

‘Have This Horse’: The Role of Horses and Horsemanship in Medieval Arthurian Literature

*Than Arthure as a lyon ran unto kynge Cradilment of North Walis and smote hym
thorow the lyffte syde, that horse and man felle downe. Than he toke the horse by the
reygne and led hym unto Ulphine and seyde, “Have this horse, myne olde frende, for
grete nede hast thou of an horse.”* Sir Thomas Malory, ‘The Tale of King Arthur’¹

Sir Thomas Malory takes advantage of the horse, and horsemanship in general, to illustrate the upheavals brought about within his culture, and also within the individual, by violence and warfare. In *Malory’s Book of Arms*, Andrew Lynch argues that the knights’ battles in the *Morte* are described “more in the style of a herald’s report on a tournament.”² The case is compelling, for even though the knights repeatedly participate in extremely violent and often deadly battles, the narrative voice remains calm, almost impassive, detailing challenges, charges, blows, weaponry, and outcomes. The style is exemplified in the passage above, taken from one of Arthur’s battles for Britain against the amassed kings. The episode continues:

Than sir Kay com unto kynge Morganoure, senesciall with the Kynge of the Hondred Knyghtes, and smote hym downe horse and man, and ledde the horse unto hys fadir, sir Ector.

Than sir Ector ran unto a knyght that hyght Lardans and smote horse and man downe, and lad the horse unto sir Brastias, that grete nede had of an horse and was gretly defoyled. Whan Brastias behelde Lucas the Butler that lay lyke a dede man undir the horse feete—and ever sir Gryflet dud mercyfully for to reskow hym.... [A]nd than sir Brastias smote one of them on the helme, that hit wente unto his tethe; and he rode unto another and smote hym, And whan Gryfflet saw rescowis he smote a knyghte on the templis, that hede and helme wente of to the erthe; and Gryfflet toke that horse and lad hym unto sir Lucas, and bade hym mownte uppon that horse and revenge his hurtis—for sir Brastias had slayne a knyght tofore—and horsed sir

Lucas. ...Also Lucas founde there on foote Bloyas de la Flaundres and Sir Gwynas, two hardy knyghtes; and in that woodnes that Lucas was in, he slew two bachelers and horsed them agayne. (19-20).³

As though playing a strange game of equestrian musical chairs, a knight unseats, topples, or kills an adversary, then leads the opponent's riderless horse to an unhorsed comrade; then he returns to the fight, only to be unseated himself. Those still mounted or having been remounted in turn lead another opponent's riderless horse to a newly unhorsed comrade, who meanwhile has stood his ground, disadvantaged, fighting on foot. The battle rages into a ferocious *melee*. The lively pace at which the knights are successively unhorsed and remounted rises to a humorous crescendo, in part *because* of the detached, "tournament-herald" narrative voice. Arthur's knights are hardy warriors, bound together by their cause, fighting not "each man unto himself," but each man beside his brothers-in-arms. But the horses also tell their part of the story within the *Morte*'s battles. The warriors on both sides of the battle, Arthur's enemies and the knights of the Round Table, are men trained to ride warhorses, and furthermore they are *all* trained to ride the *same kinds* of warhorses. By the end of the battle there is, at least on the part of the reader, no easy sorting out which knight is mounted upon whose horse, nor is the narrative voice interested in doing so for us. Neither is there any mention of equipment or animal faltering beneath the battling knights. The knight mounts, charges, and the battle continues. The horse knows his job, and no matter the skill or background of the knight on his back, the horse performs as is expected. And there is no other way to put this: such riding only happens when the riders, horses, and equipment have at some point in the past shared the field of practice and used very similar, if not the exact same, methods of training, schooling, testing, and sporting.

Leaping upon another man's horse is not usually the same thing as driving an unfamiliar automobile.⁴ However, in cases where the style of equitation, saddlery, equipment, and weaponry are nearly identical (and quite conceivably made by the same craftsmen), and given a world where possibly

the horses themselves have been bred, raised, trained, and sold *to both sides* by the same dealers, this would be much more feasible. A contrast would be the differences in mounted warfare encountered by knights on crusade upon meeting the Arab armies, whose style of riding and fighting were markedly different from the Europeans. Even today, the Arabian horse is a distinctive, identifiable “type,” easily identified on sight by experienced equestrians.

