

HORSE MOTIFS IN FOLK NARRATIVE OF THE SUPERNATURAL

by

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## **DEDICATION**

This is dedicated to my wonderful and supportive parents, Lorraine Messinger and Kenneth Harkavy.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **HORSE MOTIFS IN FOLK NARRATIVE OF THE SUPERNATURAL**

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This thesis describes the use of horse motifs in folk prose narratives of the supernatural. In the process of researching and writing this thesis, the author conducted close readings of a broad sample of folk prose and poetry and reviewed scholarship in cross-disciplinary comparison. This thesis argues that folklore motifs operate as multivalent forms of language, conveying not only the literal imagery but also the complex social structures and behaviors associated with the image. Motifs that involve horses are alluding to the cultural adaptations built around the domesticated horse. This thesis contributes to the conversation in Folklore Studies on the use of motifs as components of narrative as well as the interaction of text and context.

## **INTERDISCIPLINARY ELEMENTS OF THIS STUDY**

This thesis is a comparative analysis of the use of horse motifs in folk literature of the supernatural. In the data collection stage I used Literature and Folklore Studies research methodologies to gather a representative sample of texts that were either collected from folk artists and published in folklore collections or notably influenced by folklore. I also applied comparative analysis to the texts using established techniques from the studies of Literature and Folklore. My analysis places the texts within the contexts of the historical era and cultural groups in which the texts arose, which required knowledge of historical and anthropological theory and data. Because some of the texts deal with sacred/mythological belief and ritual, I also applied theory from Religious Studies.



## INTRODUCTION

This study examines the use of horse motifs in folk narrative of the supernatural. In folklore, the use of the supernatural in tales and other texts is significant because it can serve as a mirror of nature and society as it is lived. Stories of the supernatural can act as a critique or a reminder. The individual who experiences the supernatural is in a position to assess or reassess what is necessary and valuable and what needs to be changed or discarded. This function of the supernatural to reflect upon and question social phenomena allows it to illuminate aspects of an individual's or community's world view.

Motifs “are the stuff out of which tales are made” (Thompson 1955, 7). In a structural approach to folktale analysis, one may look at motifs as the building blocks from which a traditional teller may construct a tale (Goldberg 1986). Christine Goldberg argues that tales are “artifacts designed to meet the needs and aspirations of those who maintain them” (1986, 172); therefore the motifs in use must also meet those needs. If a motif is present in a tale, it is because it resonates for the teller and the audience; as Stith Thompson suggests, the motif is a “reflection of a whole world of belief which forms a background of a narrative” (1955, 8).

In Folklore Studies, the identification and classification of motifs serves as a tool for comparing elements of folklore from different cultures. Thompson states that the classification of motifs is more universally applicable than the classification of tale types;

individual and related motifs are shared much more broadly across distinct cultural regions than tale types (Thompson 1958, 10), allowing the researcher to compare folklore texts of varying type and from different eras and locations. If a single motif or a family of related motifs occurs in the lore of many cultural groups, then study of the shared and divergent ways that motif is used has the potential to provide insight into the process by which folk artists construct their texts. The use of particular motifs may also provide insight into how certain ideas or symbols operate within a community or cultural group, allowing for a deeper understanding of that group's world view.

Horses feature in an extensive list of motifs classified by Thompson in the *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*. In addition to the singular "horse," the *Motif-Index* contains nineteen entries containing "horse", including horses and horseshoe. These entries span across nearly every section of the *Motif-Index*, including several relating to myth and magic, and come from several cultural traditions. While Thompson's index is Europe-centric, it is not difficult to find horses interacting with the supernatural world or behaving in supernatural ways in texts outside of Europe. The Chinese tale of "The Woman Who Married a Horse" (Miller 1995), and the Palestinian "Golden Pail" (Muhawi and Kanaana 1989, 14-19), featuring a Jinn horse, are but two examples recorded outside the Indo-European world.

The presence of a common motif in distinct bodies of folklore can be explained, according to Blust (1999), in the following ways: convergence or independent invention, diffusion, or common inheritance (or some combination of the above). Convergence occurs when two or more cultures use the same motif without having any known contact

with each other, and the “explanatory mechanism is either that of limited possibilities or that of ‘the psychic unity of mankind’” (Blust 1999, 491). Diffusion occurs when an idea originates in one cultural group and is passed to other communities with whom they have contact. Common inheritance occurs when cultural groups are similar because they descend from a single cultural ancestor.

The use of the horse as a motif in diverse cultures reflects the horse as a material reality with great significance in communities throughout the world. Barre Toelken (1996) would characterize the horse as a “high context” cultural object. To understand what the horse means to a culture, one would need to be well-versed in the narratives, symbols, beliefs, and practices of that culture. The need for a deep cultural understanding is particularly true in cross-cultural comparison of horses, as only by seeing how horses relate to cultural history and daily and special practice can the researcher recognize the complex relationship of a community to horses.

David Anthony (2007) theorizes that the initial domestication of the horse may have occurred with proto-Indo-European peoples in the steppes of the Northern Caucasus region 5-6,000 years ago. The domesticated horse and the material and sociocultural adaptations it enabled would have been spread by Indo-European traders, migrants, and conquerors, making an extremely strong case for diffusion and common cultural inheritance.

Anthony’s argument that a single cultural group is responsible for domestication of the horse is significant because ideas and stories about the horse would have spread with the horse itself. However, these motifs would have changed or expanded as they

came into contact with different cultures and as they were shared, reused, and retold over time. The horse can be treated as a unit of cultural exchange and can give insight into both shared cultural inheritances and distinct adaptations of peoples who live in different places and times.

This study examines folk and folklore-inspired texts dealing with the supernatural and containing horse motifs. Initial research included narratives and other forms of folk literature from diverse cultural groups. An exhaustive study is not possible and this work will analyze narratives primarily from Celtic and Germanic-speaking communities. Comparing both the texts and the contexts of the literature reveals complicated aspects of world view and attitudes towards social realities embodied in horse motifs. This research will contribute to the use in Folklore Studies of motif analysis as a means of better understanding the structure, function, and meaning of folk literature.

## **The Problem**

Many folklorists argue that motif analysis is central to folk narrative research (Georges 1997; Bottingheimer 1993; Goldberg 1986). Several different approaches have been applied to the study of motifs. Bottingheimer (1993) studied the insertion and deletion of motifs within the tale type “The Lazy Boy,” AT 675. Hemming (1998) identified individual motifs occurring in “Pwyll Prince of Dyfed” and compared their use in “Pwyll” to the use of the same or related motifs in other tales and historical situations. Blust (1999) examines the motif of the fox’s wedding and its association with sunshowers in Japan by identifying and comparing analogues from other areas that pair animal mating and parturition with the occurrence of sunshowers and rainbows. Blust characterizes the motif as a unit of folk belief, rather than narrative. These are just samples of the research that has been done using motif analysis. Howey (2002 [1923]) created a survey, *The Horse in Magic and Myth*, but his work predates Thompson’s classification of motifs and his discussion of structure and social function is limited.

Few studies have looked at a series of motifs connected by subject matter. My thesis studies motifs based on their incorporation of the horse, rather than their closeness in Thompson’s classification system or their involvement in a particular tale or tale type. My study illustrates how motifs can be used to represent the transmission of ideas and cultural adaptations. Motifs function as a symbolic language in the discussion of social structure and human experience.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Horse, Motifs, Distribution, and Comparison**

In “The Construction of Folktales,” Christine Goldberg defines motif as “the matter from which a narrative can be made. It may be a tiny, seemingly indivisible element, or a whole episode or chunk from a tale, prefabricated as it were” (1986, 167). Goldberg argues that what folklorists must investigate is the relationship between these elements so that we may gain a better understanding of why “tales take the forms they do” (ibid). For Goldberg, part of understanding the forms tales take is recognizing that they are artistic expressions, not ordinary language or natural phenomena. Tales are assembled deliberately, “with structures, functions, and even beauty” (1986, 169).

Robert A. Georges argues that using motifs as a basis for comparison in folktales is useful because

the constructs...*motif* and *tale type*...have a behavioral basis in experiencing, both at first hand and vicariously, and in human beings’ need and ability to stimulate others and self, through narrating, to generate and respond conceptually to memorable experiences and events (1997, 206).

Georges’ characterization implies that the storyteller builds the tale out of particular motifs because they fulfill this need to stimulate a response. Applying Georges’ argument to narratives involving the supernatural, a motif, no matter if it seems fantastic, must somehow evoke the audience’s experience in order to function successfully in a

tale. There must be enough that is natural within the supernatural for the audience to recognize it.

This resonance of a motif with remembered experience is a part of how the motif functions within the tale. Blust considers functional explanations “important elements in grasping the meaning of any folk tradition” (1999, 487). In addition to seeking functional explanations, the ethnographer can also look at “distributional explanations for culture traits [that] may under favorable circumstances provide clues to functional explanations” (1999, 488). Blust has proposed a “typology of culture trait distributions together with their optimal explanations” (1999, 491) and enumerates three explanations for why a motif (or other culture trait) may occur in diverse communities: convergence or independent invention, where different groups have similar cultural traits because of similar experiences; diffusion, where two or more groups come in to contact with each other and borrow cultural traits; or common inheritance, where different groups learned a shared cultural trait from a common ancestor.

In Blust’s study of “The Fox’s Wedding,” a folk belief in Japan that a sunshower signals the wedding of the fox, Blust compares the evidence for and against the various distribution models. In first considering the possibility of common inheritance by Korean and Japanese folk groups, Blust sees a problem in “explaining why a seemingly arbitrary culture trait would persist in divergent cultural traditions for millennia after their separation from a common ancestor” (1999, 491-492). For Blust, even in the case of diffusion or inheritance, a culture trait must somehow reflect or function within the living experience of the folk group in order for the trait to be borrowed and to survive.

In the case of horse motifs, there is strong evidence for cultural diffusion, because horse domestication and training is strongly linked with the ancestors of Indo-Europeans. In *The Horse, The Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World*, David W. Anthony compares linguistic and archaeological evidence to determine the likely origins of Indo-European language and culture. Linguistically, “The horse, \*ek\*wo-, is solidly reconstructed and seems also to have been a potent symbol of divine power for the speakers of Proto-Indo-European (PIE)” (2007, Kindle Edition, page numbers not available). Working from the linguistic importance of \*ek\*wo-, Anthony analyzes the distribution of horses in prehistoric Europe and finds that they were “numerous and economically important only in the Eurasian steppes” (ibid). Evidence suggests that access to more and larger horses provided the speakers of PIE with a valuable trading commodity. The military power gained through horse riding and charioteering provided PIE tribes significant amounts of prestige, enabling them to export their culture through patron-client relationships, as well as migration and conquest.

The spread of Indo-European language and culture may very well be the basis for appearance of horse motifs the folk literature of communities across the world. Wendy Doniger argues, “The context of history can explain why some narratives take hold and spread, while others do not; stories take root only when they become important to people at a particular time, when they connect to something that those people care about” (2011, xiii). Following Doniger’s argument, the horse motif spread because horses and what



they represented were important to Indo-Europeans. They also became important to the cultures that came into contact or merged with Indo-Europeans.

The diffusion of horse motifs creates rich opportunities for cross-cultural comparison. Wendy Doniger explains,

Comparison makes it possible for us literally to *cross-examine* cultures, by using a myth from one culture to reveal to us what is *not* in a telling from another culture, to find out the things not ‘dreamt of in your philosophy’ (as Hamlet said to Horatio) (2011, 36).

Doniger’s book *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth* explains the use of comparison as a tool for understanding myth<sup>1</sup> as one of several “lenses” (8) available for scholarly analysis. Doniger describes the “big view” (ibid) as the approach that seeks universal themes in the myths of different cultures; she amends the work of earlier universalists by focusing on continuities in human experience such as procreation and death rather than “broad concepts such as sacrifice, or a High God, or an Oedipal complex” (65). Encountering horses may not be as universal an experience as birth or death, but horses have made a wide and powerful enough impression to function in tales across the world. Comparing the way horses function in folk narratives of the supernatural may reveal something about values and beliefs in different folk groups, especially if ideas about power and prestige associated with Indo-European horses survived through inheritance and diffusion through space and time.

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<sup>1</sup> Doniger’s definition of myth is “a story that a group of people believe for a long time despite massive evidence that it is not actually true” (2011, ix). I am adopting her usage only for the purpose of discussing her work specifically.

### **An Example of Horse Motifs in Use: Transformation and Fertility**

A comparison of horse motifs in the following tales reveals how separate cultures, or at least the scholars analyzing those cultures, can still view relationships and their symbols in similar ways. In “The Woman Who Married a Horse (WMH)”<sup>2</sup> a man leaves the household to go to war. His wife or daughter promises the daughter will marry whoever brings the husband (father) home. A horse fetches the husband and is killed when he seeks to marry the daughter. His hide is spread out to dry and when the daughter passes it, the hide engulfs the daughter and flies off with her into a tree. The new horse-woman hybrid is the first silkworm (Miller 1995, 276).

