

Amphibious Horses: Beings in the Littoral and Liminal Contact Zones

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Abstract

Horses galloping in littoral zones are represented as embodying wildness, freedom and a prelapsarian quality. Roy Campbell's 'The Horses of the Camargue' includes themes which recur in texts about littoral horses: the romanticising segue between the horses and the environment they inhabit, the ramifications of wild horse and human entanglement and the unavoidable loss of littoral equine 'freedom' when he is trained and/or taken from the sea. Yet Campbell's poem is dedicated to AF Tschiffely who rode two Criollo horses from Buenos Aires to Washington in 1925. If horses, generally, who cross boundaries between the wild and the tame, answer to those parts of ourselves which long for an uncomplicated connection with wildness, they also embody the potential for cross-species relationships based on training. Wolraad Woltemade's horse exemplifies equine trusting of a rider; Edwin Muir's poem, 'The Horses', stresses their desires for human connection.

This paper will then take a serendipitous journey in the company of threshold beings who whinny littorally through childhood adventure stories, *Misty of Chincoteague*, and *Big Black Horse*, and the more sombre tale, *The Homecoming*, to fetch up on the edges of a dam in Tokai where a herd of horses, and one in particular, surpass youthful fable. Horses are luminous beings who exist liminally as well as literally— in personal myth and in grounded, horse-human relationships on the sandy dressage arena as they teach the rider the stability to connect symbol and 'reality', heaven and earth.

Keywords: littoral, liminal, wildness, cross-species relationship, children's horse narratives

Horses are grounded animals, merging with environments which they grace with their presences. As Alice Walker so lyrically puts it, ‘Horses make a landscape look more beautiful’¹. In contact zones, they may, prosaically, perform labour or embody highly sophisticated training, but horses grazing in a field seem redolent of the ineffable. Somehow, they exist beyond the limits we set for them, inhabiting the spaces of the mind and of dream, where we may be lucky enough to encounter them. While I am writing this paper I dream of Galahad, the golden palomino whose life is inextricably entangled with mine: He is, effortlessly, at the bottom of a deep, clear pool, a water-being, entirely at home. He walks along the floor of the pool, hefts himself up glistening white steps, still underwater, and slowly moves from the submarine to the earth, a creature of the unconscious coming to the surface.

The very liminality of this horse gestures more broadly to representations of cross-species relationships with horses. Both dream horse and real horse, he symbolises the mundane and the mythical, the expected and the unexpected, a being I have called up imaginatively, and his own ‘real’ self beyond the dream. While horses have not evolved to have gills and cannot breathe underwater, herds of horses inhabit ecological niches between the sea and the land which extends further to nearby in-between spaces of marshes and quick-sands. Most famously, horses live littorally in the Camargue in France, as well as on Assateague Island near Virginia and Maryland and, more locally, around the Bot River estuary in the Western Cape, very close to Kleinmond where the Literature and Ecology Colloquium was held in 2011². Threshold beings of quasi-legendary status, littoral horses appear in a number of literary texts, both adult and juvenile, as I discuss below. In this essay they will also be accompanied by other horses who have bordered on the amphibious: an unnamed equine hero in the Cape Colony in 1773, a more personal equine hero who galloped through my adolescence and another who, amphibiously, moves between the quotidian and the liminal.

¹ The title of her poetry collection published in 1986 by Harvest.

² See online information provided by Kleinmond Kogelberg Biosphere, Assateague Island National Seashore, and Horses of the Camargue, discussed more fully below.

Riderless horses galloping through the surf symbolise the very essence of untrammelled freedom as their wildness is compounded and metonymised by the waves through which they move fluidly. They are other-worldly, beings from our primal memories before nonhuman animals were reduced in their numbers and in their powers, as nobly and independently they gallop beyond human discipline or taming. Through their beauty and strength they embody a prelapsarian wildness which we, mostly urban beings, may long for. Unlike other animals, such as domestic dogs or cats, who have been domesticated along with humans, horses exist on the thresholds of the wild and the tame, expressing our desires for wildness even as we train them. While some wild horse herds do flourish independently in littoral zones, humans always hover at the edges of the horses' worlds.

