

# REFLECTIONS

## QUESTIONS ABOUT LANGUAGE

I—HORSES

THE impulse behind this essay is specifically philosophical, which is a way of saying that the circumstances of my life have been such that it has mattered enormously to me to find an accurate way of talking about our relationships with domestic animals. It has mattered to me as a dog trainer and horse trainer, for what I hope are obvious reasons. When you are incoherent in your notions about an animal you are working with, things do not go well with the animal, and an animal trainer can't help being uneasy about such a state of affairs.

If I had remained firmly within the worlds of discourse provided by the stable and the kennel, I might have been content, not because there is no philosophy in those worlds but because there is such a rich and ever-changing web of philosophies when good trainers talk and write. These philosophies remember and speak to their sources in the thought of the past and are, unlike the general run of philosophies, continually tested and either reaffirmed or revised, since the world of the genuinely good dog trainer or horse trainer is one in which reality is quite clearly, as Wallace Stevens had it, "an activity of the most august imagination." However, my temperament regularly led me away from the kennel and tack room to university libraries and cafeterias, laboratories and classrooms. The result was that for some years I uneasily inhabited at least two completely different worlds of discourse, each using a group of languages that were intratranslatable: dog trainers can talk to horse trainers, and philosophers can talk to linguists and psychologists, but dog trainers and philosophers can't make much sense of each

other. (Philosophers and linguists may sometimes think each other incomprehensible, but their quarrels are usually about the interior decoration of the house of intellect, and not about fundamental structural principles.) Because I had learned to talk, more or less, in both worlds, I was intensely alert to the implications of Wittgenstein's remark "To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life."

Here is an example of the problem I set out to deal with. In Germany, there was once a harness horse named Hans, owned by one Herr von Osten. Hans's skills so impressed von Osten that he decided that horses in general and Hans in particular must be cleverer than was generally supposed. Von Osten began doing various things with Hans—teaching him to respond to questions by either tapping with a hoof a certain number of times or indicating one of a number of blocks on which alphabet letters were written. Hans was a good learner, and in time philosophers, linguists, and psychologists came from all over to test his

acumen. It turned out that Hans could not answer questions if he could not see the person asking them. It turned out, further, that if the questioner was in sight Hans could always find out what the questioner thought was the correct answer, no matter how hard the questioner worked at remaining still and impassive. Hans apparently read minute changes in breathing, angles of the eyebrows, and the like, with an accuracy we have trouble imagining. This led to von Osten's being denounced as a fraud, and he seems to have died an unhappy man, not so much on his own account as on that of the horse in whom he so deeply believed. And there has come to be a technical term in academic studies of animal psychology: the "Clever Hans fallacy." This is the fallacy of supposing that an animal "really" understands words or symbols when what the animal is doing is "merely" reading body language. In the literature, this notion is used to discredit virtually anyone who disagrees with the writer in question as a fraud and a charlatan



*"I'm sorry, but Mr. Barclay is not putting up with people like you anymore."*



*"It's certainly refreshing to meet someone sixty years old who looks sixty years old."*

or else as just plain credulous and stupid. There is an unhealthy air of triumph in the rhythms of the prose of the people who do this discrediting, and I have found myself moved to wonder why, if the trainers and thinkers who believe that Hans illustrates something more important are so discountable, they must be so often attacked.

One of the worlds I lived in when I set out to address this problem was, as I have said, the animal trainer's world—the trainer of domestic animals primarily, although that world is not to be limited by the boundaries of kennels, racetracks, horse-show grounds, and obedience trials. The other world was the world of the intellectual—especially the academic, or full-time intellectual—though it is not strictly bounded by the walls of either universities or editorial offices. What happened was that I would get up just before dawn and work my horses. Generally, I had finished with most or all of them by noon (it depended on how business was going or on whether

certain horses were giving me trouble), so I would shower and go over to the local university. There were a couple of people there I liked to meet and talk with over lunch, and I also liked to prowl in the library and either take courses in or just hang around courses in philosophy, psychology, zoology, and linguistics. I had been bitten in my childhood by a passion for books—especially books that were, as someone has said, hard to read, books that could devastate and transform your soul, and that had a kick like a mule when you were finished with them. There were as many glittering and lovely creatures in those books and in the conversations of people who cared about them as there were in the stable and the kennel. But most of the philosophers and their associates in the libraries and all but two or three of the people at lunch were profoundly disappointing—not in themselves but in terms of my passion for a language with sufficient philosophical reach to tell me what I wanted to know about the stable and the kennel. And there was a great deal

that tended to cause me to lose my temper, such as the enormous amount of time that was spent in "curing" students and others of saying about animals precisely the sort of thing I wanted to say vigorously and significantly.

One thing that preoccupied me was the trainers' habit of talking in highly anthropomorphic, morally loaded language. That was the language I wanted to understand, because it seemed to me, after a while, that it was part of what enabled the good trainers to do so much more than the academic psychologists could in the way of eliciting interesting behavior from animals. Trainers, for example, have no hesitation in talking about how much a mare loves or worries about her foal, a cat her kittens, or a dog or a horse his work. But for philosophers and psychologists to speak of love was to invoke abilities that are, for reasons I am still not clear about, as rigidly restricted to *Homo sapiens* as some religious doctrines have restricted the possession of a soul to members of one race or culture, or sometimes of one sex.

In any event, the talk I heard was of no help in enabling me even to figure out what my project was, though after a while I knew a lot about what it wasn't: it was neither behaviorism nor ordinary language philosophy, and it wasn't classic quantificational logic. Nonetheless, I saw many interesting things along the way. A student giving a paper on post-parturition behavior in cats would inadvertently attribute to the mother cat a mental state, such as caring about her kittens. The student would be corrected, and would learn in time to deliver solemnly quantified reports on the amount of licking behavior, suckling behavior, and so on, that was "exhibited" by a mother cat. I wondered about that word "exhibited." Exhibited to whom? The researchers? The kittens? I also wondered about the intellectual and spiritual future of students so carefully instructed in the terrible grammar such ways of talking entailed.

Another habit of mind that students had to be cured of was the habit of supposing that an animal might deliberately hide. (I have never known a hunter to be successfully cured of this habit of mind.) I was deeply fascinated by this, for what was the puppy doing under the bed when you returned home to find an unwelcome monument on the broadloom? But it was sternly pointed out to me what a great, an-

Dear J

What an adventure!

There is no place as rich in contrasts as Hong Kong. People actually live on sampans! Fishermen still worship Tin Hau Goddess of the sea!

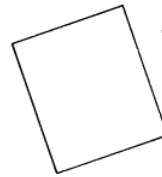
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AK



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thropomorphic mistake it was to say or think this. In order to be hiding, whether from predators or from the irritated owner of the carpet, a creature would have to have certain logical concepts that animals simply couldn't have.

I remember one careful exposition on the subject of an animal—I think it was an octopus—who in a laboratory situation would hide, or “hide,” behind glass, in plain sight of predators. A number of things struck me about that seminar. One was the way the scientist cheerfully applied his interpretation of the behavior of octopuses to the behavior of gazelles and St. Bernard puppies, which seemed to me to demonstrate insufficient respect for the individuality of octopuses. Another was the indifference of the researchers to questions about the importance of vision for octopuses and their predators, and yet another set of considerations had to do with my reflecting that in the same position I would probably do the same thing as the octopuses, either out of mindless habit or because in the tanks in the laboratories there wasn't anything but the glass to get behind. But in order to hide, it was carefully explained, one had to have a concept of self. Not only that: one had to have the concept of self given by the ability to speak academic language, or, at least, a standard human language—a concept of self which depended on the ability to think. And, as one philosopher informed me unequivocally, any sort of thinking required “first-order logical quantification theory.”

Since those days, certain conceptually complicated and interesting experiments involving chimpanzees and orangutans and mirrors have weakened the more rigid of the foundations of some of these cognitive allegories, but there is still little help from science.

And there is work with gorillas that seems to establish that gorillas, like all primates, share with human beings a tendency—which Aristotle notes in the opening pages of the “Metaphysics”—to rely on vision. Dogs and wolves and other animals, by contrast, distinguish themselves from other individuals, and friends from foes, by scent markers. I don't know why one can't speak, at least tentatively and for the sake of philosophical speculation, of a wolf's territorial markings as being a series of scent mirrors or—as fiction often has it—signatures, and argue from that to a concept of self. But I learned early to be cautious

about saying this sort of thing, and I said less and less as time went on, except to two or three friends who were patient with me.

After trying to talk, I would leave the university in the middle or late afternoon to work with a dog or so and any horses that had been left out of the morning schedule. Here, in the various training arenas, the discourse was radically different. It was, as I have said, anthropomorphic—"morally loaded"—as it has always been in the great training manuals. By this I mean that implicit as well as explicit in the trainers' language is the notion that animals are capable not only of activities requiring "I.Q."—a rather arid concept—but also of a complex and delicate (though not infallible) moral understanding, which is so inextricably a function of their relationships with human beings that it may well

be said to constitute those relationships. (By "moral understanding" I mean that, as far as a trainer is concerned, a dog is perfectly capable of understanding that he ought not to pee on the bedpost even though he might want to. Characterizing the dog's own formulation of this understanding is a separate matter. To say what I've just said is, of course, to make a claim about the nature of moral understanding.)

Xenophon, in his "Art of Horsemanship," speaks of horses as greatly appreciating certain "courtesies," and, to the irritation of a more or less scientific-minded translator, he speaks in the "Cynegeticus" (a book on dog training) of the cunning of certain hunting dogs in leading other dogs off the trail of a rabbit by barking or baying falsely. The translator in question appends a footnote in which he indulgently explains and apologizes for Xenophon's naïve little slip here in attributing such a degree of intellectual capacity for misdirection to a mere (helplessly sincere) animal. When I showed that passage to a friend of



"There's nobody in right now. They're all out looking for hanky-panky."

mine who is fond of foxhunting, he remarked rather gloomily, "I believe I know that darned hound!"