In exploring the formation of this Chinese folktale, Miller asks several questions about how the tale took shape and what it might mean for its audience. One of these questions is: “Why a horse? That is, does the horse have some special significance, or is the choice arbitrary?” (1995, 278). Miller notes that the horse started to take on “significant religious dimensions” (1995, 295) in China in late second century BCE. The horse was associated with the dragon, which was a symbol of fertility and rebirth, strongly associated with water. Miller hypothesizes that the Central Asian/Indian (and therefore likely Indo-European) notion of a sacred horse, which included the idea that possession of a heavenly (cloud) horse, was a symbol of a “universal monarch” (1995, 296).

The horse’s association with fecundity and flight allowed it to function as the agent of magical change and reproduction. Miller argues that WMH is a re-imagining of

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<sup>2</sup> This tale type was assigned by Miller because there is no adequate entry in the ATU tale type index.

older Swan-maiden tales, where the horsehide stands in for the swan feathers as the skin that allows woman to change her shape. The Swan-maiden tales are, according to Miller, tales of the female power of generation, the ability of women to internalize and transform the male principle into children. According to Miller, the horse, by contrast, is a male symbol, and in WMH he usurps the power of the symbolically female bird. For Miller, the horse in WMH functions as a sign of conquest of the masculine over the feminine and an appropriation of powers of fertility and generation by men.

On the opposite side of Eurasia, “Pwyll Prince of Dyfed,” a part of the Welsh *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*,<sup>3</sup> also makes use of horse motifs in connection to transformation and fertility. In the second section of this branch, Pwyll sees Rhiannon riding by on what appears to be a slow-moving white horse. No matter how fast the horses of Pwyll or his messengers gallop, they cannot catch Rhiannon. It is not until Pwyll calls out to her that Rhiannon stops. The two agree to marry and after managing to outwit Rhiannon’s other suitor, the two are married. In the third section, Rhiannon gives birth to a son after several years of waiting. The baby vanishes, at which point maidservants frame Rhiannon for infanticide and cannibalism. Rhiannon’s penance is to carry court visitors on her back. Meanwhile, Teyrnon, a noble in another territory, after losing his foals every year, decides to keep watch overnight in the stable. He sees a “monstrous claw” reaching in to steal the foal and so cuts it off. After failing to find the

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<sup>3</sup> *The Mabinogion* consists of eleven stories found in two Welsh manuscript collections from the 14th and 15th century. The first four stories are the only ones to which *mabinogi* can accurately be ascribed. Scholars have theorized that the four branches were once much closer in narrative and represented the traditional four parts of the Celtic heroic cycle. (Jones and Jones 1993 [2004]).

monster outside, Teyrnon returns to the stable to find a baby boy, who he raises as his own until he realizes the boy is the missing prince of Dyfed (Hemming 1998, 19-20).

Jessica Hemming summarizes and compares the evidence for three “rough groups: the mythological, the ‘Calumniated Wife,’ and the historico-legal” (1998, 21) that attempt to explain Rhiannon’s “extraordinary penance” (ibid). The historico-legal argument is based on the historical reality in

many areas of Germanic-influenced Europe throughout the Middle Ages, but especially in France from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, certain crimes of insubordination and social disruption resulted in the wrongdoer’s wearing a saddle and presenting himself humbly—and publicly—before his lord (1998, 23).

The mythological view argues that Rhiannon is a euhemerized version of Epona or \*Rigantona, Celtic horse goddesses, and therefore takes on the “attributes of her hippomorphic state” (1998, 21). Hemming acknowledges the great deal of scholarship that has connected Rhiannon to the Celtic horse goddess, Epona, or her British analogue, \*Rigantona. She argues that the theorized mythic source (the hippomorphic form of the goddess) for Rhiannon’s strange penance to carry passengers on her back, for example, is compelling, but seems “insufficient on its own” (1998, 22).

The “‘Calumniated Wife’ argument” (1998, 22) views Rhiannon’s undeserved calumny as a version of motif (and folktale plot) K2110.1, “‘Calumniated Wife’” (1998, 22), in which a female relative will steal a woman’s children and blame her for their loss, after which the mother is punished in an extreme and imaginative manner. Hemming points out that though bestial punishments are often given to these women, Rhiannon’s

equine punishment appears to be unique (1998, 23). She argues that the first branch of the *Mabinogi* may also be making use of Q493.1, ““Adulteress transformed to mare and stirruped”” (1998, 23).

Hemming states that both the mythological and historico-legal arguments are persuasive when studying “Pwyll Prince of Dyfed” but “there still remains the problem that similar scenes occur in folktales from all over the world” (1998, 23), by which she means the above-mentioned Q493.1, and its related motif, Q493, ““Punishment: being saddled and ridden as a horse,”” (23). Hemming views these examples of Q493.1 as stories about controlling the behavior of women...The horse/ass transformation gives the women a lesson in humility, after which they can take up their (subordinate) positions in human society once again (1998, 26).

The author points out that unlike most of the women turned into equids, Rhiannon is innocent of the crime of which she is accused.

Hemming’s summation of her review of these various approaches to analyzing the story of Rhiannon is that the writer of the *Mabinogi* was possibly, or even probably, influenced to some degree by all of these elements, borrowing from circulating folk motifs and known legal customs and applying them to folk figure known to have equine associations.

### **Liminality and Animals**

The above stories reflect some aspects of horses’ strong relationship with the liminal—what exists in the borders, where two separate entities meet or combine. The

horse is able to occupy both terrestrial and heavenly space and can stand in for both the masculine and the feminine. The horse has transformative power.

Wendy Doniger characterizes human relationships with animals as “deceptive” (2004, 711); humans may treat animals as lesser beings and commodities even while envisioning them as members of the family or avatars of gods. Doniger points out that in myths of Freud’s Family Romance, “in which the child’s parents turn out to be other, better people than his apparent parents” (2004, 711-12), animals can be lowly and/or associated with lower classes, but they can also represent gods and are therefore higher than any human of any status. Animals therefore straddle and occupy multiple social positions.

More specifically, Doniger claims, “The horse is one of the most evocative of mythological species, straddling the boundary between the wild and the tame” (2004, 713). For example, Doniger points out, in folklore, women who are witches may be identified by having an equine foot. Likewise, a witch may be entrapped when she masquerades as a horse and has metal shoes nailed to her feet and is unable to remove them, even when she returns to human form (2004, 713-14). Thus a woman who crosses the barriers between human civilization and wild magic becomes associated with the barrier crossing nature of the horse. Animals may cross other boundaries, such as that between night and day (2004, 720).

### **Horses and the Distribution of Power**

In any area where horses had even a slim chance of surviving, humans attempted to breed and use them, regardless of whether they were the best suited to the work or the

environment. The case is made repeatedly by scholars that humans insisted on breeding and honoring horses over other animals even in cases where to do so was expensive and counterproductive. Wendy Doniger traces generations of effort to maintain aristocratic horses in India (2006). Justina Gregory finds a pattern in Hellenic literature where horses are lauded and donkeys demeaned, even though donkeys were better suited to barren, mountainous regions of Greece and the islands (2007). Kelekna tells of the Tang dynasty “paying the exorbitant price of one million bolts of silk for 100,000 horses per year, a drain on the imperial economy that no doubt contributed to Tang downfall” (149). Eisemann notes that early modern farmers in Germany turned more and more to horses as work animals, even though it was cheaper to use oxen (2012).

Barre Toelken argues that what may seem like commonplaces or decorative flourishes in ballads can actually be complex metaphors:

If it is a commonplace, it may have become commonplace or persistent not because it is a code or because singers are too dull to think of anything else, but because it projects an idea appropriate to the cultural meaning of the song (1995, 31).

The horse in folk literature is both commonplace and a complex metaphor. Given the horse’s role in the construction of societies from China to Argentina, it would be surprising *not* to find horses populating literature and other artworks, folk or high. Inspiration for art is taken from experience, and many people throughout history have experienced horses. Some of this experience is indirect, and the horse is encountered through art. Doniger describes that “in many parts of India, horses have never been useful

at all...For most of India, the horse is *only* a mythical beast, like the unicorn” (2006, loc 11735). Doniger’s description of horses in India is a testament to the way horses have come to equal more than the sum of their biological parts. Horse motifs in folk literature are the expression of a rich, complex, semiotics of power and status.

Domesticating horses and building an equestrian society proved so advantageous to the people living in the ancient steppes that the horse became synonymous with what it enabled people to accomplish. Once horse-domestication enabled larger herds, faster transport, and victory over neighbors, horses became central to constructions of hierarchy and social order. The proto-Indo-Europeans spread so effectively from their homeland by horse that the symbolism of prestige was adopted and adapted cross-culturally along with the animals themselves.

In folk groups through time and across the world, the horse has been used as a means of affirming identity. Mycenaean and Chinese aristocracy saw horses as a way of dividing the elite from the lower classes. German farmers and smiths used horses as a way of asserting their own domestic patriarchy. Plains Indians in North America adopted the horse as a signifier of their sovereignty in the face of European expansion (Horse Capture and Her Many Horses, 2006). Contemporary girls and women use their equestrian activities as a way of taking space back from and empowering themselves within patriarchal systems (Brandt 2005; Klish 2009).



## RESEARCH PROCEDURE

My research involved a broad survey of folk literature and literature influenced by folk ideas of the supernatural and incorporating horse motifs. To facilitate the identification of texts containing horse motifs, I used Stith Thompson's *Motif Index of Folk Literature* and subsequent works by folklorists who followed Thompson's classification system as well as Hans Jorg Uther's *The Types of International Folktales*, and tale collections listed therein. I selected several representative and related tales and researched the historical and geographical context in which they were originally collected. After establishing text and context, I applied "the folkloristic method of broad textual comparison of the varied texts" (Toelken 1995, 133), to develop a theory of the function of horse motifs in folk narrative and narrative with clear folk influences. This comparison illuminates beliefs and social structures of the communities that use horse motifs in their tales of the supernatural.

## **THE HORSE IN MOTION: MOVEMENT ACROSS BOUNDARIES IN “PWYLL PRINCE OF DYFED”**

The story of horse domestication is one of movement. The horse’s desirability, as a species or an individual, is based on its ability to move in special ways. One theory of why horses were domesticated despite being “extremely fast, aggressive, and intelligent” is that their movements were adapted to the cold of the steppes: “the high gait of the horse allows it to move through snows that paralyze sheep” (Kelekna 2009, 39). Though horse meat and milk are consumed, the horse is more widely recognized by humans for its ability to run, jump, and even dance (dressage). Horses are deeply associated with locomotive power.<sup>4</sup> The movement of the horse in narrative functions both literally and metaphorically, allowing characters to move over distances in relationships and to cross communal boundaries.

The story of “Pwyll Prince of Dyfed,” the first branch of the *Mabinogi*, is famous for its evocative horse imagery and the close association of equines with momentous actions in the course of human events. Pwyll first encounters Arawn, king of Annwn, while Arawn is sitting upon a grey dapple horse (Jones and Jones 1993, 3),<sup>5</sup> immediately signifying to the audience that Arawn is both noble and otherworldly.

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<sup>4</sup> When horses are not being used to power movement, they are often invoked symbolically. Vikings carved horse heads into the prows of their longships; steam trains have been called “iron horses”; car commercials in the twenty-first century often contain horse imagery.

<sup>5</sup> All citations of *The Mabinogion* refer to Jones and Jones 1993.

Pwyll, standing in for Arawn, kills his first enemy, Hafgan, while they are both mounted (6). Arawn and Pwyll cement their friendship by sending each other horses, greyhounds and hawks (8). In this first section of “Pwyll,” horses are clear markers of an active nobility. War is made and alliances cemented while on horseback.

The ability of the horse to navigate realms and power structures is made more clear when, after his sojourn in Annwn, Pwyll climbs a fairy mound and espies a gold-clad woman on a sedately-walking white horse. The mound is famous for showing wonders to “whatever high-born man sits upon it” (8) and the woman and horse prove to be Pwyll’s wonder. Pwyll sends messengers on his swiftest horses to try to find out who the rider is. Though the woman’s horse remains at a walk, Pwyll’s servants cannot reach her. Finally, Pwyll pursues the woman himself and when he cannot catch up to her, he calls out, “Maiden...for his sake whom thou lovest best, stay for me” (10). To which the woman, who is Rhiannon, replies, “I will gladly...and it had been better for the horse hadst thou asked this long since” (10). Rhiannon has used the magic of the horse to cross over from the Otherworld and rebel against the conventional social order: she has caused a prince to beg for her attention. After she is introduced, Rhiannon explains her goal is to marry Pwyll, rather than the man to whom her father has betrothed her. It is Rhiannon who instigates the courtship, who plans and sponsors the wedding, and who strategizes how to correct Pwyll’s blunder when he promises “whatever boon thou ask of me, so far as I can get it, it shall be thine” (11) to Rhiannon’s erstwhile betrothed and Pwyll is honor-bound to cancel his own wedding night.

