*. She was awarded the title of Tasmanian Rural Woman of the Year in December 2006 which included a \$10,000 bursary that she used to write *Dog Speak* and create a DVD (See Brennan).

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