Xenophon wrote quite some time ago, but his notions and something like his language continue to echo in modern training, albeit revised, here and there expanded, here and there muted, and from time to time severely reduced. Trainers still speak of whether or not an animal is "mean," "sneaky," "kind," or "honest," and vary their approach to situations accordingly, sometimes saying, "Hey! You've got to come down on that dog hard and fast and right now—that's a real hood." Or "Relax. There isn't a tricky bone in that horse's body—he'll take care of you." Or "Don't worry, he'll come around O.K. He's no real criminal—just a juvenile delinquent." Or, in appreciative awe, "Look at that dog work. She knows her job, doesn't she?" Or, as a general principle of training, "But first, and above all, the horse's *understanding* must be developed." Or "If you want to know where the track is, *ask your dog.*"

There seems to me to be something

terribly important about this language and what it implies—partly, of course, because it is a language I myself speak, but also because, as I began in time to notice in more and more detail, one can *do* so much more with the trainers' language, despite the fact that in the mid- to late twentieth century it sounds as it has for some time: at best naïve and at worst offensive, somewhat in the way that "Huckleberry Finn" has sounded offensive to some. In the past, attempts to speak in the way I have in mind have been regarded as heretical as well as intellectually unsound. And the agitation expressed by some writers and thinkers in the face of the trainers' persistence in talking the way they do, and the uneasiness expressed by some trainers in response to their awareness of the possibility of that agitation, and the attempts in the introductory portions of some training manuals to placate that agitation—all suggest that modern injunctions against anthropomorphism have as much of a heretic-baiting impulse behind them as any of the older ones. When, for example, I gave

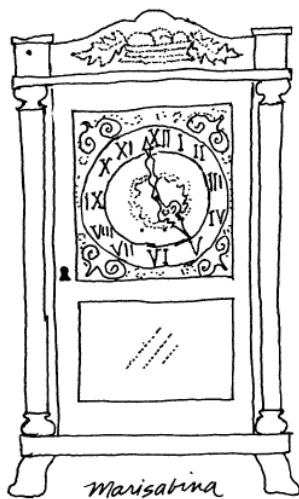
a talk entitled "Tracking Dogs, Sensitive Horses, and the Traces of Speech" at the New York Institute for the Humanities, one person in the audience said that what I was saying sounded a little—well, religious. I patiently worked at finding out what she meant by religious, and it turned out that she meant anthropomorphic. I said, "Oh, yes, indeed. That's the whole point." She wondered aloud if I should be allowed to teach in a university (as I was about to do); and at a later talk, when I found myself seated next to her by accident, she asked me to leave the room. The morally loaded language of William Koehler's stunningly fine animal-training books has led to any number of long and serious quarrels.

In academic opinion, the trainers are, not to put too fine a point on it, intellectually disloyal. This would not in itself be worth more than a few paragraphs of social history if having something to say about what animals are like—about the problem of animal consciousness—were not a nearly ubiquitous way of providing a rhetorical and conceptual frame for investigations of human consciousness in all sorts of areas. Whatever the author in question thinks women are like, or blacks, or philosophers, or Jews, or Republicans, or Americans, or whatever category defines the "we" of a given discussion, it must first be made clear that the "we" is to be distinguished from the animals.

In any case, I decided to cast my intellectual, literary, and moral lot with the trainers—even the sleaziest of them—despite my fondness for the wonderful creatures of philosophy and related disciplines. This didn't mean that as a thinker I was free from the intellectual tradition I inherited. Like any other trainer of my time, I have been enriched and bruised by what I might call "scientimorphism," by which I mean the Western faith in the beauties of doubt and refutation which is one of our central intellectual virtues. And it is, in its place, a virtue, but, like any popular notion, it is rarely in its place—it tends to run amok and lead to the curiously superstitious notion that to have

no reason to believe a proposition is the same as having a reason to assert that the proposition is false.

I should confess that doubt ran amok in my own case even after I had worn out a number of bridles and leashes, and that for a long time, even as I became cranky with the philosophers, I tended to think of the trainers as skillful, perhaps, but philosophically naïve. I hadn't noticed that genuine mastery of anything entails sound philosophical thought of one sort or another. When, for example, I read in William Koehler's book on guard-dog training about the importance of being sure that your prospective protection dog has a well-developed sense of "responsibility," I tended privately, and only semi-consciously, to think it a pity that he didn't know better than to use such a word in relation to animals. I managed to think that even though I already knew him to be one of the greatest animal trainers the world has ever seen. For years, he was a head animal trainer for Walt Disney Studios, and he was a genius at training scout dogs, war dogs, and police dogs. He wrote "The Koehler Method of Dog Training." His son Dick Koehler is at least as fine a trainer as his father, and the finest teacher of anything I have ever known.



It was not, finally, the trainers who showed me the necessity of believing them but a dog and, later, a horse. In this, my story is a common one. Alois Podhajsky, the famous trainer of the Lipizzaner stallions at the Spanish Riding School, in Vienna, called his autobiographical book "My Horses, My Teachers"—the true title of the autobiography of virtually every horse trainer who has ever lived. The dog who

forced me to notice what was going on was an Airedale terrier named Gunner. I was working him on a scent problem, having him follow a track laid by my daughter Colleen, who was seven. As I work on tracking, the dog is taught not only to follow a scent but to retrieve objects dropped by the track layer. The track was plainly marked for me, since there was still dew on the ground and Colleen's footsteps showed clearly. Furthermore, I knew where

the track "had" to end, since Colleen had been picked up in a car and driven away after dropping the last glove. I knew that she hadn't been in the area the track was laid in for a week, so there was no problem about a confusion of trails. Suddenly, Gunner left the trail and began bounding to the left, toward some bushes about eighty-five feet away. I decided, as human beings tend to, that I knew more than the dog did about what was going on. I shouted angrily and tried to halt him with pressure on the harness, but he kept on merrily (he always looked merry), to my intense exasperation, and emerged from the bushes with a stuffed toy that Colleen had for some days been mourning the loss of. It took me a decade to figure out how to talk about training in general and tracking in particular in a way that would make it clear why at such a moment my intellectual loyalties shifted; and how to tell other stories—especially a horse story—that would indicate *what the trainers have in mind* when they talk the way they do. But the experience was for me an epiphany rather than a demonstration: the moment when, taking the stuffed toy from the joyous young Airedale, it dawned on me that people like Koehler use terms like "responsible" in relationship to animals because those are the terms that *make sense* of the situation.

I began realizing other things as well, such as that in the trainers' world different kinds of animals exist from the ones that I heard and read about in the university. For the trainer, there are hot working Airedales, dutiful and reliable German Shepherds, horses with intense, fiery, and competitive temperaments, other horses who are irredeemably dishonest. In the universities, there were more or less Cartesian creatures of uncertain pedigree, revised by uncertain interpreters of Freud and Jung, which may be why animals are invoked in the world of letters in general to mark "primitive" and usually unsavory impulses, while in the trainers' world they are more like characters in James Thurber, who insisted that in his work dogs represented "intelligence and repose." The trainers' language was—if I could only unfold its story with the full acceptance of what the philosopher Stanley Cavell has called "the daily burden of discourse"—the right language, the philosophically responsible language.

Knowing this was important to me. It enriched my work and conversation

as a trainer, but it didn't enable me to tell anyone else much about what I was at last beginning to have a grasp of. This was a terrific problem for me, because argument was at the center of most of the philosophy I knew, and I didn't want to argue with anyone.

A year or so after Gunner brought me the stuffed toy, I met the poet John Hollander, and we talked about animals. I told him I thought that the training relationship was a moral one, and he asked, "Why do you say that?"

I replied, crossly, "Because I think it's true!"

He responded, very gently, "That's a good answer, but what I meant was 'What do you have in mind when you say that?'"

No one else had ever wanted to know, so I began trying to explain. That became my task. Other questions grew out of that question, and most of them quickly became questions about language—questions that located the boundaries of language in regions often understood to be remote from language.

THERE was once, not long ago, a mare named Halla. Riders with international ambitions became interested in her, because she had an enormous talent for jumping. But there were, in the way the story has come to me, those who turned away from the notion of riding her in competition. For a horse to endure the emotional, physical, and spiritual stress of what is called Grand Prix or international competition, he or she must be deeply reliable, steady-hearted, and tough-minded, and Halla was nervous, quirky, unstable, and given to temper tantrums when things went wrong on course. From a horse trainer's point of view, she was crazy.

Hans Günter Winkler, a German trainer, began riding her—rode her, in fact, on the Grand Prix course in Stockholm in 1956 and in other, equally important events. Riders watched, deeply impressed by Winkler's ability to bring the mare's passions and talent into that order and discipline we call "the art" of riding—an art that some thought had been closed for this mare by insanity. They spoke, in a way that will become importantly inaccurate as I go on, of Winkler's enormous tact in "reassuring" the excitable mare. (I put the term "reassuring" in quotes not because I think it is wrong—Winkler was one of the most tactful and reassuring riders who have ever lived, and that certainly goes a long

way toward accounting for his successes, not only with Halla but with horse after horse—but because I believe that something else about Winkler was more important with this particular horse.) In the first round at Stockholm, Halla had four faults, for the highest score. (This means that she only knocked down one fence.) The second round was scheduled to take place that afternoon.

Trouble had developed in the first round, though. The next-to-last fence was a big vertical, and Halla was coming in too fast and long. Her tremendous talent enabled her to jump the fence, although awkwardly, and Winkler's talent enabled him to stay on her, clamping his knees hard while she jumped, with the result that in the air he pulled a groin muscle badly and was in sudden and severe pain. And there was the last fence still to come—a huge wall. The usual responses to sudden pain are to collapse, vomit, take to one's bed. What Winkler did was to tell Halla to go ahead and jump the wall.

When it came time for the afternoon round, Winkler was in such pain that he had to be lifted into the saddle. He was proposing to ride a Grand Prix course when the use of his legs—which control a jumper—was virtually gone. You may more or less dispense with your legs and back while loping around nowhere in particular, down the beach or across a plain, but not over a Grand Prix course of jumps. One horseman who was there told me that he had thought it was madness to contemplate riding in that condition a mare like Halla, madness to suppose that with one's legs gone one could get as much as a decently calm working trot out of that particular mare. The idea of expecting any horse to understand what is at stake in gold-medal competition and to be able to summon the tremendous concentration required by a powerful and trappy jump course would seem ridiculous to many riders. The notion of turning a nervous, unreliable mare toward those stressful fences when the rider's control was suddenly gone—horsemen speak of a horse's being "upset" when a rider in one way or another "drops" a horse—made it look as though Winkler's ambitions had blinded him to what he was attempting.