Yet once Rhiannon and Pwyll are married, Rhiannon seems to lose her mastery. Pwyll's advisors conspire behind her back to have Pwyll take another wife, as Rhiannon has not born a child in the three years they have been married. When Rhiannon does give birth to a son, he is stolen while she sleeps and her attendants frame her for cannibalism. Her penance for her alleged crime is

to sit every day near a horse-block that was outside the gate, and to relate the whole story to every one who should come there whom she might suppose not to know it; and to those who would permit her to carry them, to offer guest and stranger to carry him on her back to the court (16).

Meanwhile, Teyrnon Twryf Liant had been losing the foals born to his best mare every May eve to a mysterious force. The same year that Rhiannon gives birth, Teyrnon keeps watch in the stable and manages to catch and defeat the fiendish presence that has been stealing his colts, and in doing so rescues not only the newborn horse but also the missing royal infant. When Teyrnon hears the story of Rhiannon's penance, he and the precocious child journey to Abnerth to prove Rhiannon's innocence.

According to Hemming (1998) (see above, p. 14-16), the associations between Rhiannon and equine motifs have been approached from three theoretical angles—"the mythological, the 'Calumniated Wife,' and the historico-legal" (21)—and all of these approaches have something to reveal about the text. Hemming treats the historico-legal explanations (European law codes that punished insubordination by saddling the guilty) and the existence and use of folklore motifs of Q493 (punishment by saddling) and Q493.1 (a transgressive woman is turned into a mare) in "Pwyll Prince of

Dyfed” as separate phenomena. I would argue that these are closely related phenomena, and it is possible that either the law was a historical act of ostension of the motif, or possibly the folk motif echoed what was once a more widespread legal custom. Certainly they are the result of the same manner of thinking about horses and social hierarchy. Even the mythological traits of a hippomorphic goddess (the evidence for which Hemming seems to underestimate) has close ties with the human power structures of class and gender. The symbology of mounted warrior culture became part of the social discourse at all levels, and religions, legal systems, and motifs all worked with the language of equestrianism.

In medieval Wales, horses, like their owners, came in different classes. Princes had the best breeding stud and their court poets, or Poets of the Princes, praised both the quality of the royal horses and the generosity of their patrons in giving horses away to their retainers. Nerys Ann Jones examined medieval Welsh court poetry and found that in panegyric poems

we find horses being depicted in two roles, firstly as war-machines and secondly as prestigious objects. These two roles are closely linked to the two central themes of medieval Welsh eulogies and elegies, praise of the patron's courage and ferocity in times of war on the one hand, and praise of his wealth, nobility and generosity to his people in times of peace on the other (Davies and Jones 1997, 83).

Contemporaneous law codes specified the difference between the extremely high-prestige destriers and palfreys of the prince and his retinue and the pack and workhorses

of the villeins (64-81). The law codes also show how horses can be used to mark a gender divide:

‘The three unclaimable things of a man: his horse and arms; and what comes to him from his land, and what comes to him as wynebwerth from his wife; he is not bound to share any of those with his wife' (HDd 61). Horses, whether for war or for agriculture, were for males (65-6).

While the working class and women do have some access to horses, it is ultimately powerful men who have the real power to command the work and control the ownership of horse power.

The context of the medieval Welsh legal tractates and praise poems reveals “Pwyll Prince of Dyfed” to contain both conservatism and subversion. Rhiannon, rather than Pwyll or even Arawn, Lord of the magical Annwn (fairy or underworld), has the most command over the movement of horses in this story. Rhiannon is not only able to use her horse to cross between the world of magic and the world of mortals, as Pwyll and Arawn do, but she is also able to manipulate horses’ passage through space and time when she prevents Pwyll and his messengers from reaching her without her consent. When Rhiannon and Pwyll scheme to undo his rash promise to Gwawl, she commands him to return and “be thou...one of a hundred horsemen in the orchard up yonder,” (12) on the evening of her planned wedding to Gwawl.

Of course, as the horse goddess \*Rigantona/Epona, Rhiannon would have great control over the movement of horses, but in “Pwyll” she is a woman, albeit one with limited magical powers. Rhiannon’s father’s effort to arrange Rhiannon’s marriage

against her will and Gwawl's assumption that it is Pwyll's right to give away his betrothed and her property without Rhiannon's leave shows that Rhiannon is treated as a woman, not a goddess, and perceived to have the same rights as a human woman in medieval Welsh society. Her control of horses and horsemen prior to her marriage, as well as her mastery of strategy, is in stark contrast to her legal status.

Rhiannon seems to be quite conscious of the social order in which she lives. She recognizes, even though her husband does not, that Rhiannon, as his wife, is Pwyll's property, and so it is within his power to give her away. Therefore it is idiotic of him to promise "so far as I can get it, it shall be thine" (11). When her serving women make it appear as though she has eaten her own child, Rhiannon pleads with them to tell the truth and vows, "And if it be fear that is upon you, by my confession to God I will protect you" (16), showing that she also understands that the lower classes may be blamed and punished for events that are not their fault. The servants are skeptical of a woman's ability to protect them, even if she is the queen. It is, perhaps, the recognition of how justified the serving women's fear is that leads Rhiannon to accept penance rather than continue to try to persuade them to honesty.

The description of Rhiannon's acceptance of penance is interesting: "so Rhiannon summoned to her teachers and wise men. And as she preferred doing penance to wrangling with the women she took on her penance"(16).

That Rhiannon "summoned her teachers and wise men" suggests the possibility that she was involved in the designing of her own punishment. If this is so, then Rhiannon has managed to mask subversion in the guise of humility. The injunction is

that Rhiannon must “relate the whole story to every one who should come there whom she might suppose to not know it,” (16) and to carry on her back to court those who would permit it, “but it was chance that any one would permit himself to be carried” (16).

Rhiannon’s punishment can be seen as making her vulnerable to extreme humiliation. Yet it also provides her with the opportunity to tell her version of events to the community, possibly before they hear any of the accusations made by her serving women or her husband’s chief men. And while she is positioned so that she may be ridden like a horse, she remains respected enough by the people that few would willingly use her as a mount.

Even without the context of medieval Welsh poetry and legal tractates, the saddling of a human as a horse or the transformation of a human into a horse is clearly a statement of the saddler/transformer’s ability to control the movements and behavior and dictate the position in society of the one who was saddled/transformed. It is also a signal that the saddler needs and fears the saddled. Saddling is a means of containing and appropriating the power of the other, rather than dispersing it. These feelings of dependence and fear can exist between the noble and common and men and women—and horses negotiate the boundaries between humans as well as between places and periods of time.

In her brief summary of the scholarship supporting the theorized mythological history behind Rhiannon, Hemming focuses on the equine motifs surrounding Rhiannon and the evidence that “Celtic sovereignty goddesses, [i.e., Epona and \*Rigantona] both Continental and Insular, typically existed in the dual aspect of



woman and mare,” (20-21). There is, however, another aspect of Rhiannon’s character that links her to Epona.

Jaen Puhvel (1970) describes the Indo-European horse goddess as “transfunctional.” Indo-European societies are thought to have been divided into three basic divisions or functions—the priests; the rulers/warriors; and the herders/cultivators (Anthony 2007), and the horse goddess was a “Great Mother” figure to all of them. Rhiannon shows early on her affinity for the worlds of the first and second functions in her exercise of magic and her strategic approach to conflict. Yet she is also in a state of tension with these functions as she seems to cede her ability to wield magic upon her marriage, and as Princess of Pwyll she is the target of antagonism from Dyfed’s “chief men” (16). Puhvel states,

It is undeniable that the transfunctional goddess exerts a particular hegemony over the third function and is thus caught in the middle of any conflict opposing the third to the others (1970, 166).

Rhiannon, in her offer to protect the serving women from punishment and her willingness to accept servile abasement, shows sympathy for the third function, the working class. Moreover, her son, Pryderi, under fosterage, shows this same sympathy for the cultivator/herder through his own connections to horses: “And before the end of the fourth year he would bargain with the grooms of the horses to let him take them to water” (17).

While the author of the *Mabonogi* uses horse motifs subversively, he also uses them as conservative markers of social hierarchy. Horses are consistently used as

indicators of class. Pwyll recognizes Arawn's elevated status in part because of his fine hunting hounds and "big dapple-grey steed" (3); indeed they both recognize each other as chieftains because "hunting on horseback is the classic high-status activity, rarely, if ever, undertaken to provide food. There have always been far more efficient ways of bringing down game" (Davies and Jones, 35).

Pwyll, in the guise of Arawn, and Hafgan, a rival king of Annwn, fight while mounted, another marker of upper class status. Additionally, Arawn and Pwyll "make strong the bond of friendship between them, and each sent to the other horses and greyhounds and hawks," (Jones and Jones, 8). Rhiannon is first seen "on a big pale white horse, with a garment of shining gold brocaded silk upon her" (8).<sup>6</sup> The reader recognizes Teyrnon as a suitable foster father for Pryderi because "in his house there was a mare, and throughout his kingdom was neither horse nor mare more handsome than she" (16).

In *The Mabinogi* the horse is most effective as a living being, as a body capable of movement in concert with humans. Unlike tales recorded in a later period (discussed in the following chapters), the horse's body is protected.<sup>7</sup> Teyrnon spends the night in the stable with his laboring mare rather than risk losing another foal. In his protection of his mare and her foal, Teyrnon combines the roles of warrior and midwife: the masculine and the feminine, death and birth, the structurally strong and the structurally marginalized. An individual's nobility is emphasized by his implicit recognition of horses as sacrosanct, as definers of ritual space.

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<sup>6</sup> That Arawn's horse is dapple gray and Rhiannon's is pale white are also indicators of their status as semi-divine beings.

<sup>7</sup> In the second branch of *The Mabinogi*, "Branwen Daughter Llyr," the antagonist maims royal horses in an effort to incite war between Britain and Ireland (22-23).

Rhiannon's penance, to sit at the horse block and tell her story, is another convergence of high and low, masculine and feminine. While saddling a human may be a way to chastise them, it is also linked to the honor given to elite horses. The horse that carries humans has the most prestige, more than horses that pull vehicles or carry inanimate burdens. Rhiannon's punishment takes her from the palace to the liminal space of the gate, but it also gives her a public speaking forum. In taking on the saddle, Rhiannon is recreating herself as a horse, capable of embodying that which is valued by a society of mounted warriors, and as a goddess capable of changing shapes.

The writer of "Pwyll Prince of Dyfed" could have been, and most likely was, influenced by a combination of ancient Celtic mythology, legal customs, and folk motifs. The convergence of these influences is not surprising, because they all relate to the same belief in horses. Horses and the act of riding them creates a liminal space where forces are balanced with each other, rather than opposed to each other. It is with a horse, particularly in the saddle, that aristocracy meets peasantry, that masculine meets feminine, and that mystery meets illumination.

The interaction of horses and the supernatural in "Pwyll Prince of Dyfed" captured the attention of many scholars. Not only is it replete with horse imagery, but it recognizes the multiple ways that horses move us and move through us. The horses and their symbolic representatives in "Pwyll Prince of Dyfed" move between the realm of the Faerie and the realm of mortal, between women's power and men's; from barrenness to fertility and from high-status to low and back again.

## THE HORSE IN THE FLESH: BLOOD MAGIC AND HORSE SACRIFICE IN KINDER- UND HAUSMÄRCHEN

*The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm* (Zipes 2003, Kindle Edition, No page numbers)<sup>8</sup> contains three stories from *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (KHM) in which a horse is deliberately killed: “Faithful Johannes,” “The White Snake,” and “The Goose Girl.”<sup>9</sup> The slaughter of horses is not unique to these fairy tales. Horse sacrifice, undertaken as a propitiation or manipulation of supernatural forces, is evident both in archaeological and written records. Anthony marks c. 4800 BCE as the beginning of associations of horses with domestic life, when “horse heads and/or lower legs were first joined with the heads and/or lower legs of cattle and sheep in human funeral rituals” (2007, Kindle Edition, no page numbers). The *Rg Veda*, the oldest of Hindu sacred scriptures (Fieser and Powers 2012, 9), contains a hymn describing the *aśvamedā*, the horse sacrifice. In this hymn, the horse is addressed with blessings: “The gods receive the horse who has been sacrificed, worshipped, consecrated, and sanctified with the cry of ‘*Vaṣ aṭ !*’” (Fieser and Powers 2012, 20). Cross argues that horses were given special treatment in the manner of death; beheading was preferred to throat-slitting because horses were deserving of a warrior’s death (2011, 199).

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<sup>8</sup> All references to the Grimm KHM are from Zipes , 2003, Kindle Edition, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>9</sup> In *Selected Tales From the Posthumous Papers of the Brothers Grimm* Zipes (2003) includes “The Old Soldier and the White Horse.” In this story the horse is beheaded, but the Old Soldier does it at the White Horse’s request, as this will end the enchantment and return him to his human form. I discuss this story in a later chapter.

The horse is not universally protected from death in daily life, ritual, or narrative, but the slaughter in the following stories from the Grimms' iconic collection are striking. The deaths of these horses do not take place in the circumscribed space of the battlefield or altar. Nor are their deaths directly connected to economic pressure or need, a contributing cause seen in horse slaughter and euthanasia into contemporary times.<sup>10</sup> The horse slaughters in the three fairy tales discussed here are marked by undercurrents of abruptness, inequality, and degradation.

