On Taking Back a Childhood Author

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No one at Grand Valley, as far as I know, teaches Mary O'Hara's books, but if My Friend Flicka, Thunderhead, and Green Grass of Wyoming were to be disassociated from the television series and required for any college course, it would surely be for English 309: Children's Literature. But until I was assigned to teach that course myself six or seven years ago, I never thought of teaching Mary O'Hara either. Then it occurred to me that her three novels, being horse books, might fit nicely into the Animal-Stories section of the course. Yes; why not? After all, I'd loved them as a kid myself: ten days into the double-volume gift set I received for my thirteenth birthday, I wrote on the inside front cover of Thunderhead, “I think that this book and My Friend Flicka are the best books I have ever read. They are so true to life. —S.W. July 31, 1951.” After that I read them so often that to this day I can recite the opening paragraphs by heart.

And so I reread them. I approached the task with some trepidation: we've all had the experience of returning to some beloved childhood book or film or locale only to find that through our adult eyes it is cheap and foolish. But imagine my amazement when I discovered that not only were O'Hara's novels every bit as wonderful as I'd remembered, but that they are not exclusively horse books, or children's books, at all. Oh, they're "about" horses, all right — and many children have loved them. But their main interest is human interest, and their primary theme is human love. Further, that theme comes to us in guises (and often through adult relationships) too complex for children to grasp fully. O'Hara may use a boy and his horse as protagonists, but her perspective — even when she is in the mind of that boy — is adult.

Nor is she a sentimentalist, as many writers of animal stories tend to be, and as some reviewers have charged. Indeed, the distinction between the hollowness of sentimentality and the truth of feeling — genuine feeling — was a moral as well as an aesthetic issue for her, for she could not abide falsehood in any form. "I abhor sentimentality," she declares firmly, "but I never cease to marvel at the miracles love can perform. This is her most compelling and persistent theme. Her belief in "the miracles love can perform" — a belief grounded not in shallow sentiment but in tried and tested conviction — spans her life as an artist and as a woman. It is at the heart of everything she writes.
Claiming as I do that Mary O’Hara deserves to be read, I will be quoting at greater
length in this essay than usual. I want her storytelling ability — indeed, her very words
— to stand for themselves.

Her first novel, My Friend Flicka, is a love story as tender as any I know, and ten-
year-old Ken McLaughlin, his face “beautiful with the young look of wildness and
freedom, and his dark blue dreaming eyes,”* is a hero at once gentle and passionate.
His beloved is a golden filly he has chosen over all the other colts on his father’s
ranch. On the day he first becomes aware of her, a kind of recognition passes between
them in the time-honored tradition of love at first sight:
The filly fled past Ken. He saw frightened eyes in a tangle of streaming hair and
slim legs, and a pang went through him. For a fraction of a second she had looked
at him, and it was like an appeal. (MFF Ch. 13)

Ken’s heart pounds. In that split second he knows his choice has been made.
Rocket’s colt — a yearling, a filly — and his own. He hadn’t had to choose one
after all. She had just come to him. His own because of that second’s cry for
help that had come from her eyes to his; his own because of her wild beauty
and speed; his own because his heart burned within him at the sight and thought
of her; his own because — well, just his own. (MFF Ch. 13)

This is unabashedly the language not of sentimentality but of romance, of awakening
into love:

No dream he had ever had, no imagination of adventure or triumph could touch
this moment. He felt as if he had burst out of his old self and was something
entirely new — and that the world had burst into something new too. So this
was it — this was what being alive meant — Oh, my filly, my filly, my beautiful.
(MFF Ch. 13)

Later, as lovers will, Ken traces all his recollections of her. He remembers a day
when he and Gus, the foreman, came across the black mare Rocket and realized she
had a new foal, a “wavering, pinkish colt, barely able to keep its feet,” which caused
Gus to exclaim, “Yee whiz! Luk at de little flicka!” And when Ken asked what the
word flicka meant, Gus told him it was Swedish for “little girl.” (MFF Ch. 15)

Later, after the filly entered an “awkward and ungainly” adolescence, Ken saw her again
but forgot about her until that moment when their eyes lock. Smitten now, he muses
on the exact color of her eyes and the contours of her face:

Her eyes — they had looked like balls of fire this morning. What color were
they? . . . really, she was more like just a little girl than anything — the way her
face looked, the way her blond hair blew — a little girl. (MFF Ch. 15)

But there are always impediments to true love, often, as in this case, a father’s oppo-
sition:

Ken said she’s me. Rob McLaughlin turned to Ken and said, “. . . the eve-
ning. . . .”