Roy Campbell's 'Horses on the Camargue' includes many of the tropes of wild horses and the sea. These horses are elemental, a very part of the ocean '[r]acing spray-curl'd', the Mistral 'whose strong gusts they love to flee' and wild weather as they 'hurl their thunderbolts of snow.' Supernaturally, 'theirs is no earthly breed' for if a Camarguais is rendered a 'slave' but smells the sea air, no matter how far away, he will 'in fury' unseat his rider and gallop to the smell of 'foam' and the sound of 'the native thunder of the deep.' More mythologically, these horses are '[t]he silver runaways of Neptune's car.' If even the sea-god has trouble domesticating them, they are not compromised by 'feel[ing] their Master's trident in their side' but are able to retain their wildness with 'white tails smoking free' due to their 'kinship' with the feminised waves. If this poem celebrates and reiterates conventions of wildness, littoral horses and their embodied connections with sea, wind and weather, Campbell's dedication of his poem to AF Tschiffely suggests another mode of relating to horses.

Tschiffely's Ride tells a classic story of a human-equine journey through South America and North America, from Buenos Aires to Washington, on Criollo horses, Mancho and Gato in 1925 (aimetschiffely.org/tschiffelys-ride.htm; accessed 15 November 2011). The naming of these originally feral horses differentiates them inexorably from Campbell's romanticised wild horses of the Camargue. Although they were described as difficult to train, they became so devoted to Tschiffely that he never needed to tie them up no matter where he pitched his tent for the night. Interdependent, Tschiffely and his horses traversed continents relying on each other for

cross-species friendships and succour. If this redoubtable explorer and his equine companions take us too far from littoral zones, however, the South African hero, Wolraad Woltemade returns us to a horse in the surf.

When Woltemade, an official of the VOC, was faced in 1773 with the spectacle of a sinking VOC ship near Salt River in Table Bay, he reacted to the cries of the sailors, by plunging into heavy seas with his horse to rescue the drowning men. Tragically, on his eighth mission to the ship, panicking sailors finally pulled both horse and his rider beneath the waves but not before the duo had saved fourteen men. That this great Friesian horse (which is how I, anachronistically, imagine him)³ would choose so generously to leave the safety of the sands for the danger of the waves in order to save human beings may seem extraordinary, yet the horse must have had a strong, committed relationship with Woltemade, so much so that he was prepared to contradict all his instincts and desires for self-preservation in order to please him. No spurs or whips would have been strong enough to persuade a horse to act so contradictorily. As Elaine Walker contends in relation to taking horses into battle '[a] horse that trusts his rider will face situations he would never dare to confront alone' (2008:120). Sandra Swarts, whose account of the horse-human heroism I rely on above (2010:123 - 124), reads this incident differently, however, aligning Woltemade's horse with the three thousand horses, 'victims of society's oppression' (2010:199) who died in the South African War.

To what extent a horse is able to express agency or choice in a human-horse relationship will vary from trainer to trainer, or from rider to rider. As my horse-trainer always stresses: 'If your horse does not listen to you he can kill you' yet we train to praise so that the horse chooses affirmation rather than a negative confrontation. The emphasis, then, is on the agency and co-operation of the horse in a cross-species partnership. Horses, if they are well-treated, will seek out connections with human and show immense willingness to work. As prey animals, it suits them to have a close bond with humans--who are predators. Vicki Hearne, poet, philosopher and trainer of horses and dogs, lyrically and humorously illustrates the persistence of equine instinct in 'Riding a Nervous Horse' who 'spook[s] at

³ Friesians were only exported to South Africa in the early 1900s (Doorndraaistud.co.za/doorndraai-fans/faq/ accessed 19 November 2011).

shadows' and bushes fearing 'horse eaters/That merely grin at me/But lust for him' (2007: 100 - 101).

A poem by Edwin Muir, 'The Horses' gestures to this paradox of discipline/equine agency in its representation of the post-apocalyptic advent of 'strange horses' who seemed to have emanated 'from their own Eden' and who are seeking 'that long-lost archaic companionship' with humans. Well after these horses change the lives of the stranded humans through their labour 'that free servitude still can pierce our hearts' (1973: 409). Fellow-survivors of a war which has ended the world as it was known, these horses hail from both a literal and a liminal space.

If the poems of Campbell and Muir are more late adolescent or adult fare, I recall as a child being fascinated by the phenomenon of Tschiffely's ride, if irritated by the book he wrote specifically for children from the point of view of the horses. It seemed patronising, both to horses and children, but other stories inspired me, even if, or perhaps because, they romanticised the entanglements between horses and humans. My late childhood and adolescence were horse-crazy. As a child I whinnied like a horse, arched my neck, pawed the ground. I sketched horses endlessly and ineptly. I trained our stubborn, tan dachshund (who had been expelled from obedience class) in lieu of a horse to jump over a course in the back garden. I collected horse ornaments which became part of the Wind Stables. Each horse was called after a wind; the exotic appellations Pampero, Chinook, or Simoom still take me back to stiff-legged china horses in a girl's pink bedroom—and some admiration for that child self who found such arcane names before the internet made research so easy.