Sacrifice requires thinking about the equine body not only as a biological phenomenon but as a social construction. Instead of narrating the obvious connection between the slaughter of livestock and consumption by humans of the flesh and bones, the horses' deaths in these tales are wrapped in layers of belief and meaning. As the natural transforms into the supernatural, the social order is transgressed and reaffirmed.

### **“Faithful Johannes”**

The first of the tales is “Faithful Johannes,” (KHM 6) in which the title character is the loyal servant of a king. After aiding his master in winning (kidnapping) his desired bride, Johannes hears the speech of two ravens describing the trials that will prevent the young king and queen from having their happily ever after. The first obstacle is a horse, “red as a fox,” who, if mounted by the king, will fly up into the air with him, never to be seen again. The crows also reveal that “if someone else jumps on the horse quickly, takes

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<sup>10</sup> Included in KHM is “The Fox and the Horse,” in which a farmer chases his “faithful” horse out of the stable because he is too old to work and the farmer no longer wishes to feed him. The farmer offers the horse the opportunity to satisfactorily complete a difficult task. The horse succeeds and the farmer “gave him all he wanted to eat until the day of the horse’s death”. The last line implies to this author that the horse died naturally.

out the gun that's bound to be in the saddle holster, and shoots the horse dead," the king can be saved. When the red horse appears as prophesied by the ravens, Johannes follows their instructions perfectly: "As the king was about to mount it (the red horse) Faithful Johannes jumped in front of him and swung himself quickly into the saddle." Johannes' rescue is misunderstood:

The king's other servants disliked Faithful Johannes and cried out, 'What a crime! Why did he have to kill that beautiful creature that was to carry the king to his castle?'

But the king declared, 'Be quiet and let him go! He's Johannes, my most faithful servant, and who knows what good may come of this?'

After saving the king from the air-borne horse, Johannes intervenes when the king goes to try on a suit of clothes that will burn him to death, and he revives the queen after she faints during the wedding dancing. All this must be done without Johannes revealing a word about his knowledge, lest more or less of his body be "turned into stone."

The red horse in "Faithful Johannes" is rare in that it intends (according to the ravens) to escape with its victim into the air and in that this fate is directed towards a single individual in the midst of a group.<sup>11</sup> Like many other horses who populate folk literature, this horse is both a boundary breaker and an embodiment of the boundary.

When Johannes precedes his king onto the magnificent horse's back and then shoots it dead, he unintentionally makes a statement to all of the onlookers who are not aware of

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<sup>11</sup> The motif of the horse kidnapping its rider is often seen in stories about the Scottish kelpie or Scandanavian nøkk, the water horse who drowns its victims. Often, these horses will approach one or two people in isolation, or else will attempt to accommodate multiple victims.

the reasons for his actions: Johannes has usurped and destroyed the royal power that the horse represents, which should have rightfully been the king's. Johannes' subsequent tasks represent, on the surface, further undermining of the king's position: Johannes must destroy a bridal outfit that "will look as if it were woven out of gold and silver," threatening the king's wealth; and when the queen faints, Johannes must "draw three drops of blood from her right breast" suggesting a threat to the king's sexual rights with his wife. While bystanders could not be aware of the tragedies Johannes was circumventing in shooting the horse and destroying the clothes, his third task—to revive the queen—has observable results: the queen, who was in a death-like state, recovers. Yet, it is on this occasion that the king becomes angry, has Johannes thrown into prison, and condemns him to death. As he stands on the gallows, Johannes explains his actions, at which point he becomes a statue, presumably as good as dead.

"Faithful Johannes" is one of 37 tales contributed to the Grimms' collection by Dorothea Viehmann, a working-class woman who carried "market wares on her back into the homes of the Kassel gentry" (Thum 1993, 14). Maureen Thum, in discussing the female protagonists in Viehmann's tales, makes the case that Viehmann's stories reveal a storyteller who "had few illusions about the limitations facing any woman within the social context that she had observed" (14). It is likely that Viehmann was also aware of the realities for men of her social class, as "Faithful Johannes" is very much a story about class tension. Johannes is wise, but the king dismisses his knowledge at critical moments, reflecting the antagonism of the upper class for folk wisdom. Linda Dégh describes such antagonism:

Prior to the Grimms, oral tales in their natural state were regarded by the urban upper class intellectuals as silly lies, spreading superstitions and sheer irrationality, fit for drunken soldiers, spinning girls, old wives, and children (1972, 92).

The status of the servant mirrors the status of the horse. The red horse must have magic if it can leap into the air and not immediately return to earth. Johannes may not have active magic, but he does have a magical level of insight, as he is able to devise the correct course of action to win the King the princess and can eavesdrop on the conversations of ravens. The horse exists in a world where some animals, the ravens, speak, but the horse does not speak and does not act to prevent its own death. Johannes, too, is robbed of the freedom to speak of the curses that threaten the king he serves and protects, knowing that if he explains himself, he will be turned to stone.

Master and servant and rider and horse also have an intimate relationship that is complicated by their distinctions in status. Faithful Johannes is a “foster father” to the young king, but the son has dominion over the parent. While Johannes has sworn oaths of loyalty to both the old king and the young king, no promises are given to the “cherished servant” in return. In a similar fashion, total obedience to the rider may be expected of the horse without guarantees against the rider’s negligence. While the servant and horse must trust that the master and rider will behave fairly, the master must entrust his will to the servant and his body to the horse. The first approach to the princess is not made by the



young king, but by Johannes acting in his stead.<sup>12</sup> The king does not question Johannes' willingness to get the king's bride for him, anymore than he thinks twice about riding the strange red horse back to the castle. The king depends on the hierarchy of the community and his place in it.

In the story's resolution, the statue speaks to the king and explains that if he will willingly sacrifice his children, he can restore faithful Johannes. The king does this and is rewarded when Johannes returns to flesh and resurrects the king's children. The storyteller informs the audience, "They all lived happily together until the end of their days" (Zipes). This tale seems to embody a certain amount of hope that a good king will recognize his own debts to his people, but still something is sinister about the exercise of power throughout this story: a horse may be killed to save a king's marriage; a servant may be killed to propitiate a king's wrath; children may be killed to ameliorate a king's guilt. The king in this story wants to be good and wise, but even when he is not, his prerogatives as king are not challenged.

### **"The White Snake"**

"The White Snake," (KHM 17) is a tale of humanity's complicated relationships with animals and the powerful distinction between domestic and wild. After eating a piece of the king's magical white snake, the king's most trusted servant uses his new ability to understand the speech of animals to find evidence to exonerate himself after he is accused of stealing the queen's favorite ring. The servant overhears the ducks in the courtyard and learns one of them has swallowed the ring.

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<sup>12</sup> Compare Faithful Johannes to Skírnir in "Skírnismál" in *The Poetic Edda*. Skírnir is sent by the god Frey to woo Gerth to be Frey's bride (Hollander 1962, 65-73).

Right away the servant grabbed the duck by its neck, carried it into the kitchen, and said to the cook, 'This one's well-fed. It's time you killed it!'

'All right,' said the cook...So he cut off the duck's neck, and when it was being cleaned, the queen's ring was found in its stomach.

Once he is proven innocent, the servant asks only for a horse and some traveling money. As he travels a path through the woods, he performs acts of kindness for some stranded fish and a colony of ants. When the servant encounters several fledgling ravens being thrown out of the nest by their unsympathetic parents, he decides to aid them by killing his horse so that they can feed. The fish, ants, and ravens return to help the servant when he undertakes tasks assigned by the king and princess of a foreign nation to prove his worthiness as a suitor.

The hero of "The White Snake's" actions in regard to his horse are not foretold and not premeditated. Why kill a horse to save young ravens? The actions of the servant even have their own motif designation: B391.3, "Hero kills horse to feed young ravens" (Thompson 1958). The Grimm story is the only sample Thompson cites. In the lived reality of the tellers and audience for this story, it would not be sensible to kill one's horse to satisfy the hunger of ravens; as the narrator states, "Now the servant had to use his own legs," a far less efficient means of transportation over long distances. The world of the fairy tale often calls for extreme action, but this slaughter stands out even in fairy tales. Other folktales include the hero or heroine sharing of their own provisions of food, not slaughtering their animal companion.

The connection between horses and ravens appears in ancient Germanic myth and ritual, where the horse was an appropriate offering to Odin, king of the Norse Gods and represented symbolically by ravens. Pre-Christian Germanic narrative also incorporates the white snake motif: B217.1.1 “Animal languages learned from eating serpent”; in Norse saga the hero Sigurd consumes the heart of a white dragon and is able to understand animal languages. These related motifs indicate that traditional structures and beliefs operate within the story in ways not explicitly stated by the text.

The slaughtering of his horse also has to be examined in the face of the hero’s supposed motivation, his compassion for animals. The hero saves the lives of the fish, the ants, and the ravens, but condemns the horse that has carried him on a long journey. He shows as little consideration for his horse as he showed for the duck who accidentally swallowed the Queen’s ring. The servant has compassion for animals living in the wild, but not for animals in the human domestic sphere.

Maria Tatar describes compassion as a crucial element in the Grimm heroes’ success:

Although male fairy-tale figures have customarily been celebrated for their heroic feats, their greatest achievement actually rests on the passing of a character test. By enshrining compassion and humility, which—unlike intelligence and brute strength—are acquired characteristics rather than innate traits, the Grimm’s tales make it clear to their implied audience (which gradually came to be adolescents) that even the least talented youth can rise to the top (2003, 89-90).

The twinning of compassion and humility seems to be key here in explaining the servant's actions: he can be compassionate to fish, ants, and ravens as they contribute nothing to the wealth or prestige of a man; but his horse, as a source of power and evidence of the servant's connection to royalty (and a position in society), must be sacrificed to prove his lack of concern for his social standing.

The servant also seems to be acting on the principle expressed by Wood (see above, page 19-20) that "the horse is the agent which both disrupts and heals the boundary" (175). The servant is in reality no longer a servant, as he has chosen to become an adventurer, leaving both home and occupation behind. After leaving the woods where he performs favors for the animals, the servant finds himself dazzled by a princess' beauty and goes "before the king, and declare[s] himself a suitor." With the aid of the fish, the ants, and the ravens, the servant wins the right to marry the princess, as well as her love. Without his horse, the servant's social position rises meteorically. In a sense, beginning with his initial disobedience in eating the magic white snake of the king who employs him and ending with marrying well above his social station, the servant disrupts the social boundaries, as well as the communal boundaries when he crosses out of his home kingdom to a foreign kingdom.

Ultimately, the servant's disruptions are limited to his own being. He improves his own station, but in the process no king is overthrown from his position and the norms of governance and family life continue unchanged, including the servant's hetero-normative marriage in which he and his bride live in "peace and happiness" (Zipes).

The source of “The White Snake” is the Family Hassenpflug, who were “among the upper levels of Kassel’s bourgeoisie” (Bluhm and Bischof 2000, 294). The Hassenpflugs were wealthy enough to hire household servants and were well-situated politically. Jacob Hassenpflug, who married the Grimms’ sister Lotte, “eventually had a falling out with Jacob and Wilhelm because of his conservative and opportunistic actions as statesman” (Zipes 2003, np). Scholarship on the Hassenpflugs has largely focused on the contributions and life of Marie Hassenpflug, many of whose stories exemplify the stereotypically passive fairy tale heroine (Thum 1993, 13). From the information available, a picture begins to develop of a family who benefitted from the existing social order, or at least more so than someone like Dorothea Viehmann did.

Yet the Hassenpflugs have their own connection to the crossing of barriers. As the descendants of Huguenots, French Protestants fleeing persecution in Catholic France, the Hassenpflugs occupied multiple worlds. They lived in Germany and were connected to the German government, but at home they spoke French (Paradiz, 95). Like the servant in “The White Snake,” the ancestors of the Hassenpflugs crossed between kingdoms in the hope of elevating their status. Also like the servant, the Hassenpflug men—Johannes and later his son Jacob—seem unconcerned with making radical change in society, only in assuring that they have a relatively high place in the existing hierarchy.

The tension between servant and master seen in “Faithful Johannes” is again at issue in “The White Snake,” but rather than the focus being on the specific relationship, the characters in “The White Snake” dramatize the significance of the domestic sphere and the distribution of power within it. The king in his palace is patriarch and has the

power of life and death over his servants. The servant is threatened with death both by the king he initially serves and by the king whose daughter he wishes to marry. The servant is not without his own status: even if he is less powerful than some humans, he is more powerful than some animals. The proposed punishment for the servant accused of stealing the ring is the same as the punishment of the duck who accidentally consumed the ring: death.