Malory’s horses underscore the small world from which the noble combatants arrive on the medieval battlefield, both in the tale and in Malory’s own heartbreakingly strife-torn England. Brothers, cousins, neighbors, childhood friends, and former allies clash in pitched violence so intimate on one level, that a knight must even check the colors on his own tunic against those on the horse beneath him to assess the damages and achievements of the day. The new horse may be one that he has ridden, or even owned, in the past; its rider, a friend, or former friend, and equal. The horse itself, standing ankle-deep in blood, might be undisturbed by the change in rider/owner just as he would be if led away by the squire of a victorious knight at the end of a jousting tournament, so long as his care and feeding at the end of the day remain a constant.

Malory, though less interested in the details of horsemanship than, say, Chrétien de Troyes, still reveals attributes of the human characters that would have been understood by Malory’s contemporary audience: Linet, Nimue, and other damsels show themselves as capable and competent riders, even on harrowing cross-country rides through wild forests and hostile lands; Pellinore, to avenge his slain horse, cleaves a knight’s head in two; Arthur and Lancelot ride horses into the ground—literally to their deaths—and acquire remounts faster than most knights change clothing. Malory’s Merlin proves his might as a royal retainer (and possibly as a wizard) by “victualling” ten thousand warriors and horses preparing to campaign by land and by sea. When they are not lying down or sitting at table, Malory’s knights and ladies are usually on horseback, battling elements, monsters, and other knights; they are fully armed and unleashed in the wilds like *Κένταυροι*, held in check sometimes only by the thread of

their allegiance to the civilized dream of Camelot.

Chivalric Audience Addressed

Marianne Dekoven in her 2009 *PMLA* guest column 'Why Animals Now?' discusses the importance of analyzing “uses of animal representation” in literary works, arguing that authors employ animals in their works for a variety of reasons and effects: anthropomorphism, animal advocacy, animal metaphors for human subjugation, shifts in perspective, and posthuman issues, to name only a few. She reminds us that animals are an integral and meaningful element of human experience, and as such carry many layers of meaning in the arts:

It is important...to avoid a reductive, ahistorical approach that lumps all literary animals together. All literary representations of animals no more form a unified or even meaningful category than do those of women or the working class.⁵

Equines in medieval Arthurian literature serve many artistic and rhetorical purposes, the subtleties of which can be glossed over or misinterpreted by even the most careful of readers, for few of us find ourselves steeped in the culture of horses and horsemanship, much less immersed in a working knowledge of medieval horse husbandry and equipment. However, this attempt to resurrect a working appreciation and apprehension of the *chival* in “chivalry” demonstrates vividly Homi Bhabha’s observation that “[t]he scraps, patches, and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a national culture.”⁶ The horse, once central to both the actual and the symbolic loci of power in Western civilization, has left the center, has become a cultural scrap, a patch worn thin. Once familiar as toast, the horse has wandered into the liminal zones of both disdain (“we have replaced you with these wonderful machines!”) and wonder (“we miss your beauty, your movement, your natural poetry—where have you gone?”). The audiences for romance and poetry of medieval and early modern Europe either belonged to, or served, a well-understood, widespread “nation” unto itself: a nation of privilege, of power, of wealth, of blood, and as this essay seeks to investigate, a nation of horses.

Of Horse And Man

The role of the horse in human history, and thus in literature and the arts, often stirs up controversy concerning ethics. Questions may arise concerning the ethics of ownership, subjugation, and the rights of animals to individual liberties. The controversies of animal suffering and freedom are often complex, as Angus Taylor has indicated:

Does it make sense to talk of liberating animals to live the lives they choose? ...Though advocates of animal liberation differ in their particular viewpoints and in the arguments they advance in support of those viewpoints, they agree that *animals must no longer be treated essentially as resources for human use*. Animals have their own lives to live and to cause them avoidable harm is morally indefensible.... Except perhaps in special cases, their basic interests are not to be subordinated to human interests.⁷