It was obvious that for all practical purposes Winkler's legs were gone. All he could do was "go along for the ride," telling Halla which order to take the fences in, and not much else. I

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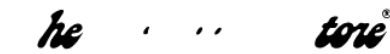
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am oversimplifying a bit here, but the point is how the event appeared to sophisticated horsemen. Imagine a race-car driver suddenly unable to operate clutch, brake, and accelerator except in a distant, awkward, and weak fashion. But Halla was a horse, not a machine. "Of all creatures the noblest," writes the Elizabethan trainer and poet Gervase Markham. And Halla, as horsemen say, took her rider home. She won the gold medal for him. William Steinkraus, himself a gold-medal rider and currently chairman of the board of the United States Equestrian Team, prints a photograph of Winkler and Halla in his splendid book "Riding and Jumping," and in the caption remarks:

Hans's wonderful accuracy in riding approaches enables him to leave the ground with little to do except maintain equilibrium, and his position in the air usually shows more emphasis on delicacy of contact than on security. . . . This combination has an astonishing record in winning the most important competitions, reflecting a very delicately balanced relationship between two high-strung and intensely competitive temperaments.

Steinkraus has here written a little allegory of virtue, or vertu—that noble old conception of intelligence, courage, and power collapsed into one trait. In the language that good writers and riders, like Steinkraus, use to talk about such people and horses and such moments, those figures of speech which are usually called anthropomorphic—as in the phrase "two high-strung and intensely competitive temperaments"—are transformed into such allegories. In our daily, secular language, one might say that the word "temperament," which refers to innate moral qualities, is literally about people and only figuratively about animals. But in Steinkraus's caption it obliterates the gap between the literal and the metaphorical, and becomes what the philosopher Charles Taylor calls invocative. Winkler's genius lay at least in part in his ability to be commanded by the invocative—to be commanded by the various poems of horsemanship in such a fashion that he called into "real" being (in a sense that even the realist might acknowledge as reality) his and Halla's heroic ride.

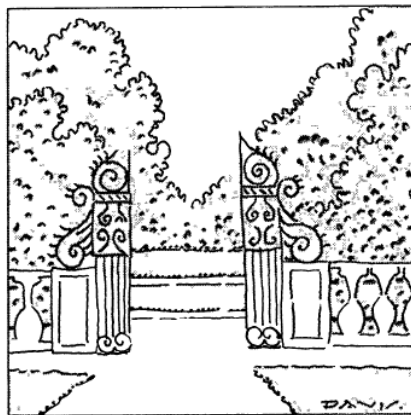
One way of explaining how Winkler was able to succeed with Halla is to say that he had a better story to tell himself and her about the nature of horsemanship and horses than riders who failed with her did. He had to have had, for one thing, a story about

how what appears to be horse insanity may be—even must be, most of the time—evidence of how powerful equine genius is, and how powerfully it can object to incoherence, and he must have had a story like that about Halla which would move him to keep thinking and trying when things got rough. Riders who have a lot of stories about incurably crazy horses tend to find that a lot of the horses they run into are crazy. The stories we tell matter, and not only do stories reclaim the beauty of crazy horses but also stories lead to insanity in the first place. I want to understand what a crazy horse is, and I strongly suspect that the epic size of the story of Winkler and Halla indicates that to understand any form of craziness entails understanding that it occurs in an epic landscape, an epic world.

This means that the question "What is a crazy horse?" is incomprehensible if it is understood as a question for psychology to answer. It is not psychology that has enabled anyone to do anything about the actual maniacs souring away in the corral, not psychology that has told the stories that restore horses to themselves and to us. The visions that have led to genuine horsemanship have been visions that come from artistic rather than psychological thinking, and even from mathematical rather than engineering thinking, since the great horsemen tend to have a sense of how form matters which is like the thinking that led to Plato's analysis of the five regular solids. The first question is: What in the world can account for anyone's success in training horses at all, whether or not they are crazy? No description of technique of the rider-as-subject, horse-as-object sort, however minute its details, can account for the myriad moments of transformation which are daily fare in the good trainer's world. Such moments are

among the things that move trainers to turn with pitying exasperation from semi-Marxist descriptions of all training and discipline as coercion for the purposes of the state, which in this case is often represented by the trainer's "ego." In an age in which Marxism is not unbridled but merely enfeebled, some writers who know nothing about horses tend to use horse training not as a trope of courage and genuine discipline—as used to be the case—but as a trope of mere coercion, and one finds remarks to this effect like Michel Foucault's when he says that dressage, like monasteries, armies, and other "general formulas of domination," implies an "uninterrupted, constant coercion."

I DO believe that, indeed, education by and large serves to defraud humans of their own interests, and sometimes thereby of their souls, and that crazy horses are one consequence of the "education" of horses. But, as T. S. Eliot was moved to speak of "the eternal struggle of art against education," I am moved to distinguish between coercive education and dressage or any other genuine discipline. Horse trainers tend to turn away from such passages as Foucault's, and one way of expressing what they reject might be to say that the passage is simply wrong about the nature of dressage, but a better way of expressing it might be to say that the passage is ugly. I think it helps to remember that the horseman shares with the mathematician an ability to be commanded by beauty even in the face of paradox, and, for both, the need to make the right distinctions between the beautiful and the merely pretty or picturesque is a condition of survival as a genuine thinker. This is embedded in the literary tradition—in tales of great horses who were disregarded because they were not fashionably pretty—and in certain places in artistic tradition. In Stubbs' portraits of great racers, for example, details of physique which would put a horse out of the running in a conformation class are carefully rendered, and in some cases, as in the portrait of the horse named Turf, there are details of posture, expression on the jockey's face, and so on, that convey Turf's difficult temperament. In "The Complete Training of Horse and Rider," Colonel Podhajsky insists that if the horse becomes more beautiful in the course of his work it is a sign that the training principles are correct. All by itself, this remark won't make you able to





## THE NEW YORKER

train a horse, but the rider who rests content with imitations of beauty finds his or her horses going crazy, although sometimes not violently enough for it to be noticed.

Beauty is a sign—even a criterion—of truth. But what is the craziness of a horse a warning against? I want to understand this by examining some of the ways the trainer summons the beauty of the horse. I don't know a great deal more about the history of Hans Winkler and Halla, so I will turn to my own experience with horses, one of whom was in temperament, I think, very much like Halla.

The standard crazy-horse story, which may have a title like "Outlaw Roan" or "My Friend Flicka," or which may be a true story, like the story of Halla, has a tendency to go in a certain way that seems to provide us with metaphors for maintaining clarity in the face of our difficulty with craziness in general, whether of horses or of people, or our difficulty with what the French philosopher Jacques Derrida calls the "fissure in the allegory"—the crazing in the enamel of our understanding of the world. In such a story, there is an outlaw horse. Not a *wild* horse but an outlaw, one who is for one reason or another outside the order appropriate to the kind of creature he is. The genuine outlaw usually has a ping-pong mechanism composed of fear and rage in response to people. There are fine tales, like Will James' "Smoky, the Cow Horse," in which we see the world from the horse's point of view, as a place that is orderly and meaningful except in the insane corners inhabited by humans. Smoky's first contact with humans comes when he is rounded up for the first time and branded, and James' narrator is careful to insist that it is not the physical pain of the brand that is central to what is "alienating" about the experience but, rather, incoherence. Then there are brutal memories, which the horse insists on by way of explaining and maintaining his craziness.

The horse's responses in such tales generally earn him or her more brutal memories, and there may even come a time when he is hunted down for use as a saddle bronc or as dog food. At this point, often a child enters, usually a child in early adolescence. The child interposes himself or herself between the horse and the horse's persecutors in quite brave ways. Sometimes the bravery is largely a matter of spiritual or emotional stamina and clarity, but

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often there is a physical element—the child stows away in the boxcar that the criminals are using to take the horse to Madison Square Garden to be a saddle bronc, or simply places the tender child body between the ram-paging roan and the raging men with ropes and rifles. The degree of violence varies with the cultural setting, but the threat to the horse is always absolute. In the hands of the right writer, the mere threat of separation of the horse and child is sufficient to make the horse's and the child's doom fully felt as a psychic amputation.

In one way or another, the child comes to have the horse available for handling, riding, training. (Sometimes the child steals the horse.) The details of this training vary enormously, depending, again, on what culture or horse subculture is involved. (A variant on the crazy-horse story is the ugly-horse story, like the one that the children's writer Marguerite Henry tells about Hambletonian, foundation sire of the Standardbred, or the story of Snowman—both favorite American true-to-life stories.) A central detail in the training of the crazy horse is the child's courage in continuing to touch the horse tenderly, with both hands and voice, in the face of the horse's hostility. The horse, it should be noted, usually becomes dangerous at the sight and stench of the works of human beings only; with other horses, if they are elements in the story, he generally lives up to the horse's reputation as the noblest, most cooperative, and most forgiving of creatures.

The child's touch eventually penetrates the horse's confusion, fear, and rage, and *voilà* the cleverest and most stalwart of all the cow ponies on the range, or the gentlest hunter of all the children's hunters in the park, or the greatest racehorse of them all, as in "The Black Stallion," or the harness-horse champion. Now, while I am on my way to denying that gentle touching is sufficient for any real wild-eyed rogue in any real corral, it is certainly necessary. Horses can ask to be caressed and touched in various ways, but it still turns out that saying "Please scratch my back" isn't by itself enough to tell one's companion how to do so. The horseman who is faced with a more dangerous situation than we usually are when someone wants his back scratched needs some rather powerful tales to transmute the horse's frustration with language into an acknowledgment of language. Frustrated

tion with language is, in the nature of things, precisely where one starts with a crazy horse.

I'LL call her Drummer Girl. Her conformation was delicate and perfect—a textbook illustration of correct slope of shoulder, angle of hock and pastern, ratio of head to neck, neck to back, back to legs, and so on. She was slightly over at the knee, but this is so commonly a trait of stunning performance horses that it might as well be called a beauty. Her balance was wonderful, her movement true and clean: there was no paddling, no wobbling, and her stride was long, accurate, straight, and powerful. She was also ignorant and nervous, and confused by—one can only guess—the bizarre activities that pass for training on and about California tracks so much of the time. She had papers from the Jockey Club and a tattooed number inside her upper lip, confirming the track history that her papers detailed.

If she was nervous, she was not yet suspicious and angry; she was young, tender, a filly still, possessed, as most horses are, of a forgiving nature, and willing to listen to the horse stories I had to tell. I found her in the course of a search I was conducting for a client—a man who had considerable riding skills and wanted a young horse to develop as a show hunter. (It is important to note that there wasn't anything particularly wrong with this man's skills in the saddle—he was far from being a moral monster. In fact, I like and admire him a lot. In horse stories, riders who fail with horses like Drummer Girl are moral brutes, but those stories are allegory, not psychological realism.) I tried the horse out and showed her to my client, who was impressed. He bought her and had her trailered to her new home, in a neighboring state.