While the servant rides in the wilderness, he is aware that he is not within the human, let alone his own, domestic sphere. He treats the wild fish, ants, and ravens as having high status within their domain: the pond, the sand, the forest. Yet the horse, as a domesticated animal, retains his subordinate status to the servant. The servant also seems to become accustomed to the idea that he is in control over the horse within the domestic sphere of their shared embodiment. First, the servant dismounts to help the fish, separating himself from the horse. Second, he exerts pressure on his horse's body to move to a different path, so as not to trample the ants. Finally, the servant slaughters his horse to feed the ravens, thus both permanently separating himself from his former life and exerting the maximum amount of control within his domestic sphere of power. The servant has leveraged the horse's death both to separate himself from his previous servile status and to give himself influence over new territories: the wilderness, the immortal realm where the tree of life resides, which the ravens access for him (Zipes), and the kingdom in which he marries the princess.

### **“The Goose Girl”**

The death of Falada, the speaking horse in “The Goose Girl” (KHM 89), leaves a significant impact on readers. The heroine of this tale, a princess, is steadily demeaned by her chambermaid on their journey to the royal bridegroom’s kingdom, to the point that the princess appears servant and the servant appears princess. The chambermaid has usurped the princess’s clothes and her magical talking horse, Falada. Afraid that Falada will reveal the secret of the identity switch, the chambermaid-turned-princess asks her royal husband to “summon the knacker and have him cut off the head of the horse that carried me here” (Zipes). This is carried out, and Falada’s head, at the request of the true princess, is nailed under the gateway, where it continues to speak to the true princess.

The impression of the horse-slaughter in “The Goose Girl” on scholars Aarne, Thompson, and Uther can be seen in the many international versions of the tale which have been assigned the tale type ATU 533, *The Speaking Horsehead* even though many of these stories do not contain the motif, B133.3, *Speaking horse-head*. Falada can speak, or at least the audience is told that he can. Yet Falada does not speak in his own defense or that of the princess meant to ride him until after his head is cut off. The false bride’s request that Falada be beheaded is based on the threat of his revealing her true identity, though Falada said not so much as a word when the masquerading chambermaid first arrived at the palace. Meanwhile, the true princess intervenes not to save Falada’s life, but to have the knacker “nail Falada’s head on the wall under the dark gateway, where she could always see it.” It is only after Falada’s head is mounted that his voice is heard. It is the hanging, in public, of the speaking horse head that ultimately leads to the

discovery of the false bride's deception and returns the princess to her rightful place. It seems entirely possible that the princess knew exactly what she was doing.

In her argument for the strong boundary associations of horse imagery and motifs, Wood notes, "A number of horse-head burials have been discovered in Wales...they suggest links to boundary and rite-of passage rituals" (179). Cross comments on the many recorded ritualistic uses of horse heads:

Other sources indicate that horse heads were considered as protection against evil. Their occurrence in foundation deposits (skulls), in Baltic architecture (carved heads on roof posts), on hobby horses and in masking, and as acoustic devices (skulls), in the modern period are all considered to function as either bringers of good luck or warders against bad luck (2011, 197-98).

In her analysis of the First Branch of *The Mabinogi*, Wood ties the presence of horse motifs to Rhiannon's crossing of boundaries as part of her maturation from maiden to wife and mother (see above, pages 17-18) and ties all this to the "Innocent Persecuted Heroine Genre," of which "The Goose Girl" is a part. Certainly the princess has used her horse's severed head to facilitate her own return to the position of bride and bind the chambermaid's ability to continue increasing her power and influence.

Whenever the princess and her companion, Conrad, drive the geese under the gate, an exchange takes place:

'Oh poor Falada, I see you hanging there.'

Then the head answered:

'Dear Queen, is that you really there?'



Oh, if your mother knew,  
her heart would break in two!”

After two days of this, Conrad is driven to complain to the king about “that girl” and her bizarre exchange with a horse head (as well as her use of magic while tending the geese in the meadow). Conrad’s complaint prompts the king to follow the princess and Conrad as they take the geese out. The king desires to know why the princess does these things, and this ultimately leads to the discovery that the goose girl is actually the true bride.

Dorothea Viehmann, the teller of “Faithful Johannes,” contributed this story, and it is as much about class as it is about gender. On a superficial level, an observant and assertive chambermaid is pitted against a princess who at the beginning of the story cannot even fetch a drink of water without beseeching the Lord for mercy and whose idea of minding geese is braiding her own hair.<sup>13</sup> The princess triumphs, but only after her experience with servitude teaches her to use her knowledge and power to affect events, rather than passively accepting all that happens to her. Conversely, the false bride loses the advantage once she is accepted as a princess, and is overwhelmed and “distracted” by the luxury by which she is surrounded.

After the false bride is found out, the king asks the chambermaid what sort of punishment would be fitting for a woman who had engineered such a deception. The chambermaid pronounces the false bride should:

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<sup>13</sup> The princess is deliberately using her hair to manipulate Conrad, the goose boy, and the social situation she has found herself in. For a relevant discussion of the deceptive nature of the Innocent Persecuted Heroine’s passivity, see Elizabeth Panttaja (1993), “Going Up in the World: Class in ‘Cinderella’”.

‘be stripped completely naked and put inside a barrel studded with sharp nails. Then two white horses should be harnessed to the barrel and made to drag her through the streets until she’s dead.’

The chambermaid has pronounced her own death sentence. The chambermaid interprets horse power as destructive, because her access to it is limited and illegitimate. First the chambermaid is demeaned by being give a “nag” (Loc 6658) to ride. Then the status she has won for herself is threatened by a speaking horse who “took good note of” (Loc 6668) her actions. Finally, she is killed according to her own proclamation, dragged by horses.

The intersection of her class and gender denies the chamber maid the use of horse magic to shape the world. Birke and Brandt describe how “until the twentieth century, representations of women with horses were few (and those almost invariable depicted aristocratic women, riding spirited horses)” (2009, 190). Eisemann explains that in the construction of early modern German masculinity, women were denied access to or inhibited in their use of horses:

Relying on the visual evidence in early modern prescriptive guides, we can see that women worked nearby horse-driven wagons, such as when loading them up for market, but were not directed to hold the horses, harness them, or drive the wagons themselves. At times farm women did ride on horseback themselves to market, yet they were expected to balance their goods between the folds of their skirt and legs while seated sidesaddle (189).

Dorothea Viehmann would have recognized the limited nature of lower-class women's access to horses:

After the unrest caused by the Napoleonic wars, the family—she had six children—fell upon hard times, and she was forced to support them by carrying market wares on her back into the homes of the Kassel gentry (Thum, 14).

Viehmann's need to carry her own goods, rather than use a pack animal, affects others' perception of her class:

But she was by no means a farmer, as Wilhelm had described her...though the Viehmanns were not common peasants, neither were they from the bourgeoisie. In straddling the line of so-called middle-class respectability, they suffered tremendous loss and privation during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars (Paradiz, 152).

The widowed Viehmann was the earner for her family, and her life was considerably less gentrified than that of the Grimms or the Hassenpflugs.

Interesting parallels can be seen between the princess-geese girl and Viehmann. Both experience a loss of status and wealth through the aggression of others. The goose girl regains her throne through the magic of her words: her interchanges with Falada, her charms used to foil Conrad, and ultimately her admission to the stove (overheard by the king) of what has befallen her. Viehmann also enters a higher social stratum through the power of her words:

Viehmann possessed a savant-like ability in telling unusually compelling fairy tales. It was her way of overcoming the hardship that so many years of privation

had placed upon her shoulders. She took pride in this gift, and her weekly visits to the Grimms' home were occasions she savored. Jacob and Wilhelm showered her with luxuries she could never afford for herself: a cup —of coffee, a glass of wine (Paradiz, 154).

These episodes of horse slaughter in the Grimm *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* locate equine liminality in corporeality. It is the flesh and blood of the horse rather than the active speed and strength of the horse that allows the protagonist to both challenge and reinstate boundaries. Placed in juxtaposition, the First Branch of *The Mabinogi* and Grimm KHM 6, 17, and 89 show different—if overlapping—understandings of how horse magic is embodied.

In the First Branch of *The Mabinogi*, protagonists rely on the horse in action. Pwyll hunts and fights on horseback. Rhiannon uses her horse's deceptive gait to establish her status and mastery of magic. Pryderi shows enthusiasm in caring for his foster father's horses, proving his identity as the missing prince of Dyfed. In her punishment, Rhiannon takes on the onus of equine work without adopting equine form.

In the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* stories, the horses create the strongest magic and make the loudest statements in death. In "Faithful Johannes" and "The White Snake," the silent horse is in contrast to other animals who can speak. In "The Goose Girl," the horse can speak, but only does so after his head is separated from his body. Falada speaks once he becomes incapable of the running and carrying for which horses are valued. These three tales show a form of blood magic in which the horse sacrifice plays a key role.

Puhvel examines a “tryptich” (1987, 270) of Indo-European horse sacrifice: the Indic *aśvamedā*, the Roman October Equus, and the Irish coronation ritual. He finds that, “the ritual enactment of the horse sacrifice redounded to the weal of the canonically constituted total society” (276). The blood magic of the horses in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* reaffirms the social order, even as it appears to contest that social order.

In all three Grimm stories, the person who decides to slaughter the horse is a member of the servant class but has exceptional access to the ruling class. Faithful Johannes tutors and acts on behalf of the king. The “servant” has access to the royal family’s living quarters and magical items. The chambermaid is the chaperone and even temporarily usurps the position of the princess she serves. The act of killing horses by these individuals either appears as (in the case of “Faithful Johannes”) or is in actuality an attack on or rejection of royal prerogative and privilege (in “The White Snake” and “The Goose Girl”). Despite the appearance of subversiveness, in its death the horse reaffirms or reestablishes the hierarchy, where royalty keeps or returns to its elevated position, men exercise control over the futures of women, and humans can call upon the labor of animals for their own gain.

These episodes of horse slaughter are startling because they suggest the possibility of disruption while actually engendering continuity. They happen outside the sanctified and ordered space of religious ritual and thereby imply asocial action, yet the sacrifice yields social validation. Victor Turner argues that in ritual liminality humans create reversals: “The liminality of the strong is socially unstructured or simply structured; that of the weak represents a fantasy of structural superiority” (1969, 168). In

these *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* tales, the horse becomes the space of ritual liminality and structural reversals. The servant in “The White Snake” wields deadly power over the horse he rides, paralleling the power held over him by the kings he serves. It is significant that this happens in the forest, away from the palace of either king. The chambermaid orchestrates Falada’s death, yet she distances herself from the enactment of the ritual by two removes.<sup>14</sup> The chambermaid’s structural reversal happens away from ritual space and the reward of the horse sacrifice redounds to the princess-geese girl who completes the ritual by enshrining the head at the gateway.

Faithful Johannes’ relationship with the horse sacrifice is complicated by the fact that Johannes functions as both protagonist and donor in this story. He performs the horse sacrifice, but he also *is* the horse sacrifice. The red horse that Johannes kills is associated with the celestial realm both because the horse can fly and because it is sacrificed to ensure the success of the king’s marriage.<sup>15</sup> Johannes, arguably, also ascends into a celestial realm when he is turned to stone and considered dead. It is only after he turns to stone that Johannes asks the king to repay the loyalty Johannes has given him.<sup>16</sup> By willingly sacrificing his body, Johannes ascends to a position where he can command kings, instead of being commanded by them. Johannes parallels the traditional role of the horse in service to the king, and thus also “go[es] to the gods on paths pleasant to go on”

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<sup>14</sup> “‘Dearest Husband, I’d like you to do me a favor.’

‘I’d be glad to,’ he answered.

‘Well then, summon the knacker and have him cut off the head of the horse that carried me here.’”

<sup>15</sup> The vedic *aśvameda* also relates to the king’s marriage; the queen “symbolically cohabited with it (the sacrificed horse) under covers, while the entourage engaged in obscene banter” (Puhvel 1987, 271).

<sup>16</sup> Significantly, this happens while the queen is in church.

(Fieser and Powers, 20).<sup>17</sup> After Johannes is reanimated, the king's sons' heads reattached, and the miraculous salvation of all revealed to the queen, "they all lived happily together until the end of their days", which can imply that Johannes is counted as a member of the royal family, not as a household servant. Additionally, it is Johannes who bridges relational gaps, between generations and between genders.

The horse gives physical form to hierarchical, relational liminality. In "Faithful Johannes," "The White Snake," and "The Goose Girl," to sacrifice the horse is to confront and resolve the perils of this liminal realm. The individuals who engage directly with the magic engendered by the death of the horse—Johannes, the servant, and the princess-geese girl—find the resolutions to their conflicts. Johannes and the trusted servant are no longer pseudo-family to royalty, they become actual family to royalty. The princess is returned to the social station for which she is bred. Sacrificing the horse eliminates personal structural instability and ambiguity.

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<sup>17</sup> The priest speaks this to the horse during the *aśvamedā*.

## **THE HORSE IN RELATION: EQUINE BODIES AND BINARY TENSIONS**

Sometimes the audience encounters in supernatural folklore individuals who appear to be horses, but the horse body is a masquerade.<sup>18</sup> The blood magic of horse sacrifice can affirm boundaries and resolve personal structural ambiguities, but the physical shape of the horse can also reveal the instability of boundaries and embody the ambiguity of social structures. Whether the horse body is worn by a water spirit or a human under a punitive enchantment, it challenges assumptions about socially constructed hierarchies used to order the world.