For twenty-first century readers the question of animals used as instruments of war, agriculture, transportation, and even of torture may be colored by posthuman inquiry. For knights of England, France, Italy, Germany, and Spain throughout the middle ages, the question was settled by the Church: Man was given dominion over all beasts by God. The practical equine historian might add that the horse used in service to mankind, while not free to choose a life in the wild, could also enjoy a much longer life expectancy in relative comfort and ease; a maltreated domestic horse in the middle ages would suffer and die no more horribly than an ailing horse in the wild. Whether the question is settled by scripturally assigned dominion, or by posthuman non-anthropocentric assertion of animal rights, the fact of 5,000 years of equine domestication and what some would even refer to as the partnership of horses and humans, of ‘man and beast,’ remains as a rich and illuminating legacy in the tales and legends of King Arthur and his chivalric court. In this essay I propose to first discuss areas of knowledge of horses and horsemanship that can inform and enrich our understanding of medieval Arthurian literature, to explain why some practical as well as historical knowledge of equine science is

appropriate to reading medieval romances, and, finally, to demonstrate with some few examples from Chrétien de Troyes, Marie de France, and Sir Thomas Malory, ways in which our modern readings of these tales can be enriched by restoring us to a small level of audience *addressed* (as were the contemporaries of these poets), rather than continuing our twenty-first century, “unhorsed” condition that prevents us from being an audience fully *invoked* by these tales.

Equus in Medieval Europe

Horses and horsemanship were important elements of European life in the middle ages. Ownership of the 'grand horse' or warhorse would be associated with the highest levels of society, marking power, wealth, and military prowess. However, the role of the horse throughout medieval Europe, Asia, and north Africa was much more complex than that of simply transporting people and goods. In addition to the specialized performance horses used in warfare and in tournaments, thousands of equines were employed in innumerable daily tasks at all levels of society, among all three of the 'Estates.' General categories include (but are not limited to) the following:

cart horse, or *carectarius*

sumpter, or pack horse

rouncy, *roncin*, or *runcinus*, listed in the Domesday Book as a farm horse or inexpensive, but

not cheap, work horse; later ridden by troops in the thirteenth century

courser, or hunter, a swift and agile horse used for the hunt and for dispatches

palfrey, or *palefridus*, a very fine and extremely expensive riding horse

Destrier, *dextrarius*, the Warhorse, or Horse, a horse trained and ridden for battle⁸

Other horses, such as the hobyn or 'hobby' horse, the hercator (plow horse), and Spanish jennet (riding horse), are less familiar general categories into which modern footnotes classify what was, in actuality, a huge variety of equine breeds, cross-breeds, types, and 'grade' horses (animals produced with no real breeding plan in mind). The work of equine historian Ann Hyland documents the complexity and

breadth of the history of horses and horse-keeping among civilizations in the West, the Middle East, and the Far East. There is perhaps no more eloquent argument than hers for interdisciplinarity in the study of medieval history that includes knowledge of equine science and the equestrian arts:

To the historian many references may lack the full meaning that experience of horses can give. To the horseman who lacks an historian's appreciation, many of these same references do not even register as pertaining to the horse except in the broadest sense. Dual appreciation shows a more complete picture of how an equestrian system has to operate in any age. Some ideas will need rethinking, some can be better explained in the light of what a horse is actually capable of, and there are many great similarities to our modern equestrian methods.⁹

The depth and range of understanding that knowledge of horses and horsemanship brings to historical studies of medieval Europe and its culture are demonstrated beyond question by equine historians such as Ann Hyland, R.H.C. Davis, Andrew Ayton, and John Clark. The same body of equine study can in turn enrich our reading of medieval literature, including Arthurian tales. For chivalry steps to the foreground in the Arthurian tradition, as both *matier* and *san*, matter *and* meaning, in a medieval European world fascinated with itself and with its courtly codes, including a body of chivalric ideals laid forth in popular literary works, as well as non-literary handbooks. One such book by the thirteenth century knight, scholar, and courtier-turned-cleric Ramon Lull is the *Book of Knighthood and Chivalry*. In his book Lull explains:

It was found that the horse was the most noble and most covenable to serve man, and because of that, among all beasts, men chose the horse and gave him to this same man. For after the horse which is called cheval in French . . . the man [shall be] named chevalier which is knight in English. Thus the most noble man is given the most noble beast.¹⁰

Lull, of course, is merely reinforcing a foundation for the elevated status of the knight, described in heroic terms as the best among men, worthy of this noblest of beasts. His mount is the warhorse, or

“great horse,” always a stallion, ridden by knights both in war and in tournaments. But the medieval European domestic horse was never a single type of creature, and was rarely the product of a consistent or organized breeding program.¹¹ There is even evidence that by the fourteenth century, at least in England, 'jousting and warfare had become very different forms of activity.'¹² Thus even the term 'warhorse' had eventually come to refer to a beast somewhat different from the “jousting horse.”