A year or so went by. Eventually, there was a phone call. The mare was causing difficulty. Would I take her in training? When I asked why a local trainer wouldn't do, since Drummer Girl now lived a day-and-a-half drive from my stable, I was told that four local trainers had already kicked her out of their barns. Since one of the stories I was determined to stick to at the time was that I could train *anything*, I accepted, and the mare was brought back to my barn.

As she was being

unloaded, she twisted herself coming out, aimed her hind end at me, and kicked viciously. I dodged successfully, and discovered shortly that she had kicked her shoe off and had kicked so hard that the shoe went through the wall of the tack room. It is very unusual for a horse to go so far out of the way to attack a human being—especially a stranger. In fact, most horses go to surprising lengths, even when they aren't particularly well trained, to avoid hurting humans. The silly, confused, but tender filly was gone. This was a full-grown mare—enraged, paranoid-psychotic, violently uninterested in “My Friend Flicka.” She had had it with humans and their stories. She had especially had it with kindness—any story about kindness. One of the many things that inspired her terror and rage was a soothing pat on the shoulder. She welcomed such gestures the way a rape victim might welcome a strange man's compliments on her figure, with an enraged trance, a kind of ping-pong of terror-anger-terror-anger.

I may have created the impression that simple physical brutality and distress caused her denials, but this isn't so—or, at least, it's oversimplified. For creatures with language, there are very few cases, if any, in which you can point to simple physical brutality isolated from a semantics of brutality, because in training situations there is always a relationship, exchanges of some sort, a matrix that creates the interpretation as well as the fact of physical pain, so that the interpretation is inseparable from the pain. (It is the syntactical and semantic context of surgery that makes it a different phenomenon from murder, even when the patient dies.) Drummer Girl, as it happens, was genuinely and unusually sensitive physically. (This, like the reports I make about the temperaments of various animals, is not something I can prove that I know—it's just the sort of thing you do come to know if you work with enough horses.)

In fact, I probably caused Drummer Girl more physical pain—to the extent that physical pain can be quantified—than anyone else had. The significant

brutalities for this mare had been linguistic—moral in the full sense. And Drummer Girl was temperamentally very different from a Pointer I once trained named Salty. Salty was mostly unimpressed with hostile and incoherent transactions—partly because she was born comfortable with the knowledge that human beings are by and large dopes, but also because going as hard as possible was central to her. A racehorse with a temperament like Salty's can survive the incoherencies of the track much better than a horse like Drummer Girl, for whom balance, symmetry, and coherence were at the center of the cosmos. Hence the depth of her enraged despair when the world failed to provide the forms that would make manifest the movements she inchoately yearned for. She desired balance the way any creature desires its own nature, and this meant more to her than what we usually call love. The human heroine of “National Velvet” desired something like this (although she was perhaps more like Salty than like Drummer Girl)—a pleasure “earlier than love, nearer heaven.” So you couldn't shift about casually, however gently, in the saddle while you were on Drummer Girl's back, even in order to stroke her neck while at halt, to praise her for getting it right, for in that small tilt the sun and the moon changed places and hunted each other down in her heart. In this she was, of course, a horse. It is innately in horses under tack to rage or, in the case of most family pleasure mounts, to retreat in varying degrees into dullness of response when there is no authentic movement and intercourse. In this case, Drummer Girl's enormous capacity for precision and elegance was the measure of her capacity for maddened refusals of any lesser communication.

What was I going to say to this mare? A number of options simply weren't available. If, for example, I were to approach her believing some febrile nonsense of the sort I quoted earlier, about training as coercion, then my beliefs would be manifest in my body as I approached her, and she, reading this, would plain old kill me, that's all, if she could find a way, thus underlining a remark of William Steinkraus's—that the horse is the ultimate authority on the correctness of our theories and methods. It is wrong to talk



about coercion not only because that doesn't happen to be what's going on in places like the Spanish Riding School, where horses are trained to the highest pitch, but also because it cannot go on with horses performing at high levels: horses have souls, and there is an inexorable logic consequent on that which makes coercing them into high performance impossible. I don't mean that you can't coerce horses—only that if you do you will end up, if you are lucky, with a dull, unenthusiastic mount or, if you are unlucky, with a Drummer Girl emerging murderously from the trailer. Similarly, notions that make coercion out to be the central force in the world can't explain why some people become artists or make love richly and joyously or have authentic conversations. Drummer Girl's rage marks with exquisite accuracy the point at which both behaviorism and Marxism, as well as perhaps deconstruction, must come to an end.

That first evening, I put Drummer Girl in a large pasture, where she could wander loosely and at will, getting the kinks of the long trailer ride out of her system, even though I knew what would happen—for, of course, the next day the first problem was how to catch her. (One speaks of "catching" horses in a pasture even when they are eager and gregarious sorts who need no true "catching.") It just means putting a halter on the horse and leading him or her out to be groomed or tacked up, or whatever is on the schedule.) I approached Drummer Girl with a halter and lead shank in my hand. She responded to this by dashing violently around the pasture, kicking and squealing in case I didn't understand what she was saying, which was "You can't catch me!" I didn't have a helper, but I knew a fair amount about herding horses, so I managed to get her into a corner and was on the point of slipping the halter on. Whereupon she whirled, stamped hard on my foot with one of her hind hooves for emphasis, and bolted. "You can't catch me, because even if you did I'd probably kill you, because I'm crazy and you don't know *what* I might do!"

I accepted this version of things, since it was obviously—for the moment, at least—true. I limped back to the tack room and emerged with a long, light whip called a longe whip, because it is used with a horse who is being worked on a longe line. (It is not a bullwhip: the distinction mat-

ters.) When she bolted again at the sight of me, I made no attempt to herd her or get her any closer to me. Instead, I said, "O.K. You want to bolt, let's bolt." So I snapped the whip and chased her heartlessly around the pasture. When she wanted to stop, I popped the whip and kept her moving. (I did not, it should be said, wear her out physically, nor did I touch her with the whip; both things would have been stupid, brutal, and dangerous.) After a while, she stopped and faced me, her stance and expression a real study. She had a new message. The message was "Jesus! You're the crazy one! If you don't know any more than that about horses, I'll have to keep you calm! You're weird!" (A psychiatrist has told me, "I get along fine with paranoids, because I get mad at them. But I get mad at them about something they can control.")

I responded by laying the whip on the ground and approaching with the halter and lead shank held out in front of me, by way of saying, "The way to keep me calm is to let me halter and lead you." The first few times I did this, she started her crazy bolting again, careering about like a firecracker. Every time she did, I picked up the whip and "chased" her. Eventually, she walked toward me and stuck her nose out quietly, handy for haltering. This was not coercion. Cornering her, lassoing her, and, most especially, sweet-talking her—all that would have been coercion. What I did—this requires the sort of commitment to the horse that is not entailed in sweet talk—was simply to set up a situation in which she had available to her certain clear decisions. Sweet talk would have muddied things up with emotional appeals.

I should say very quickly, in case there are any trainers or would-be trainers reading this, that this method will not work with most horses who don't want to be caught—especially range horses and mustangs. This was

a response to a particular and unusual problem, of appealing to what I was betting was the common sense of a very intelligent horse who had a particular history and a particular metaphysics. She had a certain story going about being caught—her own story—and since I couldn't simply toss that story out I had to revise it. But horses have nearly as many stories about what "You can't catch me" means as there are horses who refuse to be caught. No method or impersonal theory relieves the trainer of the burden of judgment.

Although Drummer Girl was—technically, at least—"green broke" and therefore rideable, I didn't ride her for a little while. Instead, I longed her. By this, I don't mean classical longeing—the handler standing in the middle of a circle around which the horse works on a longe line. I now had her on a halter and lead shank, and there was a truce between us, but it was a very uneasy sort of truce. What I did, roughly, was run in the opposite direction from the one she was taking. If she bolted to my right, I went left. If she bolted forward, I did an about-turn and ran. If she went up, I went down—to China, if necessary.

I gave her temptations and distractions. I set up a bucket full of oats, and when she darted forward to grab a mouthful (and she did this quite reliably, having been bribed a lot with oats in the past during her "You can't catch me" sequences) I turned about and ran, my momentum, as usual, yanking her head around, and she followed for a simple reason—in order to stay near her head while dealing with this clumsy ignoramus of a handler. About the fourth time my speed spun her away from the bucket of oats, the situation changed. She tensed to dart forward and then stopped herself (the lead rope was completely slack), turning over in her head the implications of my behavior. She got it right, snorted, stuck her left eye up to my right eye, and pawed the ground furiously. Stories about a sweet horsie who couldn't help herself and needed only affection and gentleness were what made her crazy, but they were the only stories she had—her only survival tools—and she quite naturally didn't want to give them up. So I didn't soothe her; nor did I put any pressure on the lead shank to "steady" her. Instead, I banked everything on her capacities as a moral agent. I turned and ran again, and because she was now distracted—not by the oats but by her broodings on my outrageousness—



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she didn't move quickly enough to prevent her head from being yanked around again by my motion. This, however, was the moment when things truly changed, and she actually began paying attention to me, as a creature whose behavior might turn out to be comprehensible if not pleasant. In order to turn comfortably when I turned, she began to learn to concentrate and keep her balance.

A few days later, I went out to the stable in the morning with my friend Eleanor, who wanted to know more about animals in order to think more fully about her own work, with disturbed adolescents. She and I stood around chatting, so I didn't immediately take out the tack and catch Drummer Girl, who by now knew the order in which I worked the horses, and knew that she got worked first. She was impatient for work and came over to the gate, pawing the ground in insistent appeal rather than in fury, and bumping at the gate with her nose. So I left my chatting. When I walked over to her with the halter, she was eager, and when I was too slow for her she impatiently reached her nose out and stuck it into the correct loop. After our session was over, I turned her loose in the riding area, and my friend and I continued to talk about what was going on, seated at a table under a pepper tree. After her roll, Drummer Girl came over to us and gently interposed her nose between us, nodding her head a bit, peacefully, to make sure we knew that she wanted to be in on the conversation. Eleanor, who had never ridden a horse, and certainly hadn't the skills for dealing with a homicidal thoroughbred, and who was, in any event, rather frail physically, scratched the mare's neck and shoulder—a gesture that just a few days before had inspired impressive displays of anger. She chatted with the horse, with Drummer Girl practically in her lap, in perfect safety.