### **Kelpies, Nøkks, Boobries and the Voracious Equine Water Spirit**

While vacationing in Inverness in August 2012, I took a tourist cruise, run by Jacobite Cruises Ltd, of the area, which included the famous Loch Ness. The tour guide shared several stories of Loch Ness and its monster, who is seen in many forms. One description of “a beautiful black horse” that lured unsuspecting people to come and touch it or ride it. Once they touched the horse, they were stuck to its hide, at which point the black horse pulled them into the loch and drowned them. One man lived to tell the tale by cutting off his own hand, arriving at the village market with a bloody stump and a fantastic story (unrecorded, 26 August 2012).

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<sup>18</sup> I am following Doniger’s (2004) use of masquerade, where a being of one species takes on the form of another.



The black horse of Loch Ness is one example of the kelpie, also known as the water horse or “each uisge.” Howey describes kelpies as “both mischievous and malicious in their actions” (145), but that does not fully express the complexity of their behavior. The kelpie appears not only as a deceitful hunter, but also as a deliverer of warnings, an ardent swain, and a powerful but often vengeful workhorse.

The kelpie and its Scandinavian kin, the nøkk or näck, are famous for their efforts to drown those who do not recognize them. Some of these stories include narrow escapes. Reimund Kvideland and Henning K. Sehmsdorf (1988) include three stories of people who managed to avoid being drowned by the nøkk through inadvertent but powerful speech. In the first, a shepherd is weary after chasing down her roving sheep, and sees a horse she might ride. “She fastened her garter onto it for reins...and led it to a mound to climb on its back. But just as she mounted it, she said: ‘I don’t think I need to ride after all’ (257). The word “need” is another name for the nøkk, and the water spirit, thinking it heard its name, jumped into a nearby lake and disappeared. In the second story, a little boy calls to his brother, “Nika! Nika!” after the brother and several other children have climbed on a strange horse’s back and are carried towards the water. Thinking he has heard his name, the nøkk disappears, leaving the children behind. In the third story, the nøkk takes the form of a horse so large that seven women attempt to ford the river on its back. The horse suddenly disappears when one of the women says, “‘By Jesus’ cross,/never have I seen so big a horse’” (258). The utterance of the holy name causes the water spirit to disappear.

In the first two cases, recognition—or at least the appearance of recognition—is the nøkk’s undoing. The nøkk gains power over its victims by using the “numinous” shape of the horse to attract the unaware (Doniger 2006). Once recognized for the water spirit it is, the nøkk loses its advantage. The nøkk’s fear of the human power to name—whether hearing its own name or the name of a greater power— suggests the pitting of the chaotic forces of nature against the the impulse to catalogue, to assign individuals to a proper place in a hierarchical order.

The physical manifestations of these beliefs in hierarchical classification are even more powerful than speech. Both the nøkk and the kelpie can be controlled by the human innovation of the iron bit, bridle, and plow harness (Douglas 1901, 156; Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1988, 258), which locks them into the horse shape for which such implements were designed.<sup>19</sup> Even with the many tools humans have at their disposal, attempts to control the water-horse are not without peril.

A laird of the Grahams of Morphie attempted to use the strength and endurance of the kelpie for his ends. The laird managed to yoke a kelpie and “compelled the robust spirit to carry prodigious loads of stones for the building, and did not relieve him till the whole was finished” (Douglas 1901 [2007], 156). Once freed, the kelpie uttered a curse on the family: “Sair back and sair banes, / Drivin’ the laird o’ Morphie’s stanes! / The laird O’ Morphie’ll never thrive / As lang’s the kelpie is alive” (ibid). To this curse is attributed the decline and extinction of the Grahams of Morphie.

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<sup>19</sup> Heather McNeil (2001) describes stealing the kelpie’s bridle as the key to controlling it, as opposed to humans imposing a bridle on the creature (67-72). See below.

The Campbell of Islay Manuscript relates an account of another family that paid the price for trying to take advantage of the water-horse's labor, though this time the creature is known as a boobrie:

'The son went down and fetched up the horse [that had been feeding by the loch], which appeared to have been quite used to ploughing, drawing first uphill, then down, perfectly steadily, until they reached the end of the furrow, close to the loch. On an attempt to turn the horses, this borrowed one became rather restive, which brought the whip into use, though lightly. No sooner had the thong touched him than he instantly assumed the form of a most enormous Boobrie' (i.e. the monstrous bird form which is his favourite shape), 'and uttering a shout which appeared to shake the earth, plunged into the loch, carrying with him the three horses and plough' (Howey, 145-46).

The farmer and his son managed to jump clear of the plow, but their horses were never seen again.

In each of these cases, the water horse seems not to be objecting to the work per se, but rather the abuse of his labor. The kelpie who built the castles for the Grahams complains not of the indignity of labor, but of the soreness of his flesh and bones after being worked without ceasing. The boobrie pulls the plow willingly for a time, but at the touch of the whip turns from mild-mannered workhorse to carnivorous bird.

Kelpies and their cousins seem to be a manifestation of the difficulty humans have interacting with the Other, whether animals, supernatural creatures, or people of a different class or gender, on an egalitarian basis: "Animals are below humans...but, on the

other hand, animals may be assimilated to gods” (Doniger 2004, 712). The kelpie is both animal-like and god-like. It is treated as a beast of burden, yet it has the capacity to change shape, predict deaths, and lay curses.

The power of the water horse is immense, and the human that manages to harness the water horse greatly increases his production. Yet the achievement is short-lived, as the kelpie or boobrie rebels against its captivity and often undoes whatever progress has been made. Bourke writes, “The model of society [fairy legends] offer is firm, yet forgiving: flexible enough to accommodate transgression” (1999, 235). These Scottish kelpie legends emphasize that need for flexibility and accommodation. Working with Turner’s (1969 [2011]) work on *communitas*, liminality, and reversal, the kelpie stories dramatize the need for reversal built into the structure. The horse must not always be in a position of servitude to human, or the system is not sustainable and will eventually fail. Humans cannot endlessly and thoughtlessly exploit the world around them. We must respect the boundaries of the bodies of the Other (Bourke 1999, 121).

Yet the boundaries between human culture and nature spirit do not prevent the human and the water-horse from being drawn to each other.<sup>20</sup> Just as humans find themselves drawn to literally harness the beauty and power of the water-horse, kelpies and their brethren can be lured by the comforts of human civilization. Howey cites a story from “Boswell, in his *Journal of Johnson’s Tour to the Hebrides*,” (144) in which “the

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<sup>20</sup> In Japanese tradition, the interaction of water spirits (typically in the form of dragons), equine bodies, and humanity is capable of bringing positive results. Eiichirō describes “the popular belief that fine horses are the offspring of dragons, or of water-gods of one sort or another (1950, 2). Como also refers briefly to “deities that were identified with dragon horses (*ryūma*), enter[ing] in the mainstream of the royal cult” (2007, 407) by the beginning of the “early Heian period (794-1185)” (396).

man lighted a great fire and had a sow roasted in it, the smell of which attracted the monster” (ibid). The water-horse’s desire for roasting meat, a human cultural adaptation, proves its undoing.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps even more alluring for the kelpie is a beautiful woman. Heather McNeil retells, “The Kelpie and the Girl,” originally titled “The Water Horse of Barra” (67). In this story, a kelpie in the form of a beautiful black horse attracts a young woman into petting him, at which point she finds herself unable to remove her hand from his coat. The kelpie proclaims his intention to take her as his wife. The young woman thinks quickly:

‘How very kind of you. But if I am to live with you in the water, I shall need a shawl to keep me warm. Will you sit with me while I finish knitting the one I had just begun?’ (69).

The kelpie agrees and changes his shape, becoming a handsome young man. As they sit together, the woman lures the kelpie to sleep with lullabies. As he sleeps, she takes his necklace/bridle, silencing him and trapping him in equine form. She leads him home and puts a cow halter around his neck.

The kelpie performs as a draft horse over the course of the year, helping with plowing and carrying, for which he is rewarded by the woman with feeding, brushing, and hearing more lullabies and love songs. At the end of the year, on the advice of the local wise man, the woman removes the cow halter, which allows the kelpie to take the

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<sup>21</sup> Doniger argues “The devouring equine mouth is a projection onto the horse of the violence that *we* inflict upon *it* in taming it, by putting a bit in its mouth” (2006, Kindle Edition, page numbers not available).

form of a man again, and returns his bridle/necklace to him. The kelpie confesses he has learned to love and care for others and chooses to become human so that he may marry the young woman (McNeil, 67-72).

In “The Kelpie and the Girl,” both woman and kelpie are drawn to each other, despite the great risk of destruction they pose to each other. Approaching a strange, feral horse is not safe, even if it is in fact a horse and not a water spirit. Yet the woman is drawn:

‘What a splendid creature you are,’ said the girl, and without even realizing she had moved as well, the girl stood up, reached out, and began to stroke the neck of the kelpie. To her dismay, she found she could not remove her hand (69).

Likewise, the kelpie cannot resist the domestic comforts the woman offers: he readily lets his guard down for a chance to sit with the woman while she knits and sings him lullabies and love songs.<sup>22</sup>

The relationship between kelpie and woman in this story also reflects the complex nature of humanity’s relationship with domesticated animals, the horse particularly . We bring them into our domestic circle, relying on them for their labor to grow food, transport goods, and carry us. Yet if we slip in our caution and control, the horses we work with can severely injure and even kill us, sometimes without even intending to do so. This is why some tools around a barn can seem sadistic: whips, harsh bits, spurs, and twitches.

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<sup>22</sup> Bourke comments on one fairy legend, “The cooper in this story, like the smiths and midwives who feature in others, is immune from danger when he puts his trade—his special knowledge—at the fairies’ service” (167).

For the horse, the relationship with humans is equally ambivalent. We can drastically increase the life span of the domestic horse as well as making it far more comfortable than the lives of its feral and wild kin: veterinary and farrier care, regular grooming, better feed, and safety from predators all can come to the domestic horse. Yet they are vulnerable to negligence and cruelty, including overwork, as with the kelpie used by the Graham of Morphie.

In the case of the kelpie and the girl, the relationship becomes positive and they each learn to trust and respect each other, resulting ultimately in a mutually-fulfilling relationship between husband and wife. But before reaching the promise of a “long life together of great, and human, joy” (McNeil, 72), the kelpie and the girl seek to trick and use each other, and the girl is anxious when the time comes to release the kelpie from the cow halter and return his bridle: “‘But then we’ll be in his power,’ said the girl. ‘Give him back his bridle, and *chi sinn na chi sinn*,’<sup>23</sup> ‘said the Wise Man’” (McNeil, 71). The stories of kelpies, nøkks, and other horse-shape-shifters are stories that dramatize our anxiety about relationships and their internal power structures: can we interact with another—an Other—without attempting to overpower each other?

### **Female Witches and Male Persecutors in Legend**

The difficulty and complexity of creating functioning relationships between male and female and horse and human is played out in other ways in horse masquerades. Witches and sorcerers will transform their human victims into horses and take on the horse shape themselves, sometimes willingly and sometimes not.

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<sup>23</sup> “We shall see what we shall see.”

Wendy Doniger includes the following story from Josef Baudis' collection of *Czech Folk Tales* in her essay on masquerading animals:

[A Czech farmhand went] where the witches were having their feast....Now, when he came there, the farmer's wife knew him, and, to hide herself from him, she turned herself into a white horse. But he did not lose sight of the horse. He mounted it and went to the smith with it, and told him to shoe it.<sup>24</sup> Next day the woman had four horseshoes on, two on her hands and two on her feet. And she had to stay like that always! (2004, 713).<sup>25</sup>

In Doniger's analysis, "the men in the story...impose [restrictive] culture on the women" (714). The witch in this story uses the shape of the horse to try to make good her escape of the boundaries imposed on her because of her gender. Unfortunately for her, she unwittingly gives her servant the means of safely extricating himself from the liminal space he has come to, the witches' feast, and returning his world to the proper order. The means, of course, being the horse, who is extremely good, either in life or in death, at negotiating liminal reversals for its rider or driver, as "Pwyll Prince of Dyfed," or slaughterer, as is the case for the horses in KHM 6, 17, and 69 (see above).

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<sup>24</sup> G211.1.1 is the designation given for the motif of "witch in form of horse" and G211.1.1.2 is "Witch as horse shod with horseshoes."

<sup>25</sup> Howey refers to a similar story: "A remarkable story is told at Yarrowfoot of a witch who was shod whilst in the form of a mare, and actually sold to her husband as that animal. When he removed the bridle, however, she resumed her proper form as his wife, though the horse-shoes still remained attached to her hands and feet" (174).



Moreover, once in the shape of a horse, the witch is incapable of or unwilling to struggle against the power of the male servant who mounts her.<sup>26</sup> Toelken (1995) argues that horses are used in constructing “vertical imagery [which] is used to underscore the dominator-dominated theme” (135) in some ballads. In her equine state, the witch takes on the role of servant, standing beneath the farmhand, and the farmhand takes on the role of master. The farmhand is acting as surrogate for the farmer, as Faithful Johannes does for his king. The farmhand returns the farmer’s wife to the farmer’s domestic sphere of power and ensures that she will never leave again.