On a para-

But for all

The miracle

Their hid.
Ken said stubbornly, "Dad, I have to have her — she's mine." He really meant, she's mine. It felt as if his father were asking him to be torn apart. (MFF Ch. 17)

Rob McLaughlin's conviction that any foal of Rocket's must be loco seems corroborated when Flicka runs straight through a barbed wire fence too high for her to jump, and Ken must acknowledge his own responsibility for hurting the one he loves most: . . . the events of the past fortnight unrolled like a piece of film . . . Rocket going down the hole — the sound she made when she hit bottom like a muffled bass drum — plunk . . . Banner [the Goose Bar stud] — and how the officers had cheered, and his mother had cried, "All his flags flying!"

Flicka ought to be running on the upland too, her flags flying in the wind, golden and beautiful like Banner — not the hole . . . if he could have undone it all then, and put her back on the range, free and alone, he would have. (MFF Ch. 21)

On a parallel course now, both boy and horse pass through the valley of the shadow, hovering near death — Flicka from barbed-wire infection, Ken from holding her all night in the cold stream that washes her wounds clean but leaves him chilled and bloodless. By the time he recuperates — not just from pneumonia, but from an inexplicable spiritual malaise as well — many weeks have passed and Flicka has grown strong again.

He did not know what had ended the cold, weary detachment and united him to the world again, he only knew that it was his own once more, that it was beautiful and alive, and that he wanted to see Flicka. And he pressed his face against his father's sleeve and wept. (MFF Ch. 36)

Ken's tears are healing. He is ready for reunion with Flicka — a reunion that befits their love story.

Every day for weeks she had looked for him . . . Ken's quick feet thudded across the Green, the gate rattled; and when the boy came running down the path, crying, "Oh, Flicka! Flicka!", the neigh that rang out on the cold air was a sound the filly had never made before. (MFF Ch. 36)

The miracles love can perform are here clearly at work.

But for all of Ken's romantic idealism, there is nothing sentimental or idealized about O'Hara's depiction of life on the Goose Bar Ranch. Indeed, her realism can be stark, even shocking, as in the gelding scene early in the novel. Before Doc Hicks begins his bloody work, Ken watches the two-year-olds:

Their hides were glossy, their thick necks strongly arched, tails held up curving proudly. . . . They coiled and uncoiled inside the floating fringes of their hair in flowing, incessant movement, and the sun blazed down on them, making shin-
ing mirrors on their round haunches and bulging neck muscles.

Ken felt the singing spirit of them, the young hearts, the free, overflowing power,
and his hands tightened on the rail of the fence. (MFF Ch. 8)

But then the lariats snake out, the colts are thrown down to the dust, and the knives
go to work. Jingo, a tall blue roan, turns out to be a risling — a colt with undescend-
ed testicles:

None of the men joshed or even spoke now while the vet worked, but the colt
screamed and struggled terribly. Before the operation was over, he too was quiet,
lying inert while the bright streams of his blood darkened the sand. Doc’s arms
were red to the elbow.

At last it was over. “Got it;” said Doc, straightening up. When Tim got off
Jingo’s head, Jingo lay still and did not move. Then Bill gave him a couple of
good kicks in the haunches, and Jingo sprang up and trotted into the next corral. (MFF Ch. 8)

Clearly, this is no equine version of “Lassie.”

The human portraits, too, are realistic. Rob and Nell, for example, are not just Ken’s
parents; they are individualized adults whose love for each other is strong but whose
relationship — like life on the ranch — is often stormy:

“Love me?” [Rob] asked.

“I knew you were going to say that!” she exclaimed angrily. “When you’ve just
made me mad, that isn’t any time to say things like that.”

His one arm squeezed and shook her a little. “Love me?” he repeated.

The one deep dimple in Nell’s right cheek appeared in spite of herself, and
she turned her face away. “Oh, yes, then, have it your own way! . . . But, Rob —
Ken —”

“Don’t talk about him!” he roared, dropping his arm. “I’ve had all I can stand
of him!” He went out of the room, slammed the door, and stamped down the
hall to the bathroom.