Besides classic horse stories, three stories of horses in littoral zones appeared on my book shelves. As I re-read them today I am struck by the recurrence of certain themes, both explicit and implicit, from the 'The Horses of the Camargue': the romanticising segue between the horses and the environment they inhabit, the ramifications of wild horse and human entanglement and the unavoidable loss of littoral equine 'freedom' when he is trained and/or taken from the sea. I try to imagine what a horse-mad child, who still lived in the imagination with horses rather than interacting with them as embodied animals, absorbed from these novels. Susan McHugh in *Animal Stories: Narrating Across Species Lines* examines Girl-Horse Stories in a chapter called 'Velvet Revolutions.' She argues that while girls are the

‘stereotypic stewards of horsey things’ (2011:74) certain disturbing trends in horsey narratives are currently emerging in which ‘fictional horsewomen are cast increasingly on the defensive, victimized by a peculiar linkage of girlish love for horses with sexualized violence’ (2011:66). In the late 1950s and 1960s, girls were lucky to appear at all in the horse stories on my shelves. *National Velvet* (1935) by Enid Bagnold is about an unattractive girl and her horse counterpart who win the Grand National (the young, beautiful Elizabeth Taylor was entirely miscast) but *My Friend Flicka*, the first of a trilogy by Mary O’Hara focuses on a boy and a wild Mustang. The interchangeable Pullein-Thompson sisters, Josephine, Christine and Diana, whose popularity was at its height in the 1950s and 1960s, and whose horse books I read assiduously, wrote prolifically of boys and girls, as did the British Show-jumper, Pat Smythe⁴.

In *Big Black Horse* ([1941] 1953) adapted from *The Black Stallion* by Walter Farley (which has spawned a number of movies and a TV series) the subtitle *The story of a boy’s love for a horse* relegates girls to non-existence, and *Misty of Chincoteague* ([1947] 1961) by Marguerite Henry which has a brother and a sister saving up for the elusive Phantom and then vying to ride her, casts the sister as a jolly good sport who knows her place when her brother is triumphantly adventurous and wins the chance to ride the pony in a race. More disturbingly, *The Homecoming* (1964) by Marlana Frick, set near the Camargue, sets affection for humans and for animals against each other and feminises emotion. A character describes the love between a man and a horse as more substantial than that between a man and a woman, and the villagers laugh at the heart-broken elderly Valentin who cries for his condemned horse for “weep[ing] like a woman” (1964:10). The main male character has no female foil, but, implicitly, the horse serves a feminine purpose. The link between women and horses was illustrated for me when I lived in southern Spain, teaching English in Valencia and learning Spanish. I regularly rode an Andalusian gelding called Capriccioso through

⁴ That these very English children were ritually ‘blooded’ on their first hunt when the bloody stump of the fox’s tail was smeared on their faces points to a darker desire for wildness accessed through primitive hunting practices. The longing for equine wildness causes no harm unless it is sullied by the imperative to claim power *over* this wildness.

vineyards and by the sea, close to Gandia. When I asked for him once in his absence, his owner humiliated me in front of a bar full of wine-drinking men, scoffing at my desire to be partnered with Capriccioso: ‘When you have ridden one horse you have ridden them all. They are just like women!’

Big Black Horse, replete with lurid illustrations, tells of Alec Ramsay, returning home to North America after a sojourn in India visiting an uncle. En route, the ship he sails in picks up a fiery black stallion who has been captured by tribesmen in flowing robes and who is now confined in a stall on board. Alec builds up the horse’s trust by leaving him sugar lumps and when the ship begins to sink in a storm, instead of heading for a lifeboat and relative safety, the boy races to the horse’s stall to release the frantic stallion. In a panic the horse barges him and both fall into the sea. Alec manages to grab the Black’s halter rope and the horse swims them both to a small island. The romance between horse and boy, signalled by their galloping together through the surf, is interspersed by each saving the other’s life after being cast away. Alec washes and dries seaweed so the stallion can eat; the Black wakes the boy when his make-shift cover catches fire. The conflagration has alerted a passing ship which comes to rescue Alec who persuades the horse to follow the small rescue boat and to allow himself to be hoisted on board. Once they reach home, Alec blindfolds the terrified Black to get him down the gangway and then he transforms into a tame, apple-stealing horse who charms Alec’s parents – who agree that the Black can live in a barn down the road. And so this fairy story ends. As castaways, it is their living together in the littoral zone and their common suffering which cements the contact between them. The powerful, black stallion, so much part of the sea and its wildness, is tamed by a boy who knows little about horses. The exotic is even more firmly brought under civilised control as they leave the sea behind and reach dry land.