This tension between servility on one side and aggression or rebellion on the other is important to stories of humans taking the shape of horses. The role of the male servant in unmasking and subduing the witch is repeated. Kvideland and Sehmsdorf include a legend “The Serving Boy” (183-34), in which a serving boy spies on the mistress of the household and uses her magical salve to fly after her as she attends a sabbath on Easter. Once there, the serving boy meets the “gentleman” the mistress has been going to see. After the boy refuses to sign his book, the gentleman gives him a black horse to ride home. The serving boy

put the horse into the stable, as the gentleman had instructed him to do, leaving the saddle blanket on the horse...He went inside and asked his master to come out and see what a big and fine horse he had gotten on Easter night...the master told the boy to take the blanket off....But as soon as the serving boy did this, his mistress appeared in the stall where the horse had been.

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<sup>26</sup> Toelken (1995, esp. 35-39), discusses the use of horses and horseback riding as metaphors for human anatomy and intercourse.

‘Well, well,’ said the farmer, ‘so it is you.’

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘I’ve been out on Easter night.’

Well, there was nothing more to be said about it. (184).

This time it is the witch’s master, “the gentleman” who turns her into a horse. By doing so, he effects a reversal of power, whereby the witch, who is the mistress of the farm, becomes subject to the serving boy’s control. It is not explicit why the gentleman betrays his student in this way (though a figure who is presumably the devil may not need a reason), but the transformation suggests a punishment (see above pg. 16-17): to be turned into a horse and given to a serving boy to ride would be a humbling experience, especially for someone of the propertied class. Yet while there is a power reversal here, the gender hierarchy is kept very much intact.

In their notes to this story, Kvideland and Sehmsdorf state,

In a number of legends, the witch rides the serving boy in animal shape to the sabbath, but the boy tricks her into trading places on the way home. In the present narrative, by contrast, it is the devil himself who imposes the horse shape on the witch (184).

“The Blacksmith’s Wife of Yarrowfoot” is a tale of the former type.

In “The Blacksmith’s Wife of Yarrowfoot” (Douglas 1901 [2007], 190-91), a blacksmith’s apprentice notices his younger brother’s failing health; the younger brother confesses that he is “quite worn-out” (190) from being turned into a horse by way of a magical halter (D535) and ridden by their mistress to her “hideous feasts” on a nightly basis (190). The older brother arranges to take his younger brother’s place and is ridden

by the witch to the feast. He manages to remove the halter from his head, then lies in wait, gets the halter over the witch's head as she returns to his stall, and transforms her into a mare. The blacksmith's apprentice rides the mare to exhaustion and gets her front shoes replaced.

After returning home, the apprentice releases the witch from her halter and she sneaks into bed with her husband. In the morning, she complains of being ill and calls for a doctor. During the doctor's examination, it is found that "horseshoes were tightly nailed to both hands!" (191). The witch is summarily tried and executed and the younger brother is able to recuperate from his travails. In this third story, the peril and the antagonism are increased, as the witch explicitly causes harm and the apprentice that turns the tables on her is deliberate in seeing her punished. This is also the only story of the three in which the witch is legally prosecuted and executed.

All three of these stories theoretically "impose culture on the women," as putting shoes and clothing (the horse blanket) on the witches restrains and subjugates them. These are modifications to the horse's body so that the horse may better serve men's purpose. The modifications also interfere with the horse's ability to live according to its own nature. The hair coat that has been compressed by tack is less weather resistant. A horse who is long accustomed to shoes may feel tender-footed without them, and thus must wear them even when the hoof's structure may be better served by time spent barefoot.<sup>27</sup> Thus the shod horse finds it may only be comfortable within the human

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<sup>27</sup> I have personally experienced this with my own horse.

domestic sphere, much as a witch whose hands and feet have been pierced may never freely move about again.

These stories target women as objects of suspicion and scorn, especially within the rural community. Robin Briggs (1996), examining the witch hunting craze of early modern Europe, argues that the reason women in general were more likely than men to be accused of witchcraft was not because of overt misogyny, but because women's social position and responsibilities made them more vulnerable to these accusations. Among the realities governing women's lives, Briggs points out,

There are also reasons to suppose that women were less able to mobilize groups of kin than were men; they were more likely to marry away from their own village and family, while patriarchal family structures tended to separate them much more firmly from their blood relations (273).

Barbara Rieti discovered this could also influence witch accusations in more recent times in Newfoundland: "Since 'new' women were an unknown quantity (from the native point of view), they might be first choice if a witch was desired" (2008, 24).

In all three of these witch-horse transformation stories, the woman is identified as someone's wife and this as evidence that she is likely not well-integrated into her community, having come from outside it. The horse, like the wife who comes from outside the village, may also be viewed as straddling this dividing line between the strange and the familiar. In popular and scholarly treatment, horses are often described as being never fully domesticated, as always retaining some of their wildness (See Doniger 2006, Hannah 2006 for

examples).<sup>28</sup> Someone who has worked with horses could certainly tell you about the perils of letting your guard down, of becoming too comfortable.<sup>29</sup>

Women and horses have in common their importance to the well-being and production of the European household and family unit. In addition to the labor they did, women and horses served as embodied evidence of the household patriarch's control and worthiness.

Squarely within the province of perpetuating an extant, dominant social hierarchy, one should also understand a housefather managing equine<sup>30</sup> and human bodies to be a quasi-religious act through providing a small scale model of the godly household (Eisemann, 57).

Briggs describes women as responsible for “house, dairy, poultry and garden, including the marketing of surplus produce from these areas” (268). Horses, for those who could

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<sup>28</sup> This view of horses may have very ancient origins; Miranda Aldhouse Green, “Horses were domesticated, but they enjoyed a special relationship with humankind which included a particular respect, and their management as animals which were rounded up and broken in at need (Cunliffe 1993, 84), rather than kept in herds like cattle, may support the notion that horses were regarded as belonging both to the wild and the settled worlds” (Davies and Jones 1997, 6).

<sup>29</sup> It is common in the barn for teachers to remind their students not to walk directly behind a horse, not to run at horses, and to generally remain vigilant. A horse may respond instinctively to a perceived threat by kicking or rearing, and can easily injure a human who is unaware. While being ridden, a horse may respond to stimuli that the rider does not know of, and the consequent “spooking” may throw a rider who has let their attention wander. This author personally was kicked in the shin when I approached a horse who was being annoyed by leg wrap, and did not pay attention to my angle of approach.

<sup>30</sup> Birke and Brandt (2009) argue that

There is ambiguity in the way we imagine horses, for at the same time as they symbolize great feats of conquest, those feats depend upon the horse becoming tamed, its wildness contained by domestication—and so implicitly feminized (193).

afford them, were the animal par excellence for plowing and carrying goods overland (Kalekna 2007). Eisemann argues that “the early modern household extended even to the stable. In fact, the home and stable were frequently used interchangeably for different economic purposes” (32). Yet humans did not see their domesticated animals as kindred:

“Descartes’ mechanistic view of animals as mindless automatons reflects a common early modern belief that rationality was one of the primary defining characteristics of human beings, a quality perceived to be wholly absent in other animals (32).

Women’s position on the human side of the dividing line that is rationality and reason is not assured. Briggs describes the belief that “Deficiency in capacity to reason supposedly left women unable to control the baser part of their nature” (285). Even as women are not entirely human, horses are not entirely inhuman.<sup>31</sup> They are “documented as enjoying some of the same sophisticated desires, such as enjoying music, as humans” (Eisemann, 53).

Women were also “expected to offer basic medical care to their own families and routinely consulted experienced neighbours or known feminine healers (Briggs, 270).”

Horses also have their own associations with healing, as in this charm: “Saint Olav rode in/green wood:/broke his little horse’s foot./Bone to bone,/flesh to flesh/skin to skin./In the name of God,/amen (Kvideland and Sehmsdorf, 141). Green (Davies and Jones 1997) cites evidence of the association of horses with healing cults in ancient Gaul (13, 16). The horse is also a site of contestation for “representatives of two different approaches to supernatural/magical forces” (Ó Héalaí 1995, 171).

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<sup>31</sup> See above, p. ??? that horses are entitled to a warrior’s death.

The degree to which a wife or a horse could increase production, wealth, and well-being is proportionate to how threatening their liminality is to patriarchal society. In these three stories, the wife has gone out of the household, abandoning her feminine sphere of responsibility. Like a run-away or intractable horse, she has decreased the capacity for production and commerce. In all tales, the witches are not known to have children; women's centrality in child-bearing and rearing is woven into the gendered narratives of witchcraft.

Mares appear to be far more suspect in their sexuality and procreative power than their male counterparts. Houwen (1994) analyzes medieval bestiaries and states that "mares could symbolise lustful women" (486). Historically, "when raiding into enemy territory, the Arab sewed up the mare's vagina to prevent her mating with an inferior stallion" (Kelekna, 220). Eisemann (2012), in her study of early modern German "hippology" publications, describes at least one author who "displays underlying concerns about lacking complete control over female bodies in his depiction of broodmares as sexually promiscuous and physically impure" (49). Eisemann also finds that "it is still the act of the stallion and the setting that the humans create around [the mare] that causes her to reflect things onto her unborn foal" (46). Thus the female generative power requires masculine influence.

Like mares not under strict control of human male handlers, witches of these stories have corruptive sexuality. A second story collected by Kvideland and Sehmsdorf, "Riding the Minister's Wife" (185-187), opens,

Once there was a minister, a handsome and well-to-do man. He was newly married, at the time of this story, and had a beautiful young wife of whom he was particularly fond. She was in every way the most exceptional woman thereabouts. There was, however, one problem in the marriage, which the minister did not regard as so very minor: she disappeared every Christmas Eve, and no one knew what became of her (185).

The wife is newly married, beautiful, and escapes her husband's supervision—on Christmas Eve, when he is at the center of the festival rituals— thus she is under suspicion. The male protagonist of this story, who was ridden to the meeting by the minister's wife as if he were a horse, discovers the minister's wife and other women paying the Devil in menstrual blood (186), which was “considered unclean and therefore dangerous” (Kvideland and Sehmsdorf, 187). The other stories are less explicit in their references to uninhibited—and therefore, in the patriarchal world view, unacceptable—behavior but allow the reader to infer. In the “Blacksmith's Wife of Yarrowfoot,” the younger brother describes waiting while the witch “and I know not what other vile creatures hold their hideous feast” (Douglas, 190). The Czech farmhand's wife is found at a feast, and the witch in “The Serving Boy” is discovered alone with a “gentleman.”

Briggs summarizes the scholarly and popular understanding of women's nature in early modern Europe:

Deficiency in capacity to reason supposedly left women unable to control the baser part of their nature, while their mysterious cycles were evidence for the way they were dominated by womb. Eve had been responsible for original sin, and



women's attraction for men led to corruption and death; women's inconstancy and self-love made them natural allies of the Devil, an eternal danger of betrayal for the men they lured on (285).

The women in these stories go out into mischief and, like the unclean mare, bring or lead males into danger with or after them.

Thus in her many parallels to the horse, woman who is witch is well-chastised and controlled by the same tools used to chastise and control (and generally render useful) horses: saddle, bridle, whip, and especially shoes. Horseshoes are intended as a positive aid to horses, but they do have the result of making a return to a feral or wild state more difficult. For women, there is no ambiguity about the results of wearing iron shoes.<sup>32</sup> A woman who finds herself with iron nails holding horseshoes to her hands and feet has been crippled and is unable to move or work. Doniger (2004) writes, "Feet function as signs that allow a particular individual to be recognized. Moreover, they are signs not merely of individual identity and class identity but the identity of the species as a whole" (714). The witch's foot and hand must be mutilated, so that she can always be identified as someone not a part of the constructed human society. The witch can no longer threaten the social hierarchy because she is crippled and marked as something other than human.

### **Male Sovereignty and the Equine Body in Fairy Tales**

Men are also subject to being transformed into horses, as was the case with the blacksmith's apprentices. As with those apprentices, sometimes a boy or man is turned

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<sup>32</sup> KHM 53, "Snow White," ends with the evil queen dancing to death in red-hot iron slippers (Zipes, Loc 4347).

into horse as a result of the malice, or at least selfishness, of the villain, and no motive is stated beyond proximity. The nature of these transformations and the human lives returned to by these men in horse masquerade, reveal a divide in how men versus women are incorporated or reincorporated into the social structure.