Nell climbed into bed, turned up the kerosene lamp, took her book from beside
it, and began to read. Her dimple had disappeared, and her lips were very set
and prim. (MFF Ch. 23)

Characters like these remain solid in our minds, just as real people do.

In Thunderhead Ken’s love for Flicka has modulated into a kind of settled affection,
like a marriage that is no longer new; the intensity of his feeling is transferred to her
ugly little goblin colt.

It was Flicka’s — her first . . . Half his sobbing was because of this love that was
bursting his heart for the ungainly little creature that had turned away from

him and his brothers.

At the climax of his father’s death, Ken says: “I can’t believe that boys are consigned
Th Ch. 39) into sentimental experiences like this.”

“boys who have no social or emotional experience of the death of a loved one.”

Anger is evident in Thunderhead. Rob is a stallion. Both father and son command
both father and son are given a rite of passage to mark their masculinity:

We experience the truth of Ken’s comment about his mother of losing confidence
and not denying it. “We should be out of it — 50 years!” (Th Ch. 39)

She had no more confidence in herself than in her son. She had never given up
her firmness as the end of things.

Both suffer confusion and shame;
Both suffer disillusions;
Both suffer loss;
Both suffer loss of confidence.

She also weeps constantly, hopeless and helpless.

I always feel a great deal of anger and loathing about the solution to do it.

She couldn’t do it.

And at that point he is brought to see how to avoid a repetition.

Rob finally
him and looked at him with a resentful, white-ringed eye. (Th Ch. 6)

At the climax of this novel we again find him “white and hollow-eyed” — a condition his father recognizes as “always caused by one of these soul-struggles over horses.” Th Ch. 39) For Ken is, as N. Y. Times reviewer E. L. Buell aptly put it, one of those “boys who hurt themselves by the very force of their desire.” Indeed, the central emotional experience of Thunderhead is frustrated desire: the anger that arises from it and the death of the willful ego necessary to transcend it.

Anger is evident even in O'Hara's animal protagonist — he is called Goblin at first, Thunderhead later — and is his dominant humor until he comes into his own as a stallion. But it naturally takes more complex forms in humans than in horses, and both father and son grapple with it powerfully in this novel. For Ken it becomes a rite of passage into first manhood; for Rob an awakening into a fuller, less arrogant masculinity.

We experience Rob's anger mainly through Nell who — in her own need to face the truth of their financial situation — draws its focus to herself. When Rob accuses her of losing faith in him, of "just sitting back waiting for the crash," Nell cannot deny it. "‘Well,' she suddenly whispered, ‘we are on the downgrade, have been for years.'" (Th Ch. 18) Rob is bitterly wounded at this admission. As he sees it, Nell has lost confidence not just in the ranch but in him, and he hardens himself against her.

She had wounded his pride (but not his self confidence — I might have known he'd never give up the horses, he'd sooner give up me) so he had put her outside. She was the enemy for him. And he was all she had. (Th Ch. 25)

Both suffer deeply. But Rob seems strong in his anger; he wraps himself in it and appears — to Nell at least — impervious:

Rob! Did he feel nothing? Didn't he care at all? Didn't he miss her as she missed him? Suffer for the loss of her? No. People who get angry save themselves, at least for the time being, from suffering. You throw up the barrage of anger — you escape the hurt. Rob got angry. He was always angry. (Th Ch. 26)

Nell weeps constantly, cannot eat, and grows physically weak. But Rob is "dark and hopeless and in a sort of hard frenzy."

I always knew he could do it, whispered Nell to herself. He likes it. Likes his anger and fury. Likes to harden himself. Confidence! Silly...Confidence has nothing to do with it. Besides, is it true? Is he really hurt or is this revenge?

She could not bear to look at him.

And at last she could not bear to be near him. She planned, all day long, how to avoid him... (Th Ch. 32)

Rob finally breaks only when the old mare who represents all his youthful spirit
dies after foaling in an ice storm:

It wasn't only a horse dying. It was the end of half his life and all his young manhood, his young wilfulness. It was the breaking of that last link with the happy beginnings of things. (Th Ch. 33)

Nell finds him crouched over the mare, and Rob turns to her with “a harsh, anguished cry,” weeping, kissing her frantically. “There was pleading in it...and shame...and love.” (Th Ch. 33) Later, he confesses that he too has been in hell. “Something had to — sort of — die in me,” he muses, “before I could give in.” And Nell replies, “But that's the way it always is. Something dies — so that something better can come to life.” (Th Ch. 34) The words carry a double charge: they suggest both the spiritual rebirth of her husband and the literal engendering of a child. For the reconciliation, rich in the miracles that love can perform, brings Nell the little girl — the little flicka — she has always wanted.