One of the recurrent formulae of horse stories is that of ‘a naïf find[ing] true love with a rogue’ (McHugh 2011: 66) and *Big Black Horse* is no exception. *Misty of Chincoteague*, however, takes this formula and then plays with reader expectations of the on-going narrative of this ‘true love.’ The young siblings, Paul and Maureen who are staying with their grandparents on Chincoteague, are enthralled by ponies and obsessed with the idea of owning and training the Phantom, a mare who has eluded capture during the annual round-up of wild horses on Assateague. In this round-up,

the ponies are herded and then swum over to the parallel barrier island, Chincoteague, where the young colts and fillies are auctioned off to raise funds for the Fire Company. The children both raise money by working equally hard at chores for the neighbours in the hope of buying the Phantom but because girls are not permitted on the round-up Paul plays the role of the hero, flushing the Phantom and her foal out of the brush, swimming alongside the horses and holding the head of the foal, Misty, above the water to prevent her drowning.

After the requisite setbacks, the children buy the mare and the foal, although their grandfather, who is a repository of homespun wisdom and nonstandard English, is adamant: 'The Phantom ain't a hoss. She ain't even a lady. She's just a piece of wind and sky' (Henry 1947:54). Together the siblings gentle the mare and ride her but never with a bit in her mouth, only a piece of rope. Even so, with the mare as a partner in this cross-species relationship (no piece of string could stop a horse who really wanted to take off) she remains elusive and detached. She has something 'far away about her' (1947:141) and a 'wild, sad look' (1947:143). Henry has it both ways: the mare has become tractable but she remains wild, elemental and then, in her natural swiftness, she wins a race ridden by Paul but only after he, rather than his sister, gets the lucky wishbone. Subsequent to this triumph, in which nature and wildness have been harnessed, the stallion Pied Piper comes to fetch the Phantom and escort her back through the waves to the barrier island. The mare has remained a littoral creature then, any training she acceded to merely a pretence of civilization overlaying the wildness at her core. The equine romance between mare and stallion has its parallel in the romance between the children and the foal Misty who has taken to their company and to training without a backward sniff at the sea. Only by proxy, has the Phantom has been tamed in the personage of her offspring who is naturalised in the human settlement of Chincoteague. Her essential wildness, however, remains inviolable.

Marguerite Henry claims in a frontispiece that 'All of the incidents in this story are real' and then proceeds to perpetuate the kind of originary myths which exoticise and romanticise feral horses as wild horses. Legend has it that the Bot River 'wild' horses, for example, are descendants of horses set free by British soldiers returning home after the South African War ([www. Kogelbergbiospherereserve.co.za/ content_1010500000_Kleinmond](http://www.Kogelbergbiospherereserve.co.za/content_1010500000_Kleinmond)).

htm; accessed 18 November 2011) rather than merely the remnants of domestic horses who have gone feral, which is more likely. Henry has the Assateague ponies as descendants of Moor ponies shipwrecked in a Spanish galleon headed for Panama where horses are worth their weight in gold. The National Park Service finds rather that ‘the most plausible explanation is that they are descendants of horses that were brought to barrier islands like Assateague in the late seventeenth century by mainland owners to avoid fencing laws and taxation of livestock’ (www.nps.gov/asis/naturescience/horses.htm; accessed 16 November 2011). The grandfather in the children’s narrative circumvents such binary thinking of legend and history, claiming that ‘legends be the only stories as is [sic.] true!’ (1947: 39). Visiting Chincoteague when I lived in Philadelphia was a great let down for my childhood imagination and any belief in the romance of littoral horses. The wild horses I mis-remembered from my childhood book are squat ponies due to their reduced diet of salt grass and they are bloated because of the excess water they drink to compensate for the quantity of salt they consume. The mosquitoes attacked us in swarms in spite of the constant wind. Now the very wildness of the horses themselves is debatable. The ponies have been enticed by visitors and have developed a liking for junk food. Agentively they endeavour to meet their new tastes: ‘A horse that is raiding your campsite and getting into your cooler—is that a wild horse anymore?’ asked Carl S. Zimmerman, a park spokesman. ‘That’s a shame, because that wildness is what makes them so special’ (www.washingtonpost.com/local/assateague-struggles-to-keep-the-horses-wild/2011/07/07.html).