It is not hard to make this out to be a tale of coercion, I suppose; all you have to do is put the right adjectives in front of the word "halter," or suitably modify the word "eager," in the foregoing paragraphs. However, as I keep saying, it would be impossible to get the response I have described from the mare by using such a philosophy.

Drummer Girl still didn't fully trust me, so even though she had come fairly quickly not merely to tolerate but to enjoy the work on the ground—which progressed to heeling and stays and recalls—getting on her back turned out to be quite another matter.

One day, I mounted Drummer Girl. She flipped her head back immediately and broke open my eyebrow. Instantly, with no pause, just as though she were a carefully raised and civilized Lipiz-zaner at the Spanish Riding School, I asked her to perform a *volte* at trot instead of moving off at a gingerly walk. A *volte* is a graceful circle that the horse can't maintain at all without a fair amount of concentration. Drummer Girl was so startled by this outrageous, unorthodox response on my part (remember, she had been in the hands of a number of trainers, and so knew something about orthodoxy) that she gave me two and a quarter nice

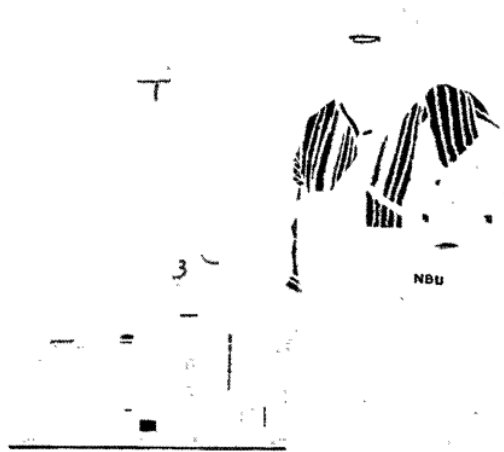
circles before she broke out again in upset. But her resistance changed, quite suddenly, from what a Marxist might admire as revolution to a half-hearted kind of objection that was a function more of habit than of story or philosophy. This was because her own beauty and talent had given her, in response to my request for the *volte*, a trot that was just about classically pure for those few moments. For a few steps, then, she achieved under saddle what horsemen call "self-carriage," and those moments of congruence and contact with her own splendor accomplished more than years of people's babbling about her sweetness and prettiness had. She was neither sweet nor pretty. She was, however, beautiful (the sort of beauty that can be the beginning of terror, since to know beauty is to know the loss of beauty and thus full angst in the face of the knowledge of death).

That it was beauty, and not prettiness, mattered, and continued to matter as I worked with her: the discipline of horsemanship entails continually making the right distinctions, not allowing oneself to be seduced, whether by the horse or by one's own flabbiness of soul, into either asking for or accepting merely pretty movement. Offering merely pretty movement was probably how Drummer Girl had kept other riders at a distance from her, but that distance she knew so well how to

maintain was the exact distance from which nagging is possible. So in refusing to nag her I was insisting that her movement be *true*, while remembering that this was a truth that came from her, and not me. My job, as Wallace Stevens said of the poet's job, was simply to recognize it when it came. Which is, of course, yet another of the hundreds of translations that horsemen have been making for centuries of Xenophon's remark that in riding the development of the horse's beauty is the sign of a true training philosophy.

VARIOUS things happened in the course of our work to complicate and change what I had to do and know in order to elicit from Drummer Girl her own power. When I originally tried her out, one of the things that had drawn both me and her owner to her was her jumping. She was one of those horses who take to jumping naturally; she was, in fact, less nervous about fences than she was about work on the flat. And her form over fences was a thing to see; without instruction, she brought from herself knowledge of all sorts of things about approaching and negotiating fences which normally I wouldn't expect of a horse for some time. She just liked to jump.

But she had become a fence rusher. Fence rushing is so generally recognized as one of the hardest problems to deal with that a fair number of excellent training books advise people to pass a fence rusher by, and try another mount. Instead of going forward eagerly and thoughtfully into a jump, of whatever height, including a symbolic pole laid on the ground, a fence rusher pushes the panic button and charges the fence in a high rage. This is dangerous for both horse and rider. I've seen and read various solutions for fence rushing. One method that once in a while works tolerably well, at least in terms of bringing home ribbons from local shows or enabling a rider to survive a fox hunt or a cross-country run, is to put a lot of headgear on the horse—martingales, which hold the head in and down, and bits, which, through leverage, not only punish the mouth, chin, and poll when the head starts to rise but also reduce the amount of pressure the rider must exert to hold a horse in, and so on. Another method is to work the horse in circles, one of whose arcs equals part of the arc to the approach, over and over again, turning the horse



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from the fence anything from ten to forty times for every time the horse is allowed to go on and jump. The hope is behavioristic: the horse will come to associate the sight of the jump with the quietness of the circles. I have seen this method work on horses (and on riders) I didn't consider genuine rushers but only temporarily unnerved or inexperienced. Another method that works on sane horses or fairly experienced ones is simply to stop the horse on the approach to the fence if he starts to charge, and then negotiate the approach again and again, until the horse comes in quietly and thoughtfully.

But Drummer Girl was dead serious about rushing. If there was any evidence of jumping timber when we walked into the riding ring, she would tense up and tremble as though she were having delirium tremens. I estimated that we could circle around and around for the next twenty years and it would serve only to reinforce her dedication to rushing. In the right hands and on the right horse, martingales and various kinds of curb bits that use leverage are useful, and even noble, devices, but at this stage Drummer Girl was still capable of such an intense terror of being captured or hemmed in that I knew I had to rely on my own quickness in giving halt corrections rather than on equipment that would otherwise have considerably reduced the amount of sheer physical work I had to do.

After suitable preparation I needn't detail here, designed to insure that she understood what was going on, I made no attempt to slow her down on the approaches to the fence. (The "fence" was, at this stage, literally nothing but a pole laid on the ground, so the athletic problems she had to solve were virtually nonexistent.) She charged at a pace and with a fury that made the Kentucky Derby look like a pleasure ride, and I let her go, leaving the reins entirely alone as long as she bolted *over the pole*. Trying to slow her only fired her up anyway; no one is strong enough to hold in such a horse—at least with the headgear I was using. I couldn't slow her, but I could stop her. So, one and a half or so mad strides after the fence, I sat up and very quietly asked with my legs and seat—not with my hands—for a halt. She, of course, paid me no attention; one purpose of fence rushing is to try, in a kind of distorted *furor poeticus*, to revise the rider and the whole situation out of existence. Drummer Girl not

only was doing that but she seemed willing to let herself be so revised: anything to avoid the by now terrifying business of *thinking* about jumping. I responded by giving her a violent halt correction, dropping the slack into one rein and using it to compensate for my relative frailty, jerking her head up and back in a way that brought her, perforce, to a sudden halt.

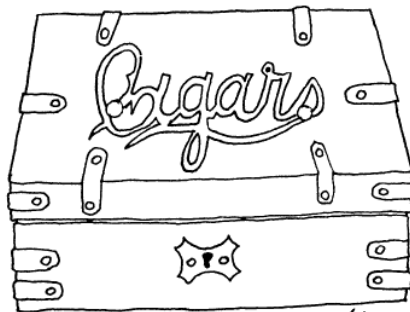
Since she understood a great deal now about the halt correction on the flat, this got her attention. We went back and forth, back and forth, over the tiny rail. I continued to leave her free to rush as she pleased on the approach, insisting on nothing but the halt afterward. In time, she started to slow down on the approach and think about it, not because she had returned to her former innocent enthusiasm for jumping but in order to be *balanced* in such a fashion that she could stop when I asked her to without either getting the correction or having to stop by letting all her weight slam painfully onto her fragile and sensitive front legs.

Soon she started, with no advice from me, to teach herself to come in with that thrillingly round canter—full collection at canter—which eliminates gravity. She achieved on her own—in the course of solving for herself the problem of dealing with the fact that she must stop after the fence—a traditional movement that is sometimes criticized by those who don't understand it as "artificial." She rounded her back, flexed her head and neck, flexed hip, knee, and hock, and brought her hind end up under her for greater control and suppleness. I had heartlessly set things up so that if she was capable of any sort of reasoning at all she must slow down and canter properly—must, that is, choose a muscular version of the Good over the chaos of the stories about a sweet, dumb horse who just couldn't help herself. I could do this only because there was a vein of harmony in her to

call on, and once she had made *this* decision she suddenly had within her the power to make further such decisions, in other situations, even though I was still far from being all the way home with this extraordinary mare. She knew now what the Good felt like, even if she didn't yet know many of the forms it could take in the uneasiness of actuality.

There are a few things in all this I haven't said much about—for instance, the fact that my first ride on this mare was made difficult for me because my eyebrow was split open, and there was a fair amount of blood stinging my eyes and interfering with vision. I did not get off to check the damage; that would have been a failure on my part to go forward, and going forward is a sacred value that the rider as well as the horse must submit to or the horse probably never will. In addition, there were risks for the horse in the procedures I am describing—not anything like the risks young horses encounter on race-tracks, but risks. And this must be understood without appeal to some calculus of suffering. The way to avoid pain and risk for the horse would have been, instead of training her, to give her a nice stall with access to enough pleasant pasturage to inspire her to move about and stay relatively healthy. The question "Why train horses at all?" is like the questions raised in "The Tempest," about why one should bother with language, or children, or with being human at all. Or like the question "Why should we like the world?" Most of the time, the only answer that can be given is a maneuver rather than an answer, as when Wittgenstein (so I am told) said, "We like the world because we do"—a remark that can be interpreted darkly or not, as you like.

If, for example, there was someone who wanted to challenge my involvement with training in general, and especially with horses like Drummer Girl, on the ground that it was "suicidal," then I might say, with some impatience, "Yeah, but you don't know how self-destructive I would be if I weren't doing this." That, of course, wouldn't answer anything, though it might get someone off my back. I have said this sort of thing—and, in fact, had occasion to say it during my first ride on Drummer Girl, as there was a nervous spectator on the ground, yammering about emergency rooms and so on, and I said that I didn't dare get off yet or the horse





## THE NEW YORKER

would eat us all. But even if such an answer were true it wouldn't tell anyone anything about what is going on. (Even if psychoanalytically inclined thinkers were right, in a given instance, about why girls ride horses, that wouldn't tell us anything.) I had fallen in love with horse training, and with this horse, and while love is a dangerous guide there are parts of the forest we sometimes find ourselves in that no other guide even guesses at the existence of.