Ken, too, discovers in himself a capacity for anger as events push him beyond his boyish trust in happy endings. Frustrated past endurance at the disappearance of his colt, Ken hurls his stopwatch from the top of Castle Rock, mopes, and neglects his duties.

He raised his gun and shot at a hawk that was sailing low...He felt like killing something. (Th Ch. 14)

He mulls over the words Sine Deo Quid on his mother’s family crest:

So who would say without God what?...He felt a sort of jar inside him because — now — none of [the] good things made him happy. He didn't want anything but the Goblin. That was it — without Goblin what? — Nothing! (Th Ch. 14)

Ken’s grief is compounded by the more generalized loss of innocence that accompanies a maturing sensibility. Standing alone at the top of the Saddle Back one moonlit winter night, he is assailed by his first intimation of mortality:

He felt the impact of all that was beyond him — the larger things. His future manhood. Women and love. Death. It hit him so sharply that he could have cried out in pain, and he looked up at the moon trying to blink the hot tears from his eyes. Such swift maturing fused him to adult life before he was able to bear it. (Th Ch. 10)

In the months that follow, other revelations crowd in upon him:

Awful things happened to other people, he knew that. You read about them in the newspaper, you heard about them, but to him himself — to his family — He felt bewildered and his eyes roved the meadow. If that was the way life really was — that no one was safe, not even you yourself. (Th Ch. 14)
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Here was the real blow. That not even when you were grown up — your own

master, stamping around, giving orders to everyone — did you get what you

wanted. Within himself he writhed — that thing he had always thought, that

he had only to arrive at his twenty-first birthday and any possibility of misery

was over. (Th Ch. 14)

Rob lectures Ken on fortitude, and the boy is inspired:

“Dad, I’ve decided to take it.”

Rob turned to say, “Deciding to do a thing is very different from doing it.”

Ken was disconcerted. “Why... If you decide, you can go ahead and do it, can’t

you?”

“Sometimes. Sometimes not. Things happen. It doesn’t come off. You can try

and break your heart trying and still you can fail.” (Th Ch. 14)

After Thunderhead kills the Albino and takes over his mares, Ken must give up

his dream of racing the stallion. But the fact that Rob shares his disappointment helps,

as does his praise:

“I can tell you this, if it’ll make you feel any better—” They both got to their

feet. “I’m damned proud of

you.”

“Of me!”

“Of

you. My God, Ken! You rode a stallion at work!... You behaved with
courage. You tried to get your colt back... You got on him and rode him to hell
and gone. You did something I’ve never done.” (Th Ch. 39)

Ken feels suddenly older. He leaves for Saginaw Falls wearing a small Fedora hat and

new trousers “two inches longer than any he had had before.”

But the greatest change was within him... He decided finally that it must be

fortitude... an admixture of bitter disappointment with cheerfulness and readiness
to go on and do whatever was in line. He wasn’t ‘howling’ about Thunderhead now when the worst had happened. When you were howling you could
derive pleasure from nothing except the one thing you wanted which was denied

you. But when you had fortitude, a great deal of pleasure could be built on top

of that, even though, at the bottom, was still the deep grief. (Th Ch. 40)

In his new maturity, Ken is able finally to let go of his own dreams of glory. The

end of the novel finds him not in the winner’s circle with his stallion, but back at

the Valley of the Eagles, saying goodbye:

That other life he had tried to give Thunderhead — the life of a racehorse —

how desperately he had prayed for it! He felt almost bewildered. For all his prayers

had been denied and all his efforts frustrated, and yet this — this — was

the answer. (Th Ch. 44)
Ken knows that returning the horse to his mares means inevitable death for Banner: there is no room for two stallions on the ranch. Racing him — and winning — means either gelding Thunderhead, or selling him to the Army as a band horse, or both. But Ken finds an ingenious solution to this dilemma that answers the stallion's mute plea to "give me back my mares!" without endangering his father's stud. So that the horse will be unable to come back down the mountain to challenge Banner, Ken has dynamited the boulders that enclose the valley, sealing off any egress. Now he stands on a rock and strains his eyes for a last glimpse of Thunderhead and the mares: Here it was, now, the parting. He put up his hand and brushed the warm tears from his cheeks, surprised to find them there, because, in spite of the loneliness and the sense of bitter loss, it was as if the beauty of the valley and the gloriousness of Thunderhead's freedom were inside him too. (Th Ch. 44)

