

## **Confronting Binaries in the Liminal Spaces of Beach and Adolescence In Maggie Stiefvater's Turbulent Water Horse Novel**

Maggie Stiefvater's *The Scorpio Races* places a pair of riders in competition and, eventually, romance in the context of an annual November 1 race on a Celtic island beach. Puck (Kate) is the first woman to sign up, racing her ordinary land horse against the traditional field of capall uisce. The horse whisperer Sean is a four-time winner, riding the red capall uisce Corr for Corr's wealthy owner, Malvern. The male riders, the fierce, blood-drinking water horses, and most of the island's population are opposed to Puck's competing. The races, though a contemporary tourist attraction, are rooted in ancient blood sacrifices to a horse goddess, and maintaining traditional rituals is deemed important to preserving the safety and future of the fishing trade and the island itself.

The novel is full of binaries: the male and female protagonists; Sean's and Matthew's relative positions; stallion and mare; water horse and land horse; horse and rider; pre-Christian horse worship and Christianity; island and mainland; stability and change. These binaries structure the myth-saturated narrative of liminality enacted in Sean's and Puck's coming of age on the narrow strip of beach dividing land from sea.

The protagonists, both orphans, are navigating uncertain and perilous paths to adulthood. Sean is described as having one foot on land and one in the sea; the island, itself a liminal space and more character than setting of the novel, is the only place he can feel at home. He also straddles his conflicting needs for independence from his demanding employer and his bond to Corr, whom his employer owns. Puck, in contrast, is rooted deeply on the island, dedicated to keeping her family together and keeping the home where she feels free. Both see a path to fulfilling their desires in the perilous Scorpio Races. This paper examines the tensions that define Puck and Sean's threshold to adulthood.