Certainly by the height of the Roman Empire the horse had become an integral if sometimes problematic element of life and of warfare throughout Europe, Asia, and North Africa.¹³ Methods of breeding, selecting, training, riding, barding (armoring), and valuing of warhorses went through many adaptations as the face of warfare changed, usually as a result of changes in battle technologies. The *understood* practicalities of horse ownership at all levels of society in the middle ages were complex. Because our twenty-first century culture lacks this intrinsic “horse sense,” it can be tempting in literary analysis to cite the warhorse one-dimensionally perhaps as simply a quaint prop, an antiquated icon of power, a curiosity, a mechanistic Burkean agency, a static element of *mise en scene*. All of these the horse provides in Arthurian literature, but the added dimension of even a rudimentary knowledge of horsemanship connects the dots of chivalry—the culture of the *chival*—in a manner unavailable through other terministic screens. For example, in the middle ages, just as in our post-industrial era, the horse could prove a great asset one day, a resource-burning liability the next. The very details of grain, enclosure of land, herd management, and other practicalities of sustaining the horse *qua* horse in medieval cultures have largely been lost upon a techno-urban twenty-first century audience.¹⁴

Then as now, attitudes toward the horse ranged from bonds of affection with the ‘noble beast’ at one end of the spectrum, to a mechanistic utilitarianism, the ‘beast of burden’ toward the other end of the spectrum, an animal whose life often ended as meat for the stew pot in its least ‘noble’ role.¹⁵ Then as now, audience members of the romance whose lives were closely entwined with the horse as riders, knights, archers, squires, hunters, breeders, stud marshals, farriers, trainers, farmers, drivers, and

caretakers understood that the phrase ‘to go on horseback’ was a phrase that implied a substantial amount of infrastructure and resource management beyond the mere entrance on the scene of a horse and a rider.

In their introduction to *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline, and Identity in the Early Modern World*, Karen Raber and Treva J. Tucker make an engaging case for the importance of knowledge of horses and horsemanship in studies of medieval and early modern literature and the humanities, noting the paucity of studies that focus on the influence of horses and equestrian arts in the humanities.¹⁶ The same case can easily be made for studies of medieval romances and Arthurian tales. Critical focus upon intertextual references to literary and culture-based elements such as names, colors, trappings, literary analogues, and symbolism of horses in medieval Arthurian legends and tales provides an important part of the picture.¹⁷ But we should consider the medieval Arthurian horse *qua* horse as well. For the *san*, *matiere*, scene, character, theme, and tone can be enriched from a base of equine history and practicum. Raber and Tucker point out that studies of medieval and Renaissance literature foreground knowledge of subjects such as the visual arts, gender, violence, race, and even architecture in large part because these are also elements of our twenty-first century lives. Horses, once a commercial and utilitarian commonplace in human societies, have now lost that prominence.

Horses were once so common in everyday life that the English language teems with figurative expressions, metaphors, and truisms whose origins stem from equine experience of which many speakers are oblivious. Raber and Tucker provide a useful analogy to help us reflect upon the extent to which horses, once familiar to at all levels of society, have become an esoteric subject, no longer ubiquitously accessible in Western culture:

[Imagine] a future population to which car culture is utterly defunct. How would one communicate the ubiquity of these machines to a world ... in which no one knows or cares ... what the difference between a beautiful car and an ugly one is, what constitutes good handling

or why that could possibly matter?¹⁸

Most Americans understand instantly the automotive references such as “put it in gear,” “give it some gas,” and “hit the brake.” However, many equestrian references have lost their once commonly shared imagery.¹⁹ For example, the phrase “to get off on the wrong foot,” an expression of dismay at the failed initial interactions between newly acquainted people, comes from a rider’s request that the horse transition into canter or gallop; the horse, signaled by the rider, must “move off” into canter from halt, walk, or trot by first striking out with the proper hind foot, so as to impel forward motion into the three-beat gait; in order to accomplish this, often the rider must give the signal at the appropriate time. An early (fourth century, B.C.E.) and excellent explanation of this is provided by the Greek warrior and chronicler Xenophon in his “Art of Horsemanship” (*Hippike*):

Since, too, the more approved method is to begin with the left [lead], one will best begin on this side, by giving the horse the signal to gallop while trotting, at the instant when he is treading with the right (fore) foot. As he is then on the point of raising the left, he will begin with it, and, as soon as the rider turns him to the left, will immediately begin the stride. (Xenophon, 333)²⁰

If the cue is given at the wrong moment, the horse strikes out with the wrong hind foot; thus his canter will end up on the “wrong lead,” a technicality which has little implication on a casual country hack, but could spell disaster in a cavalry charge requiring orchestrated turns, halts, and half-pirouettes (also known as ‘turn backs’ or ‘reverses’). Another example would be the expression used to describe an obstinate person as “headstrong.” The dying (perhaps already dead) metaphor, alludes to horses who quite literally do not “give” to hand pressure on halter and bridle; such a horse is not merely uncooperative or inattentive, but *literally* uses the muscle power of head and neck, to the point of dragging or overthrowing its handler. Such horses are called headstrong in comparison to “submissive” horses who may have equally inattentive or resistant moments, but nevertheless “give to pressure,” coming much more easily to hand when given a tug or “correction.” In short, even the simplest of dead

and dying equestrian metaphors in modern English carry images and experience-driven perceptions very much alive in a horse-mounted culture.

Whether reading or being read to (and often sung to), audiences in the middle ages shared, along with the fundamental necessity of fluency in the language of the poem, tale, or song, an additional fluency in the language of what today we would call equine science. Even those too poor to own or hire horses were exposed to them regularly, if only by toiling in positions adjunct to the equine service industries: loading and unloading carts or wagons; holding and/or grooming the mounts of visiting members of the upper crust; even simply knowing basics such as where to stand, walk, and place any and all items or implements in relation to a nearby horse would be useful, internalized knowledge. They understood that the wide variety of sizes, conformations, bloodlines, and temperaments of European domestic horses were in real life not as easily shoehorned into simple utilitarian categories as dry annotations written centuries later might imply, and they understood that tales of “knights” were by definition tales of “mounted warriors”: of horsemen and of *horses*. Chrétien’s contemporaries knew, for example, that there had to be *something* about the *Chevalier de la Charette* the “Knight of the Cart,” that inspired multiple hosts to *give* him warhorses, presumably outfitted with good quality saddles, bridles, and barding, the modern equivalent of a soldier showing up on foot at a stranger’s villa and driving away in a brand-new, state-of-the-art armored military vehicle, along with a cache of top-quality firearms and ammunition. Such gifts would come at great cost, though accuracy in determining exact modern equivalents of monetary value is almost impossible.²¹ Part of the difficulty consists in comparing needs with costs. During peacetime an overabundance of horses might become a drain on resources such as grazing land and grain. However, during times of war such horses would be valued at a premium as an important part of the neverending medieval European arms race.²²

“Arthurian” Knights and 12th - 15th Century Audiences

Modern historians and archaeologists have pieced together plausible portraits of early post-Roman era mounted warriors in Britain. Some evidence suggests that organized cavalries of fifth century sub-Roman knights fought against Saxon aggressors. After 400 years of Roman occupation, military units in Britain would be comprised of both continental recruits taken from various tribes (such as mounted Sarmatian conscripts), and soldiers whose parentage, culture, identity and allegiance would be a combination of Roman and Briton. Roman armies were not renowned for their mounted units, and typically drafted cavalry from conquered and occupied “barbarian” nations who were more skilled in mounted warfare, particularly in mounted archery.²³ In Britain, cavalry were developed over time, in the wake of the importation and diffusion of tactical equipment such as stirrups, saddles, and horseshoeing techniques, some probably originating in the far east, most in place, at least in some regions, by the end of the Roman era.²⁴ These hybrid Romano-Briton mounted *cataphracti* are generally presumed to be the forerunners of the armored, mounted warriors, and may have been the catalyst which inspired tales of sixth century “knights.”²⁵