In Green Grass of Wyoming Ken, now sixteen, meets Carey Marsh, the childlike niece of racing stables owner Beaver Greenway, and with his usual single-minded intensity, falls deeply in love with her. Watching him, Nell muses on what Rob calls Ken's possessiveness:

Who that loves, really loves, would be willing to share? If they were willing, it would mean that they were lukewarm and indifferent. The possessive ones are the ardent ones, the all-out ones; the ones who can give themselves wholly, utterly. Possessiveness is the sweetest part of love, and it's all of sex! (GGW Ch. 10)

For Nell — as, one suspects, for Mary O'Hara herself — love is "a force, like electricity," which comes not as affection or admiration, or any sentiment, but as if one suffered a blow, an impact... It is all one can do to hold up under it. One is changed, and struggles along as a blinded, bewildered, changed being. (GGW Ch. 24)

Love is transformative: by a kind of alchemical magic it leaves us permanently changed. After her first encounter with Ken, for example, Carey's prior existence seems to have been lived in another dimension:

Looking backward through life, one can see the points of change, like great locks through which one glides on a flood wave, so smoothly, on such irresistible power that one is hardly aware of any movement. But life is never the same again. One has gone through the lock and lives on a new level. (GGW Ch. 8)

Like her pampered filly, Crown Jewel, Carey has led a sheltered existence. Even Ken is struck by this:

It seemed to him that he knew so much more, had experienced so much more than she, that she could not possibly understand. The Valley of the Eagles had entered into him and nothing like that was in her life — just carrying trays to an old sick harridan up to the attic. But after she painted scenery for party for Jennie grass and the freedom, wild and free.

Despite his energies with Carey:

Ken did not notice at all. Didn't notice in... might Gosh... (Ch. 7)

But for all the spiritual awakening of the morning of putting his "Leave Her..."

"Yes, I...

The carame... before Ken... that mad... But not un...

Bewildered... did he... his head... went around.

The imperishable mixture of p...
Search for Banner: meaning — means horse, or both. Stallion's mute word. So that the Banner, Ken has Now he stands and the mares: warm tears loneliness glorious—childlike niece ended intensity, calls Ken's pos-

willing, it live ones are wildly, utterly. (GGW Ch. 10) like electricity,

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an old sick woman, and changing her clothes, and being obedient to the old harridan and riding a horse that was cleaned and saddled by a groom and brought up to the front door for her to mount. (GGW Ch. 9)

But after she meets Ken, Carey's life spreads out "like an open fan upon which were painted scenes of new and fascinating places and people." (GGW Ch. 11) On a search party for Jewel and Thunderhead she feels a thrilling new intimacy with "earth and grass and the smell of the horses and men. There was something else — it was freedom, wild and soft and sweet and exciting." (GGW Ch. 12)

Despite his greater experience, Ken's perspective is similarly altered by his first meeting with Carey:

Ken did not know how deep a sigh he heaved, did not know that he sighed at all. Did not know how long he stood leaning against the stone wall of the spring house...In the house...she was there...soon he would be going in...might actually run into her in the hall or on the stairs...Oh, Gosh, Oh, Gosh...was it real...It had all happened and everything was different. (GGW Ch. 7)

But for all this romantic intensity, their love unfolds slowly and believably. The sexual awakening of the two young people is subtly yet powerfully evoked. Early on the morning of the search party, for instance, Ken tells Carey that he will wake her by putting his hand through her bedroom window:

"Leave the screen up a little. I can put in my hand and reach your shoulder:"

Her head sank. It was a gesture of assent, but that was not all. There was something tremulous that moved between them. (GGW Ch. 10)

And even though Carey wakes on her own, Ken reaches through the window "just to see" if he could have touched her shoulder:

"Yes, I could have," [he tells her]. "I felt the pillow."