**H**ORSES are not themselves capable of forming the question quite as we do, but they are capable of seizing on a solution when they think they have found one, as I was taught by a horse I'll call Star Blossom. I don't know for sure why so many crazy horses have names like Blossom or Sunshine or Pennies from Heaven, but I can guess. Blossom was a thirteen-year-old gelding, a nicely but somewhat coarsely built quarter horse with a deep-copper coat. Unlike Drummer Girl, he gave no evidence on the ground of being difficult—he trailed quietly, walked easily on the lead, was cooperative about being tacked up and groomed. And he didn't look crazy but seemed, rather, to regard the world peacefully out of large, serene eyes. He also, when I first saw him, was wearing the only baby-blue roping saddle I have ever seen.

Once anyone mounted him, he was a textbook maniac, though even that, despite his hard-core bolting, was deceptive to anyone watching from the ground; you really had to be on his back in order to feel how deep and persistent his insanity was. And he had, of course, been in the hands of numerous trainers. One of them had tried to teach him to stop by letting him gallop past a hitching post and leaping off as she tossed the reins over the post. So Blossom learned to slow down near hitching posts, but otherwise this vaguely behavioristic fantasy of training served only to teach him that perhaps he could get rid of the rider by heading for whatever resembled a hitching post.

Since Blossom was, in any case, easy to handle on the ground, I would lead him out to the center of the riding area (safely far from fences for crashing into and trees to climb), get aboard, and start thinking very hard and riding very intensely. I mounted at a point that was also the crossing point—and thus for some exercises the stopping point—in a large figure

eight. I could make Blossom stand still while I mounted, but once I asked, however lightly, with leg pressure for a walk he bolted. Here, as with the jumping exercise with Drummer Girl, I made no attempt to slow him; I only insisted that he bolt in a figure eight, and that his bolting be interrupted by a halt every time we went through the X in the center of the figure. He, like Drummer Girl, started to slow down, collect himself, and think, in order to be ready for the next halt command.

The first day, it took nearly two hours to get him to halt in response to the leg aid or other request without a correction. The second day, though, he was halting about half the time when I asked him to, and I gradually began to ask him to halt at other places on the figure eight besides the X, and to add in other ways to the demands I made on him. At the end of two weeks, he was calm at walk, trot, and canter, at least in the confines of the ring, but two weeks wasn't much against his thirteen years of studying how to be a crazy horse, so when his owners showed up I had no notion of putting anyone but myself on their sweetheart. When they first arrived, I happened to be working Blossom, and as we trotted by their observation post on the ringside fence they called out that that was sure a nice little ol' horse I was riding, and if they waited for a while would they have a chance to see Blossom work? That is to say, they didn't recognize their own horse, whom they had owned for a decade, so changed was he.

The son, who was about sixteen—I'll call him Jim Andrew—fancied himself quite a wrangler and wanted very badly, once he knew that this was Blossom, to ride. I thought that it wouldn't hurt if he just went about a little at a walk, and said this, and Jim Andrew got on. At first, he was still afraid of the horse and followed my directions exactly. I allowed him to progress to a trot on a long rein. Jim Andrew had never trotted the horse before (Blossom had had only two gaits before, at least under saddle: halt and bolt), so Jim Andrew decided that the necessary transformation had occurred and he could now proceed in the old way. When I felt that both horse and rider were doing well enough to try a little cantering, and had explained the leg aid for the canter, Jim Andrew instead stuck his foot out preparatory to a bold kick with a sharp-heeled cowboy boot. In the mini-second during which I read Jim

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Andrew's intentions, I despaired, being quite sure that the kick would land both of them in the next county and me with a lawsuit, if not a criminal charge, after they scraped the boy's body out of some chain-link fence.

Blossom, though, had been thinking about things. When Jim Andrew kicked him, he merely broke into a slow, shuffling, plow-horse-babysitting-the-kids-style jog trot. I shouted Jim Andrew to a halt and told him to give the aid correctly this time. But again he kicked, and again Blossom did his shuffle-foot routine. This time, I assured Jim Andrew that if he didn't do as I said I would use the bullwhip on him, and he was apparently still afraid of me, if not of Blossom. He obeyed, and Blossom surprised me—even though I had been reading him correctly—by picking up a beautiful, classical canter, with no help from Jim Andrew, who couldn't ask for that canter, because he had never known it.

All sorts of risks were being taken here. Initially, for example, I was risking the horse's health and my own life by riding at all. But notice that in making his sustained effort to say to his family "I know another way for life to be, and from now on I'm going to insist on it!" Star Blossom was also taking an enormous risk—call it a psychic or metaphysical risk—for the brief version I had had time to teach him of the story of the grownup, responsible, in-control-of-himself horse was really only a kind of small sketch, for the sake of which he was willing to give up, as it were, a gigantic mural in oils by which he had lived successfully most, if not all, of his life. This mural of his lunacy had earned him a lot of soothing pats on the shoulder, plus a lot of free time because, of course, he hadn't been ridden much in recent years.

**T**HE continuing presence of risk in any kind of training tells me that understanding what risk is, what kind of logic is involved when we speak of a "justified risk," is important. What you risk reveals what you value, or, as Heidegger would have it, the ground of your being. By "the ground of being" I don't mean anything terribly abstruse. For example, horses and dogs form an important part of the ground of my being, which can be seen by anyone who takes a ride through the countryside with me: my eyes tend to fix on any horses, dogs, and ponies in the landscape—they are the means by which I know the land-

scape. Someone else would read and know the landscape differently—by the buildings in it, say, if the person is a historian of architecture.

I'm not sure that I've made it clear how hard the question about the nature of risk is, except, perhaps, to any horseman reading this, who will know that when I "chased" Drummer Girl with the longe whip I was taking an enormous risk with her sanity—a risk that could, for all I knew, have flipped her into unalterable psychosis, the loss of all possibility of trust. In this case, I made the right decision; the risk paid off handsomely. But it needn't have; I could have been wrong—dead wrong, as we say. The horseman's relationship to risk is an example of a frequent sort of human response to the knowledge that we die, and to the way it turns out that once death has got into the imagination not even immortality will get it out again. (Think of Tennyson's poem "Tithonus," in which Tithonus, Aurora's lover, to whom the goddess has granted immortality but not eternal youth, pleads with her for the restoration of his mortality. His plaint is one of a long series in our literature.)

I don't know of a trainer who hasn't had experiences of the sort my partner had one day in riding a horse who was suicidal and homicidal in a more organized, though less committed, way than Drummer Girl. (I suspect that this horse wasn't smart enough to achieve the kind of commitment that Drummer Girl had.) My partner asked me to be on the ground whenever he rode this horse, because, he said, there ought to be someone there to get the forklift out and scrape him up from time to time. At one point, my partner said savagely, after a particularly malicious effort on the horse's part, "You know what I'd do if this were my horse? I'd kill him, that's what." He recovered his trainerly philosophy fairly quickly after this lapse, but he really meant it—this man who

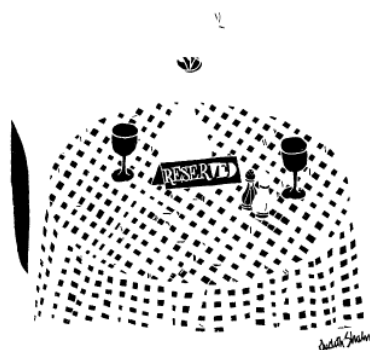
loved horses as he loved his soul, and most of the time gladly took informed risks for the sake of their beauty. And this, in the end, was a success story, a story about the success of my partner's imaginative courage, but it was also a story that needn't have turned out as it did. There was every evidence that the horse was a genuine rogue, and it did look for quite a bit as if destroying him were the only safe thing to do.

In "Riding and Jumping," William Steinkraus, who knows quite a bit about risk, has this to say:

The only horse to whom the above recommendations do not apply is the rogue—the equine equivalent of the congenitally criminal personality. As in the case of humans, some rogues are so gifted that we are tempted to take the enormous pains they require in hopes that they can be redeemed. Almost by definition, this is impossible with the real rogue, and as a rider's experience expands, he will begin to learn the telltale gestures and expressions that distinguish the rogue, or the genuinely dishonest horse, from the various spoiled and frightened horses that present some of the same symptoms. When a true rogue is encountered, the best advice is probably to dispose of him, no matter how beautiful he is, or how wonderfully he can go "when he wants to." However, such horses are very rare—and should a rider find that he is encountering very many truly stubborn, or unwilling, or dishonest temperaments, he should examine his own skills and find what it is he is doing that has made him such a bad horseman.

As it happens, I have never encountered a horse in whose soul there was no harmony to call on. I believe in the existence of such horses, especially when someone like Steinkraus tells me about them, just as I have come to believe that there are human mental disorders that are, as it were, the cancer of psychiatry—meaning that no one knows what to do for them—because of my respect for the people who tell me about them. I have just never had such a horse in my barn, partly through sheer luck. But Steinkraus's willingness to acknowledge the existence of such horses is part of what I want to call his heroism—especially when I set his passage about rogues next to Will James' insistence that there ain't no horse that can't be rode, and there ain't no man that can't be thrown.

The hero and the heroic horse both know, in one fashion and another, that we must risk death, and that this is the must of logic—something that certain would-be suicides know only too well. Ignoring it leads to moral fatigue. (There is an equine equivalent of mediocrity, and there are horses who refuse that possibility at all costs.) But



there is letdown after the glamour of winning—there isn't enough of it to go around, or enough for any one lifetime—whereas the glamour of being fully alive, angelic in what horsemen call forward desire, creates an impulsion not easily evaporated. It is in us not only to risk death but to trample on it, the way some horses trample on rattlesnakes, or else to live in the pallid indoor luxury that makes the thermonuclear button so unhealthily fascinating. A friend of mine wrote to me once that if thermonuclear war comes it will be because someone got tired; it will be not an accident, she said, but a deliberate decision to log out.