The third text I had on my shelves as a child (and still have) about littoral horses, *The Homecoming* by Marlena Frick, is about a Camarguais. Unlike Roy Campbell’s spirited and mythical beings, this horse, originally from the Camargue and brought in like the horses in Assateague for auction, is now elderly and retired from hunting and farm labour. His owner wants to sell Pompidou for a few francs to a picador, but Valentin, the horse’s caretaker and an aged impoverished farm hand, cannot countenance the fate decreed for his beloved horse –of being gored to death and disembowelled by a maddened bull as part of the spectacle in the bull ring. Instead of escorting the horse to the picador in a neighbouring village, which is what he is ordered to do, Valentin heads for the Camargue, planning to subsist on fish and frogs while Pompidou returns to his native environment. By giving one

horse his 'freedom' he is attempting to compensate 'for all the world's butchered animals' (1964:74) as he tells a young boy living near the Camargue. Now a fugitive from the law, he is ashamed and cannot endure the thought of a court case and prison. The story ends tragically when the horse dies of exhaustion and a fever and Valentin walks into the quicksands of the Camargue.

The cover of the book depicts the ghosts of a horse and a man walking over the Camargue marshes under a full moon. The novel offers no such spiritualised redemption, although Valentin is comforted by the fact that Pompidou had died peacefully in a warm stable nearby, and the marshes with flamingos and a heron are beautiful. In closure the narrative suggests, but only in a muted way, that the horse and the man become one with the littoral zone that the horse had lost as a colt. When I first read the story I hated it. I wanted a happy ending, not a more realistic one. Reading it now, I am struck by the categorising of this novella as a child's book with sentimentalised illustrations. The themes of sexuality and death, the details about the practices of the bullfight, the subtlety of the way the final tragedy is represented, point to a narrative which only adolescents who have begun to wrestle more maturely with issues of cruelty towards nonhuman animals and the impoverished could appreciate. Ill-equipped to accept too much reality, I still expected horses from the Camargue to be free spirits, not farm horses or fodder for bull fights.

What I did understand from the novella was the love of a man for a horse and if it lacked drama and romance I had my own experiences of wildness and love in the littoral zone, as an adolescent in the Eastern Cape. The horse ornaments and the long-suffering dachshund had been replaced by weekly lessons at the Glenlyn Riding School, a very efficient and extraordinarily colonial establishment which boasted that the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret had ridden there in 1947 on their visit to South Africa. In the 1960s their mounts, Jill and Treasure respectively, were still useful members of the school. We took Pony Club Tests⁵ designed in

⁵ The Pony Club, motivated initially by bringing horses into leisure activities, 'was established in 1928 It grew to become the largest associations of riders in the world, covering around 20 countries with over 110,000 members' (Walker 2008: 177).

England, read horse books about children who went fox-hunting in the mist, envied Princess Anne for her access to horses and were very well-behaved, children and horses alike. Then a friend of my father asked me to show his ex-racehorse and hack her out. After learning how to sit shies at butterflies, donkeys and hahdedahs, we progressed to long out-rides to Nahoon River and the beach. In retrospect I am astonished but immensely grateful that my over-anxious parents chose to remain ignorant of the dangers of a girl riding alone, through thorn-bush veld and a sinister disused quarry to the sea – with a horse for company and no means of alerting anyone in an emergency.

Once at Blue Bend, Lady remembered her race horse training on Eastern Beach and we would take off at a gallop between the sand dunes and the surf. All the tropes of littoral horses implicitly informed our races with the wind — becoming elementally part of the sea, the foam and the wind which we galloped through. Then my amphibious horse, unsaddled, would roll and roll in the sand and in the Bonza Bay lagoon, immersing herself like a seal in the brown water. The photographs which remain from this period are of Lady and me impeccably turned out, about to perform at a show, but the personal littoral myth-making has gone unrecorded.