The car drove on through the thinning darkness...And it was a long time before Ken finished his thought with a few simple words, "The pillow was warm," that made a strange, tingling embarrassment go through Carey. (GGW Ch. 11)

But not until Chapter 27 does he finally kiss her:

Bewildered, thrilled, weary, excited, Ken moved hesitantly toward her. How close did he dare to go? He put his arms around her, he hugged her tight, he bent his head down upon hers. He felt the slim little-girl body against him, her arms went around him, and her hands held on to his waist. (GGW Ch. 27)

The impediment in this love story is Carey's grandmother — or, rather, Carey's emotional bondage to the selfish old woman who manipulates her through a potent mixture of pathos and anger. As Carey herself observes, "But she gets so mad!...When
one person’s mad and the other isn’t, the mad one always wins!” (GGW Ch. 43) And when anger fails, Mrs. Palmer exploits the girl’s natural tenderness and compassion, adopting the attitude of “piteousness and tremulous bravery which she knew from long practice was the hardest of all on her granddaughter.” (GGW Ch. 32) Not until the end of the novel does Carey, emboldened by her engagement to Ken, find the courage to break free of the old lady’s physical and psychological grip:

“You dare to tell me, what you’ll do and not do!”

For answer Carey smiled. She lifted her imprisoned wrist, gave it a sharp twist, and she was free.

She said the word aloud as she stepped back, rubbing the skin where her grandmother’s hand had held her. “Free!” The next moment she was gone. (GGW Ch. 45)

While Carey struggles with guilt and divided loyalty, Ken probes the nature of love itself, questioning the depth of his feeling for Carey in language reminiscent of My Friend Flicka:

He searched himself more deeply. Did he really love her... all that love meant?... Did he want Carey for keeps?

A pain shot through him... Of course he wanted her! Anyone would want her. Oh, she was his own! She was the only girl he had ever known or talked to who seemed important — who even seemed real. The others... seemed sort of made up out of curls and eyes and giggles and pretty legs, but Carey was real. (GGW Ch. 38)

Borrowing Victor Hugo’s words, he murmurs to himself, “Carey is my abyss.”

She was a deep place within him. She was there permanently. Whenever he was alone, he, as it were, fell into that abyss and there lived, silently and strongly, alone with her. (GGW Ch. 38)

The miracle of love — for Ken and for his creator — is that it is the source of all happiness. As Nell puts it in a letter to her older son, “If only we could find some way to kindle it to a great flame in ourselves, which would never wane or die, and for some One who could never disappoint or abandon us, we could ask nothing more.” (GGW Ch. 28)

Consistently, then, Mary O’Hara celebrates the miracles love can perform — not in sentimental effusions, but as an integral theme in her fictional world. Her handling of this theme is, as we have seen, many-faceted and complex, so that although her novels have been appropriated by children she cannot accurately be called only a children’s author. Her depiction of ranch life in Wyoming in the 30’s is factual, stark, frequently bloody and brutal. Her family portraits are similarly realistic: an amalgam of tensions, which seem familiar to reviewer pu...and discour...ism.”6 Even of character...skilled and... She knows far more at... 1Mary O’Hara in...Citation: American...1947); Contemp...1981); Current...2Orville Prescott...O’Hara in her...3Mary O’Hara, My...Grass of Wyoming; available are the...theses in the...4E. L. Buell’s re...5Mary O’Hara, l...6G. G. Bates’ re...
7Ch. 43) And compassion, he knew from the first.

32) Not until he laid it on the line, find the sharp twist, her grandmère. (GGW

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tensions, rivalries, affections, and loyalties. Her characters are flesh and blood; they seem familiar not because they are stock figures but because, as one contemporary reviewer put it, “they are brusque, with the sharp corners left on, falling into anger and discouragement convincingly and fighting out again with no tinge of Pollyannaism.”® Even her animals are individualized; some, like Thunderhead, undergo a change of character nearly as interesting as a human being’s. All in all, Mary O’Hara is a skilled and sensitive writer who deserves to be read by adults as well as by children. She knows as much about people as she does about horses, and she is entitled to far more attention from educators and critics than she has received.


Mary O’Hara, My Friend Flicka (1941; rpt. New York: Dell, 1974), Ch. I. My Friend Flicka, Thunderhead, and Green Grass of Wyoming were originally published by J. B. Lippincott in 1941, 1943, and 1946 respectively; more readily available are the Dell editions of the novels published in 1974. My references will be to chapter numbers in parentheses in the text.