None of this knowledge of early post-Roman British knighthood and horsemanship, however, was of much concern or interest to contemporary readers of Marie de France, Chrétien de Troyes, Geoffrey Chaucer, or even Sir Thomas Malory. Taking up the matter of Britain, in tale or in *lai*, was not required to impart “accurate” information about, nor understanding of, historical people and events of early post-Roman Britain. Indeed, neither were historians nor chroniclers expected to concern themselves with “accurate” details. Most, including Gildas, Nennius, Orderic Vitalis, Geoffrey of Monmouth and Jean Froissart, were concerned with propagandistic agendas which prioritized the aggrandizement of powerful patrons.²⁶ Treatises and chronicles were written—or, just as likely, dictated (a seemingly minor point, but in cases of close critical analysis of surviving manuscripts, maddeningly crucial)—by particular classes and groups of people. But much larger and equally potent groups were inclined to burn such materials as insurgent, counter insurgent, or heretical. Often texts were burned

indiscriminately, any and all labors of eloquence assigned as mere kindling in fires of conquest, destruction, or pillage. Tales from both the oral and written traditions were imitated, adapted, translated (both well and poorly), satirized, elevated to the highest of literary forms, and lowered to the raunchiest. In his detailed study *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and Future Fictions*, Donald Maddox provides a rational summary of the variety of voices in medieval Arthurian literature, and at the same time succinctly explains the impracticality of searching for consistent threads and 'influences' from generation to generation of poets:

The likelihood of identifying a stable intertextual portrayal of the renowned realm as we move from Chrétien to later writers is thus diminished by the fact that there was no consistently held, canonically 'medieval' attitude toward Arthurian story and its regal protagonist. During the Middle Ages, the Arthurian matter proved itself adaptable to a wide array of positive and negative schemes. As a result of the incessant *mouvance* of the myth, heirs of the rich legacy of Chrétien and of *his* precursors repeatedly appropriated and reinvested the tradition in ways that were not always in harmony with those of their forbears.²⁷

The practice of setting Arthurian prose and verse romances against anachronistic backdrops of, for example, the authors' familiar world of post-Norman stone castles and (in the case of Malory) fifteenth century barding was a broadly accepted convention. And because contemporary audiences were not the least bit interested in historical "accuracy" in Arthurian tales, we can learn more about the contemporary audience and its culture from each tale than we can discern about the misty realities of a much earlier, post-Roman, "Arthurian" era.²⁸ Tales of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table were the stuff of legend, expected to reinforce, challenge, complicate, even satirize a broad spectrum of chivalric cultural codes and ideals. Horsemanship, however, was one consistent element of chivalry in all its incarnations.

For thousands of years horsemanship held an established place among the Assyrian, Egyptian,

Parthian, Roman, Turkish, Norse, Slavic, and European ruling classes.²⁹ The horse was more than a symbol of means at the top of the social scale, nor of merely a way of transporting cargo at the bottom. The horse was an ever-present, integral, experience-shaping, perception-altering fact of life. Never a mere agent for travel and conveyance, the horse was a tangible, understood and *present* element of daily life. And more importantly for the Arthurian poet and audience, the horse was instrumental in carrying out one's duties and asserting one's rights as a member of the elite class. The horse fought battles, pulled plows, uprooted dead trees, side-passed menacingly between noisy mobs and nervous princes, pranced in awe-inspiring processions, pulled funeral-carts, patrolled the roads, and in many areas of England and mainland Europe, horses roamed wild. The horse nickered warnings of approaching friends or foes, and facilitated networks of swift communication, including espionage. But even these facts of equine-infused culture rhetorically highlight what in Burkean terms might be classified as the *tautological* horse, or the horse that culturally symbolizes, even idealizes, progress and power in civilization.