More recently, I recorded the experience of watching my daughter as a young adolescent swim through a dam in Tokai on a black Friesian. Swimming a horse into deep water has its risks: a wet horse becomes slippery, and losing a grip on him means that you are in the water next to powerfully churning legs. Unlike my oblivious parents, I am aware of the dangers of riding, and, more particularly, of the courage it takes for horse and rider to leave the earth behind. Here is the poem, about an amphibious event, entitled ‘The Birthday Present’:

He displays nothing but his dark head
in the red halter
now parallel to the dam surface,
stirred with mud and clay,
and only a little of his usually arched neck

The girl-woman, poised
along the mane curling in brown water,
is submerged but for head and shoulders

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above his sixteen hands of pent power

As the ground shifts its haunches further
and they step into depths they cannot gauge
she rides bareback
towards the bravery he offers her
with each great flooded stride

When his hooves reach
the shore of the earth
they emerge, together, streaming:
the slight girl and the chivalrous horse
stepping into an ecstasy of arrival
no longer deferred

I cannot predict what she will take
from this epiphany
on her thirteenth birthday
into the myths of her life
but he has offered me a certainty—
this gracious high-stepping being—
as he stands, solidly again,
in conversation with the earth
and his observers,
slooshing rivers of mud-wetness
over me and the yellow grass
in the late-summer evening (Woodward 2008: 50).

After twenty-five years of merely dreaming about horses, I needed no persuasion when my daughter expressed an interest in starting riding lessons. She had a choice: ride at a stables in Constantia where her mount, who was delivered to her parcel-like, was an impeccably trained marionette trotting round a small paddock, or ride at the Country Club in Tokai where the horses lived out (not in stables) and where children learned to ride bareback and with a halter. Caley chose the latter – where the emphasis is on building a partnership with a horse, using your seat and legs rather than your hands,

working with your mind and that of the horse. Galahad, the horse Caley and I have shared for seven years, lives there in a herd of fourteen horses in a large area, roughly four hectares. We may be far from the sea and the littoral zones of my equine-adolescence, but on the sandy arena near the dam, training a horse has become a new kind of cross-species practice for me.

Paul Patton answers his question of whether ‘training of any kind [is] an indefensible form of co-optation of the animal’s powers’ (2003: 95) by maintaining, via Monty Roberts and Vicki Hearne, that if we acknowledge our horses and dogs not just as our ‘interlocutors’ but as ‘moral beings’ (2003:95) then we are in a position to recognise ‘ethical relations and obligations toward other beings’ (2003:95). Certainly, this is a position which we work towards in Tokai. When we train the horse in dressage movements, these become a kind of therapy to strengthen the horse’s musculature. The ultimate aim is for the horse to perform his own self carriage in a rounded shape, bringing the neck down and engaging the hindquarters, which emulates horses prancing in a field—not because it makes the rider feel good (although it does) but because it empowers the horse and makes cadence and impulsion effortless.

Training a horse is humbling. It means learning to be absolutely focused in the moment so that you do not give aids to the horse either prematurely or too suddenly. Ideally, your physical and mental capabilities are seamlessly engaged with those of your horse as you work towards harmony and a sublime balance. Because Chogyam Trungpa of the Kagyu lineage together with his spouse Lady Diana Mukpo were adepts at horseriding and the latter, in particular, a dressage rider, the practice of dressage as a training for Buddhist mindfulness has been recognised in this lineage:

The rider has to be completely present to be able to tune into the horse’s energy. When the rider’s mind and body are working in harmony, this synchronicity immediately manifests in the horse’s gait. The energy is able to flow freely—rider and horse are riding the energy as one (Contemplative Arts and Disciplines www.shambala.org/arts.php; accessed 2 May 2011).

Such spiritual practices recall the passionate harmony between horses and their environment in the littoral zones; ‘riding the energy as one’

could describe the Camargue horses galloping through the waves, even if it is discipline here which engenders this balance rather than an expression of wild freedom.

Partnering a horse, co-creating movements in the sandy dressage arena is motivated by the same desire of connecting with wildness in the littoral zones which Farley, Henry and Frick have their characters express and which I experienced as an adolescent galloping through the waves. If the romantic representation of horses mythologizes them in an uncontaminated, wild environment in Campbell's poem, the poems of Muir and Hearne focus on cross-species equine relationships. Threshold beings, amphibious creatures literally and metaphorically, horses, however, sashay beyond our myth-making littoral representations and the embodied realities of training. Eluding our representational nets or intellectualised paradoxes, they are utterly themselves, making landscapes and seascapes more beautiful from moment to moment.

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