To understand safety and genuine risk in relation to war is part of the prelude to understanding what happens when a horse like Drummer Girl gets sane. The texts of horsemanship begin in a military context; the original one, Xenophon's "Art of Horsemanship," was a military manual. Drummer Girl's craziness and her sanity both have their origins in these texts, in the various traditions of horsemanship that produced her; one may say that she is the artifact of those origins, in somewhat the same way a physicist might want to say that material objects are the artifacts of gravitational fields. Hence to make mistakes about those origins is to make mistakes about who Drummer Girl is and who we are. Such mistakes are inevitable, but they need not be forever stupid.

DRUMMER GIRL'S soul was several sizes too large for her when the heroic life and its contemplation and preparation weren't available to her. That was what was wrong with the language she had been taught: the heroic had been expunged. Once she was quiet over low fences and during all exercises on the ground, I started asking her to take the genuine risks that are the only opportunities any of us have for a sufficient metaphysics, one that our souls will fit.

I had before kept things as safe as possible. Then, one day, we were at a horse show (not her first horse show, I should say). The fences in one class were from four feet nine to five feet three, and while this was not a Grand Prix course those are Grand Prix fences. At this level, there are no guarantees. There was a big oxer, followed by a tight, trappy turn to an equally formidable fence. Drummer Girl, on landing after the oxer, stumbled to her knees. I didn't pull any

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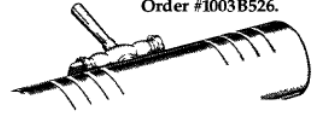


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muscles, but I did, more shamefully, lose the reins, which were floating around the mare's ears. With most horses, I suppose, I would have pulled up then, conceding the ride at that point, but by now Drummer Girl had enlarged herself—her soul was filled out—so instead of grabbing at the reins I asked, with legs and seat only, that she pull herself together and take the fence. Which she did, rising literally from her knees to jump it, at an angle. There was a wide enough turn to the next fence to enable me to collect my reins and myself, and since Drummer Girl kept her cool we won that class.

Winning was thrilling, but it was that movement, I think, from fall to heroic leap, that was the final restoration of a sane glamour to Drummer Girl. And while neither of us went on to the kind of fame that Hans Winkler and Halla earned, largely because I am no Hans Winkler, I want to return to Halla's story and say that Winkler is famous for discipline and precision in his riding—for just those qualities that a pseudo-Marxism wants to call "coercion." The horses, having read neither Marx nor Foucault, embrace heroic precision when they can. To say that horses are noble animals is to say, in part, that one of their gods is the infinite god of the details of the surface; another is the god of studied ignorance of the psychological depths and etiological empathies behind the "poor, mistreated horse" stories that had kept Drummer Girl batty.

We, too, are noble animals. I mean that we are born to it: born to the demands of the heroic, of a pleasure earlier than love and nearer to heaven, the pleasure of the heroic approach to knowledge of form. Hence an ethic or a theory of justice or a theory or practice of education that makes no attempt to trick out the syntax and the semantics of the heroic as a central mode of being human is not an ethic, whether of animal rights or human ones. Jacques Derrida, writing about Nietzsche's "On the Genealogy of Morals," says, "Degeneration does not let life dwindle away through a regular and continual decline and according to some homogeneous process. Rather, it is touched off by an inversion of values when a hostile and reactive principle actually becomes the active enemy of life. [It] is not a lesser vitality; it is a life principle hostile to life." In false romances that oppose the quest and the hearth, safety and the heroic, safety becomes in this way

"degeneration," but the great literature of the heroic tells us that the quest and the hearth are the same thing, that genuine safety demands the genuinely heroic—or, at least, that they must be mated if life is to be fecund of meaning. To ignore this primary aspect of the spirit is certainly not to write a philosophy of consciousness or, it may be, of anything at all.

IN Grand Prix riding, which is to say either dressage or jumping competitions in which the demands placed on horse and rider are so extraordinary that it is not hyperbole to call them limitless—in precisely the way that the demands of art are limitless—the logics of art, sport, and morality become indistinguishable. In Grand Prix jumping, the judge's decision rests solely on whether the lumber is still there or has been knocked to the ground after you and your horse complete your ride and on what the automatic timers say about the time the ride took. We call this a sport or a game because neither the horse's nor the rider's intentions enter into public judgments about what has occurred, any more than a batter's intentions enter into the judgment "foul ball" in baseball. You may, for example, have intended to use the course simply as preparation for a more important Grand Prix event, and so not have put a great deal of pressure on your horse to jump clean; that is, what you had in mind was increasing the horse's knowledge and experience, and not primarily winning. But if the fences are all up when you have finished taking them in the correct order, and your time is the fastest, you have won. The observer is to a great extent relieved of the burden of judgment. Dressage events are slightly more complicated for the judges, since in these, as in gymnastics or diving, winning is a matter of how well the horse performs a given movement. There are nonetheless criteria for judging which are largely independent of the rider's or the horse's intentions. I don't mean, of course, that such events are commonly won or lost *accidentally*—only that the logic of judgment does not demand an account of the competitor's intentions. There are exceptions to this rule, as there are in baseball—when the pitcher hits the batter with the ball, say—but such exceptions tend mostly to show that even baseball is not epistemologically perfectible.

In all riding competitions, the presence of the horse imposes a continuous,

unique moral burden. Not all riders are responsive to this burden, but its presence is revealed in the logic of horse-show judgments. The regulations and structures of different horse shows are variously hedged with regulations about cruelty, and whether or not an appropriate body decides that a given matter is a case of cruelty will depend, as it does normally in the rest of the law, on evaluating intentions. In Grand Prix riding, as it happens, it is rather difficult to compete both successfully and cruelly, but it is not impossible. It may happen that while warming up a rider uses a pole studded with tacks to inspire the horse to jump high and carefully. If the rider does this knowingly, it is straightforwardly cruel. If, however, in the confusion of the warmup ring I have without noticing taken my horse over such a pole that someone else has put up, I am not in the same way responsible for what has happened and am probably not going to be barred from showing. The same holds true if a trainer, unbeknownst to the rider, blisters the pasterns of a gaited horse. (There might, however, be a reprimand to the rider to be more alert in the future, and, of course, once the rider is aware of such a possibility the nature of his or her responsibility expands. If my trainer has blistered my horse's pasterns, and I don't fire the trainer or, at least, get really tough with him, then official as well as unofficial judgments of my behavior will change.)

But the burden is weightier than this. It is like the burden of teaching human beings, since the nature of riding is such that doing it at all entails meaning to do well by the horse. There are hundreds of children's stories that reveal this: the rider or keeper who sacrifices the horse's mental and physical well-being to some momentary or permanent advantage is shown to be not a bad horseman but, rather, no horseman at all. The world can make mistakes about this, and that is not only the reason there are such stories but also evidence of what kind of allegory a horse story is. In jumping, there are some riders who win fairly continuously for seasons of varying lengths despite rough, ugly methods. These riders' failures to develop their horses' beauty, understanding, nobility, and so forth, cannot by the logic of the thing enter into a judge's decision, whether or not he has eyes that are open to genuine beauty as opposed to what is merely thrilling.

The case of the rider who clowns

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and lurches his or her way around the ring year after year with little or no intelligent thought for the horse is different from the case of the rider who just doesn't happen, for whatever reason, to give a pretty ride; it is the rider's intention to *ride well* that makes the difference. The green rider going around the show ring for the first time on a wise and long-suffering old trooper is not judged *cruel* because of the knocks and bumps that both rider and mount encounter and endure. Beyond which, there are riders who are not especially strong, or are a bit stiff, or badly built, whose horses nonetheless go beautifully in the full brilliance of their intelligence.

What matters is an understanding of the *horse's* capacity for caring about beauty, precision, perfection of performance. This gives the horse's pain meaning and context, so that riding close to the point of exhaustion a green horse who knows little or nothing of art is totally different from, on occasion, asking a mature horse with a strong, developed vision for an effort that will leave him or her for a time weak. It is not that the mature horse becomes desensitized to pain but that the pain now means something. To say that pain is meaningful is simply to say that for the creature experiencing the pain there is something that matters more than comfort, at least for the moment—something that is the ground of a certain creature's being, what it cares about, is oriented toward, in relation to which pain isn't quite pain anymore, isn't anything that matters. This is probably not something anyone can make a judgment about for anyone else. My pain, like my death, belongs to me uniquely most of the time.

When my horse is in his stall or lounging about the pasture, he has the same relationship to pain that I have when I am cuddling up with a good murder mystery: comfort and convenience have top priority. Indeed, convenience is so important to horses that in the earlier stages of training one can accomplish a great deal by remembering that, as Podhajsky points out, they will even overcome objections to obeying in order to save themselves inconvenience. Nonetheless, a developed jumper or dressage horse not only doesn't object to the removal of his warm blanket and the substitution of saddle and bri-

dle but actually welcomes these preparations for work. And even horses who are extremely fastidious about stepping on wet, sloppy ground will cheerfully plow through it under tack in the course of performing *voltes*, serpentine, and so on. (Similarly with dogs: my pit bull Belle is one of the most comfort-minded dogs in existence, and has gone as far as to pull the electric blanket off my bed and put it on her bed. Furthermore, in the winter she hates going outside, even to relieve herself, and peers out the door at the weather with extreme gloom. When she has her tracking harness on, it is different: when at the beginning of a track I ask for the down-stay that lasts for several minutes she will throw herself down cheerfully in ice-encrusted snow, though not at any other time.)

Some horses are plainly more sensitive to pain than others, and Drummer Girl was such a horse. If she knocked her legs against something while playing in the pasture, she would actually limp for a while, looking distressed and sorry for herself—and this was not the kind of faking that some horses do so well. Even though she loved jumping, I had to be very careful in the beginning to avoid as far as I could her hitting herself on the jump poles and becoming frightened again. Yet once she came to *understand* jumping and actively participate in it, she wasn't distracted even by hitting a quite solid fence with a significant thwack; she simply responded by jumping harder and more carefully the next time.

Almost anyone who watches a Puissance class can see what I'm talking about. In such a class, there is a relatively low (around four feet, usually) practice fence, and then a few very formidable obstacles are raised after each round, until there is only one horse remaining who can clear them. The fences may go higher than the mounted rider's head; these are the classes where jumping records are set. Horses do not go about jumping such

heights in other situations; at least, I have never known a horse to jump higher than seven feet to get out of a corral—not even a horse that can jump higher than that under saddle—and a Puissance horse can often be kept quite handily behind fencing that is no more than four feet high. Horses, like people, require meaningful occasions and contexts for intentions that are deep and focussed. Seasoned horses develop a very keen sense of the importance or unimportance of a given context.