“Beauty and the Horse” (Bay 1899, 14-20), is such a tale. The tale is a typical version of ATU 425C, “Beauty and the Beast,” beginning with a merchant who has three daughters and shelters at an enchanted castle after one of his business ventures turns sour. The beast, in this case a horse, transforms back into a prince after Beauty promises to stay with him always. “He now told [Beauty] that both he and the whole land had been enchanted by his wicked step-mother, who had converted him into a horse” (20). In the world of Fairy Tales, the fact that the enchantress is a step-mother<sup>33</sup> may serve as sufficient evidence for why she would enact such an enchantment.<sup>34</sup>

The prince’s transition from human to horse is gentler, in some ways, than that experienced by the witches or their victims. Even in horse form, the prince manages to act upon his patriarchal royal privilege. He asserts his right to the merchant’s life or progeny in exchange for the merchant’s use of agricultural resources (attempting to pick flowers from the garden). He sets conditions on Beauty’s interaction with her family,

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<sup>33</sup> In Briggs’ discussion of the gendering of witchcraft, he argues, “...there was great temptation to displace [sibling rivalry] and blame wives for hostilities... which may not have been their doing. Such feelings were almost certain when stepchildren came into the picture, at least in those families where there was something to squabble over” (274).

<sup>34</sup> This story was included in *Danish Folk & Fairy Tales*, published in 1899, by which point seven editions of the Grimms’ *KHM* had been printed. The Grimms had systematically changed villainous mothers to stepmothers in their included tales, so at this point in history it may have become a common understanding between tale audiences and tellers that stepmothers are antagonistic towards their stepchildren. See Maria Tatar 2003, especially pp. 139-155.

attempting to limit her ability to leave the horse's domestic sphere. Finally, the horse extracts a promise from Beauty that "she would always stay with him and never leave him" (19). While the prince is a horse, it is Beauty who is domesticated.

The stepmother is a familiar villain, but male antagonists also impose the equine form on humans. In "The Old Soldier and the White Horse," (Zipes 2003), collected from the posthumous papers of the Brothers Grimm, an old soldier finds work with the lord of a castle who is actually a sorcerer. The old soldier defies the sorcerer's orders to feed the white horse only meat and the black poodle only hay. In response, the white horse gives the old soldier advice that helps him use the sorcerer's magic to make himself young and to defy and escape the sorcerer without consequences. The white horse gets the now young soldier a position as a royal gardener's assistant. When war comes to the kingdom, the white horse provides the soldier with horses and armor to defeat the enemy; and the soldier succeeds, earning him the admiration of the king. The soldier marries the king's daughter and becomes his heir. After forgetting his "faithful horse" (Zipes, loc 15096) for several years, the soldier-turned-prince summons the white horse, who instructs him to cut off his and the poodle's heads. The beheading ends the sorcerer's spell and transforms the horse and poodle back into a prince and princess, who are able to "return to their country and lived happily ever after" (ibid).

The prince's transformation into a horse temporarily disenfranchises him from his kingdom, but like the horse in "Beauty and the Horse," he maintains his capacity for

speech and has access to reality-altering magic.<sup>35</sup> The soldier obeys the white horse when he gives commands and implicitly trusts him.

Sometimes the teller of the tale includes a justification for the man's transformation. In "The Little Mare," (Bay, 28-34), an arrogant prince has an old man and his ugly mare driven out of his sight. The old man is in fact a "conjurer" (29) in disguise and decides the prince needs to learn compassion:

'Now you try and see what it is to be a mare like mine, and that you shall be until an innocent young princess calls you her dearest friend.' The moment he had uttered these words, the prince was transformed into just such an ugly little mare as the one which he could not bear to look at (29).

The mare-prince is taken in by the son of a farmer, Hans, and works hard. Hans dotes on the prince-mare. The farmer decides to sell the mare and she is bought by a king for his younger daughter while Hans gets work in the royal stable.

After the mare and Hans rescue a precious golden ring lost by the king's eldest daughter, Hans earns the right to marry the eldest daughter, but he shares the credit with the mare. The younger daughter, upon hearing this,

skipped down to the stable, folded her arms around the mare's neck, kissed her, and said: 'No, you shall not be married to my sister, she may take Hans; but I am going to keep you always, for *you are my dearest friend*' (34).

The mare turns back into a prince; and he and his bride, the younger daughter, return to his kingdom. After his punishment, "[the prince] is no more haughty or conceited, but

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<sup>35</sup> In stark contrast to the poodle/princess, who is silent and largely invisible throughout the story.

noble and good” (34). For the prince, becoming a horse is punitive, but it also allows the opportunity for growth. He becomes a better prince because of his experience, and also finds a wife.

In these stories, men fare reasonably well in their transition back from horse to human. The men return to their original status, sometimes with improved relationships or personalities. Women, however, do not have a clear-cut return to society. The best-case scenario is an undetermined future, as with the witch in “The Servant Boy.” In other cases the woman is permanently maimed or killed. This juxtaposition of the woman/horse transformation with the man/horse transformation suggests that there is more flexibility in the communities that tell and record these stories for men to differentiate themselves, to explore their power and identity, than there is for women. The equine body becomes the space in which these distinctions are dramatized.

Eisemann finds that for men in early modern Germany, the horse’s body was a tool that enabled them to establish and support stratified masculine identities, for both nobles and tradesmen. In the literature from the period, women were largely invisible in the equine world. Eisemann argues:

in this way, a gendered economic hierarchy was established in which the acknowledged possession of and knowledge behind the proper use of economic tools—in this case workhorses and breeding stock—was firmly dominated and controlled by a communal patriarchy (37).

Moreover, women were more closely tethered to the home. Briggs argues that in the era of witch persecutions, much of life was

carried on in public spaces as much as weather and convenience allowed. If the tavern was a masculine space, the street and the houses which sheltered the *veillées*<sup>36</sup> were mixed, even predominantly feminine (231).

These stories reflect a social reality in which men are permitted to have public spaces and spheres of activity exclusive to their sex, whereas women occupy space which is co-inhabited, controlled, and defined by men.

### **Powerful/Powerless Bodies**

The approach to and treatment of the horse body dramatizes the inequalities that make up the social structure. Gender, social class, and species allow for overlapping and intersecting spheres of power that create multiple points of antagonism and struggle, where the power hierarchy must be reconsidered or reestablished. In the case of water horses, humanity is reminded that control over nature is illusory. The boundary between the domesticated world and the wild world is not as firm as “civilized” people could hope, and humanity is vulnerable to overconfidence. Artifice is only so effective in halting the fury or obstinacy of nature.

The witches who are persecuted as horses are vulnerable to the same overconfidence as the riders/drivers of *nøkks* and kelpies, but rather than underestimating nature, they underestimate the power of men. The witches in these stories are wealthy enough that their households can afford to hire laborers and it is their servants that ultimately get the better of them. In stories of witches-turned-horses, the witch wears the horse form as does the kelpie, but actually plays the same role as the person who bridles

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<sup>36</sup> Spinning bees (Briggs, 158).

the kelpie. The witch relies too heavily on the artifice that gives her power over her servants, and fails to foresee the coming reversal. The servant's punishment of the witch also undermines the local authority of her husband: it is not the farmer or the minister who puts an end to witchcraft, but his employee. The reversal of socio-economic power is mitigated in these witch stories by having lower-class aggression directed at women rather than men.<sup>37</sup> A woman acting independently is threatening to all classes invested in the existing patriarchal system, and so makes a safe target.

The stories of the princes who are transformed into horses differ from the water horse and witch narratives in that they may be more firmly categorized as fairy tales rather than legends.<sup>38</sup> Maria Tatar describes:

On the most basic level, the fairy tale's cast of characters—kings, queens, princes, princesses, soldiers, craftsmen, and peasants—reflects the social stratification of a feudal society (2003, 48).

What "Beauty and the Horse," "The Old Soldier and the White Horse," and "The Little Mare" contain is a view into the entirety of that stratified world: merchants, soldiers, and farmers interact directly with kings and princes. Unlike legends, in which the action takes place within the local community, even within a single household of characters, the fairy tale sweeps between low and high, jumbling communities and domestic spheres together.

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<sup>37</sup> Angela Bourke describes the abuse and murder of Bridget Cleary—accused of being a fairy changeling—as the exercise of "communal power against a woman whose behavior they found unacceptable" (154).

<sup>38</sup> I am using the definitions put forth by William Bascom in "The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives" (1984). Legend takes place in the "recent past," "world of today" while fairy tales take place at "any time" and "any place" (9). The tales of water horses and witches are located in specific places, while the stories of the princes are unspecific about time and place.

This delocalization may be part of why the princes are able to transform into horses and maintain at least part of the prerogatives of royalty, namely kindness and respect from others. There is no single bounded community or household, and so the breaking of those boundaries is less disruptive. The prince, as royalty, may also be less vulnerable to structural instability generally. Princes, as royal heirs or reigning monarchs, are established from birth until death as belonging to a particular country, a particular household, a particular place in the uppermost class. The reversal they experience in becoming a horse is the carefully bound world of ritual. Turner argues that “the liminality of those going up usually involves a putting down or humbling of the novice as its principal cultural constituent” (168). For a man born into royalty, a humbling may be necessary for personal growth, but a permanent reduction in status is highly unlikely.

In “Beauty and the Horse” and “The Old Soldier and the White Horse,” the prince as horse is able to exert control throughout the narrative, even as he is in the body of a beast of burden. The prince in “The Little Mare” silently works as a horse, but his experience is that of a pampered and beloved companion, in sharp contrast to the experience of the kelpie who labors until sore for the Grahams of Morphie or the blacksmith’s apprentice who is nearly ridden to death.

The horse in the human domestic sphere is at the center of opposing tensions. The horse is part of the construction of masculinity for many cultures and this requires feminizing of the horse to maintain the proper relationship of master and subordinate. The horse is seen as both wild and tame, biddable but on the verge of rebellion. The horse is both high and low, valued above other domesticated animals by both the aristocracy



and the working class and used as a signifier of one's power, but still the horse is desired to be servile. The equine body is liminal space where the roles of class and gender are challenged and reaffirmed, and where the boundary between the domestic, the wild, and the supernatural is crossed and healed.

## **THE HORSE: IN CONCLUSION**

In illuminating the role of horse motifs in folk literature of the supernatural, I found that virtually all avenues of research in the humanities and social sciences was fruitful. The limitations were those of time and space, rather than a dearth of materials. The horse has ranged far across the world and made a deep impression on large portions of human culture(s). The horse is fast and strong, and humans found a way to use that speed and strength to shape their world. At some point, the horse as a signifier of power became as important as the horse as a biological reality.

Horse motifs in folklore of the supernatural illuminate the social constructions of power within the community, and how the individual is affected by and may subvert or overcome those structures. Rhiannon and the Goose Girl use horses to maintain the power that is given them by their class, but also to overcome the lack of agency they experience as women. Kelpies and boobries take on horse form to show the locally privileged the importance of reciprocity, without causing permanent disruption of the relationship between employer and worker. A prince who becomes a horse is still a prince, but possibly a wiser and more mature man for the having had the experience of servitude.

Horses are difficult to discuss because much of the discourse depends on the body and ideas on what the body is. In this work I have tried to investigate the varieties of literary treatment of the equine body, and the variety of ways in which human beings

encounter the equine body. It has been difficult to find the vocabulary to adequately address these ideas. When a kelpie looks like a horse, walks like a horse, and sounds like a horse, how does one make the distinction that it is *not* a horse? At least not the domesticated *e. caballus* as a biologist would understand it. In the blood magic of horse slaughter, it is difficult to make a simple explanation of a rite in which an animal is disembodied in order to emphasize the strengths of its animation. Jürgen Streeck describes one possible way of understanding one's own body "as a repertoire of 'I can's'" (2012, 88). Humans can interact body to body with horses, and so there are several repertoires learned: what the horse can do, what the human can do, what the human can do to the horse, what the horse can do to the human, and what the horse and human can do together.

In much of the world, especially prior to the development of steam and combustion engines, the horse has served a signifier of who can and who cannot. Thus they are found where determining who has power over whom is ambiguous, such as when upper-class woman meets lower-class man, and the hierarchies of gender conflict with the hierarchies of wealth. Through the symbolism of the horse, societies negotiate these conflicts and hope to resolve them.

"Horse" is not just a particular species of equid but a symbol used to signify a complex of folk ideas. Alan Dundes defines a "folk ideas (as) traditional notions that a group of people have about the nature of man, of the world, and of man's life in the world" (1971, 95). When the horse is invoked, it is a type of abbreviation or shorthand,

containing information about the distribution of power, the possession of agency, the way in which an individual or folk group conceives of itself.

While this paper must conclude, it is by no means conclusive. Horse motifs are myriad in narrative and other folk arts, and for any perceived trend in their use, a counter-example may be discovered. In the process of collecting and analyzing horse motifs in folk literature of the supernatural, I have come to see unstated theories of epistemology and political science. The stories I have examined contain messages about the nature of knowledge and power, especially their relationship to each other: what we understand and can control, what we understand but cannot control, what we neither understand nor control, and what we control without understanding. The horse becomes the slate on which humans endeavor to either overcome or accept the limitations of our understanding and control.

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Victoria Harkavy graduated from Winston Churchill High School in 2001. She received her Bachelor of Arts from University of Maryland-College Park 2006 in English Language and Literature and in History. Ms. Harkavy has worked in many industries, including publishing, retail, marketing, libraries and archives, and research. She is a 2009 *Jeopardy* champion and a frequent presenter at the International Conference for the Fantastic in the Arts and at the American Folklore Society Annual Meeting.