A rider can't say to a horse, "At around eight-thirty this evening, you will have to be psyched up for your best effort," but a rider who knows a horse fairly well can tell him or her ahead of time something about the magnitude of such an occasion: a rider can say, "Horse! Stirring things are in the air!" So in the Puissance ring there is the practice fence, which is jumped more or less on the way to the fences that count, and is the last step in the mental preparation of the horse. One frequent way of using this fence is deliberately to jump it badly. I don't mean that one interferes actively with the horse's taking it well but, rather, comes in to it casually—sloppily, even—not paying much attention, not putting out one's best effort, so that the horse either takes it uncomfortably, off balance, or actually hits it. If it is the right horse, the right rider, and the right training, this throws the horse powerfully onto his own mental resources, and you can see good jumpers, after the practice fence, prick up their ears, look around for the next fence, and, instead of trying to pull away from it, pull eagerly toward it. You can even see an awesome moment of decision in horses coming down toward really big fences. First, there is the discovery, the moment of "My God! That is a big sucker," and then the deliberate gathering, in the horse, of all his or her power, all forward desire. (Or, unfortunately, sometimes the opposite—a desperate squirrelling around, seeking any avenue of escape.)

There are various ways to talk about what could conceivably motivate a horse, or any animal, to make such an effort. Fear certainly does not do it. Courage, joy, exaltation are more like it, but, beyond that, horses have, some of the time, a strong sense of artistry. This is something very specific. It



is not merely craftsmanship, although being able to do a difficult thing well is, of course, a powerful motivator for man or beast. When I say that a horse has a sense of artistry, I mean that the movements of a developed horse, the figures and leaps, mean something to that horse; and an artistic horse is one who is capable of wanting to mean the movements and the jump perfectly.

The jump, like the complicated movements of dressage, is an imitation of nature—especially of various movements that horses perform for the sake of sexual display or in the course of exercising claim rights: a stallion's claiming of a herd or a mare's claiming of a foal or of leadership status. In nature, in the horse's first inheritance of these gestures, they have particular meanings, such as "Wait your turn!" or "Watch out!" or "Look at me! I love you!" or "Wait. Be still. Something wicked this way comes." But the movements of dressage and formal jumping, properly performed, don't mean "Look at me! I love you!" or any of the others. They mean the natural movements themselves. This is why the language of analysis and criticism of riding at the highest levels is the language of art criticism. Podhajsky, attending the Olympic Games, recorded detailed observations of the rides, which became the book "The Art of Dressage." He says, speaking, as always, after Xenophon, "Anything forced or misunderstood can never be beautiful," and, later in that same chapter:

Nature can exist without art but not art without nature. Consequently, the well-trained dressage horse should perform the natural paces with perfection. Any defects in these movements cannot be made up for by some other spectacular exercises. Riders or judges who allow themselves to be dazzled by such striking movements betray the true art of riding.

Such betrayals not only are common but have become activities in themselves, and there are competitions in which special effects have entirely replaced genuine art. In the true art, Podhajsky insists, haste in the movements is always a fault, as is unhappiness on the face of the horse. Guiding phrases include "purity of the paces," "harmony, lightness in all movements" and "the impression of complete confidence," and he also says, "The horse's concentration upon his rider becomes obvious." Riders are criticized for failures of "cadence" and "tempo," or are praised for what is "fluent and precisely performed" and, especially, for what is "expressive."

Of a ride that does not achieve full passage over what he calls "the threshold of art," he writes, "Without brilliance . . . hesitant transition . . . Performance of a tolerably obedient horse with little charm and suppleness."

Podhajsky died before "The Art of Dressage" could be published, so it concludes with an "In Memoriam" by Berthold Spangenberg, who thanks his great master for teaching "the difficult, the gentle art of riding." And, indeed, it became a gentle art under Podhajsky's influence, but gentle because so difficult, or gentle because genuine, since in a genuine art there is the amassment and expression of true power as opposed to mere force. And this brings me, finally, in contact with the central question, which will be hard to talk about, because it is difficult to talk about the horse without talking about the rider, and vice versa (although it can be quite hard to see why from the ground). If this is an art for the horse, then the horse must intend it, and what does the horse intend? What can the horse conceivably mean by it? And does—can—the horse mean by it anything like what the rider means, or can mean?

The movements themselves are not literal; they don't mean what they say. If anyone, equine or human, were to respond to, say, a capriole as a literal threat or appeal, the horse would be as disconcerted as a composer would be if someone gave such a response to passages of music that are expressive of rage. But if the movements are not literal the horses nevertheless mean something by them, and there are a few horses, very great horses, who, like very great artists, have the capacity for accepting full responsibility for meaning what they "say"—do—and this is the kind of meaning that is always entailed in art. In other words, I am claiming that a great horse, like a great artist, is, in Stanley Cavell's words, "responsible for everything that happens in his work—and not just in the sense that it is done, but in the sense that it is *meant*." This does not yet explain what the horse means by it, but it does begin to suggest one aspect of the rider's role—the rider's own responsibility. Cavell goes on to note, in "Must We Mean What We Say?":

It is a terrible responsibility. . . . But it is all the more terrible, when it is shouldered, not to appreciate it, to refuse to understand something meant so well. . . . In art [the right to question the artist] has to be

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earned, through the talent of understanding, the skill of commitment, and truthfulness to one's response—the ways the artist earned his initial right to our attention. If we have earned the right to question it, the object itself will answer; otherwise not. There is poetic justice.

So a rider who is a true rider, and no mere keeper of horses, is someone who continuously earns the right to question the horse and the horse's performance, and it is the horse's performance that answers the rider's questioning. Thus, the very fact, the very possibility, of Grand Prix riding—both jumping and dressage—is our discovery in the horse of a capacity for meaning a movement or a series of movements artistically. When the threshold of art has been crossed, then the wonderful obedience and supple submission of the horse, the joy of the horse's submission, are like the intensely accurate responsiveness of a great performer to a good audience—another case of the collapse of command and obedience into a single supple relation. It is, as Podhajsky says, as though the rider thought and the horse executed the thought, without mediation or any sort of cuing; but it is also the other way around on the back of a great horse—it is as though the horse thought and the rider created, or became, a space and direction for the execution of the horse's thoughts. The rider is the person who shoulders the burden of knowing—through “the talent of understanding, the skill of commitment”—what the horse means.

But, as I have said, there are differences between the horse's concept of time and ours. It is, of course, the rider, and not the horse, who sits in the study working out training schedules, filling in entry forms to be mailed to the show committee, and marking dates on a calendar. Horses do not have what we call the tenses of verbs, so they don't talk or think about that, and that is why the Puissance rider, for all the wonderful things he can say to the horse, can't say, “Be ready to do your very best tonight at eight-thirty.” The concepts of time that enable us to make appointments and leave notes are not in the grammar of the horse's world, so we cannot share that form of life with them. And our concept of a rehearsal is very much a concept of ordering time in a particular way, by means of a particular grammar.

There is a novel called “Night Mare,” by Piers Anthony, which is told from the point of view of a mare

whose task is to bring instructively awful dreams to human beings. One of these human beings is a woman who, on learning that the mare is a hundred and seventy years old, expresses her astonishment. The mare comes up with the clumsy but strangely apt explanation, “We are immortal, at least until we die.” But there are some horses (and this, alas, is part of the talent in them) whose response to the knowledge, which art creates, of what it feels like when there is complete congruence between the soul and the moment (that congruence which Wittgenstein indicates when, at the end of the “Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,” he says, “He who lives in the present lives in eternity”) is a general anxiety that work should continue. If work, for some reason, eases and they are left to mooch serenely around the pasture, these horses become not peaceful and lazy but, rather, depressed. Such a state of mind does not, of course, entail the full grammar of angst or melancholy in human beings, but the taint of mortality is on the horse, and it takes more than mere comfort for his or her spine to be restored to a feeling of congruence with the landscape. I don't mean that in such a case any horse ever learns that death is inevitable—any more than any horse ever learns that the National Horse Show at Madison Square Garden is on the twenty-seventh of next month, however much he learns about the significance for a given moment of activities before, during, and after horse-show activities and seasons. We cannot, thank heaven, teach horses the tenses of English verbs, and this means that we cannot



not teach them that they die, or that we do—any more than you can tell your dog not to worry, you will be back from the store in ten minutes or back from the Holy Land in ten years. But

we can nonetheless interfere with—disturb—their sense of time, teaching new modes of anticipation as well as new modes of loss. The book “Night Mare” provides a kind of allegory of this. The heroine becomes “mortal by day,” and this means that during the day she cannot escape being ridden by the extremely sinister figure called the Horseman. That vulnerability is a nice emblem of what horses can learn from us—not the grammar of mortality, not a knowledge of their own, but, rather, a participation in ours.

If what I have said so far were all



there is to it, it wouldn't be hard to come to the conclusion that training horses is morally indefensible; but this isn't all there is to it, because horses have their own grammar of time. They can't say anything that requires past, present, or future tense, but this doesn't mean that without us they live in eternity, in the present tense only. Their concept of time might be expressed by saying that the names of their tenses are "not yet, here, and gone." You can't make appointments by using such tenses, but you can remember, and you can anticipate the future, with no little anxiety. That is to say, horses do have some sensitivity to the knowledge of death, and it makes them nervous, just as it makes us nervous

The knowledge is what they are relieved of, just as their riders are, in the tremendous concentration of horsemanship at the highest levels. This is why we are forgiven for riding them, especially in competitions; for distracting and scaring them with brass bands at football stadiums; for spooking them by placing garlands of roses around their sweating necks; and for surrounding them with photographers, neon beer signs, and journalists who profanely scribble figures on notepads while the horses are jumping their hearts out. And nothing short of the tremendous artistic task of training them in such a fashion that they can be released from time could ever justify our interfering with their greater serenity, our imposing our stories and our deathly arithmetics on their coherent landscapes. What they mean by their artistry, then, is just this, which one could call the release from time, but which could also be understood as what happens when a horse becomes time's lover or time's partner, moving with time instead of as time's slave.

—VICKI HEARNE

(This is the first part of a two-part article.)

CONSTABULARY NOTES FROM ALL OVER

[From the DeKalb/Sycamore (Ill.) Daily Chronicle]

VANDALISM—Jimmy E. Stone, DeKalb, reported to police that he left his residence Friday at 6:30 p.m. and returned to find mayonnaise thrown around his kitchen, police reports stated.

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