The *primal* horse, the horse woven from birth into daily life among those of high rank or even reasonable wealth, demanded attention from all five senses. In comparatively densely populated areas such as Paris, London, Troyes, or any established castle or town, one's first experience of the horse would necessarily be olfactory. Even in the most fastidiously kept stables and courtyards the smells of horse manure, urine, and sweat could linger. Records show, for example, that in London as Chaucer would have known it, '12 carts bought for use by the City rakers in carting away rubbish in 10 of the City's wards had two horses each; the carts and horses were purchased between 1372 and 1382 at a total cost of £48 6s. 8d.³⁰ The management and labor involved in simply *cleaning up after* horses encumbered a very expensive portion of the municipal budget. The smell of horses, which some people find 'earthy' and even pleasant, can quickly reach unpleasant levels, lingering on clothing and footwear,

sometimes in spite of multiple cleanings. Thus, for example, we see in Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec and Enide* the arrival of Erec and his new bride at King Lac's castle. Erec sends two knights ahead to announce his approach, and the king and at least five hundred knights "*galoperent et corrurent*" (gallop and run) out to greet the happy couple, where father and son greet and talk: "*de grant piece ne se remuent / d'iluec ou il s'antr'encontrerent*" [for a long time they did not stir from the spot where they met].³¹ The purpose of galloping out of town for the grand meet-and-greet not only gets the whole town of Carnant hopping and celebrating, but the scene also shows Chrétien's practical side: once five hundred *mounted warriors* have gathered for a procession, it is best to move everyone along briskly before too much tumult and manure have overtaken the courtyards. Among the joyful preparations upon the return and dispersal of the knightly procession, "*de jons, de mantastre et de glais / sont totes jonchiees les rues*" [all the streets were strewn with rushes, wild mint and grasses].³²

The sight of the warhorse, its profile, shape and size, has remained iconic throughout the centuries. Historians and archaeologists, in piecing together the size and shape of various mounts have left us only with the conclusion that one cannot make sweeping claims about the breeding and conformation of the horse, and that for every rule there is an exception. That having been said, *as a rule* the hunter and the war-horse were of medium build and between 15-17 hands in height (one hand=4 inches).³³ Many utilitarian-class animals, however, such as cart-horses, hackneys, rounceys, and everyday farm horses, would be reasonably small or even pony sized in stature. In "Norse Horses in Chrétien de Troyes," William Sayers speculates that the dappled palfrey given to Enide as a wedding gift from her cousin (the one first replaced by a mule, and then by a "parti-colored" palfrey from Guivret) could be a small, gaited horse not unlike the Norwegian Fjord.³⁴ And although some of these "northern" small horses are quite beautiful, their short, stocky frames would be hardly awe-inspiring as befits the new wife of a prince. It is much more likely that her "*norrois*" (northern / Norse) palfrey would be a Friesian-cross, or some other, more stately horse with smooth gaits (such as a Spanish

Jennet). Historians and literary scholars are often tempted to cite medieval illustrations such as the Carolingian siege depicted in the ninth century Golden Psalter of St. Gallen and the eleventh century Bayeux Tapestry as evidence that warhorses, too, were of small stature. However, such illustrations are stylistic, themed representations of famous events, devoid of perspective, depth, and proportion.³⁵ In such pictures, the knights' legs hang down past the horses' knees, and castles and buildings are shoulder-high. In short, all perspective is skewed, possibly for thematic emphasis. In many regions, especially those stricken by famine or simply unable to support the grain crops and fenced fields necessary to sustain greater sized animals, horses owned and ridden by those of limited means would likely have come from small-to-moderate sized stocky English horses. The wealthy and high born (including high ranking clergy), however, would probably not invest in the same small, English or Norse stock that an unassuming friar or merchant would ride.

Knights and ladies of high station would hardly be expected to hustle along the streets on shaggy little mounts, their feet nearly dragging the ground. Rather, the *comes stabularis*, or horse-marshall of a grand estate, would be expected to find and bargain for the best and most regal mounts his master could afford. And while the most expensive of all horses, the warhorse or *magnus equus*, was not necessarily in a weight class approaching that of the massive draft or heavy horse breeds (at least not until the “heavy horse” jousting of the high Renaissance), persons important enough to be considered of the noble classes were expected to have a respectable seat upon an animal large enough to intimidate those of lower birth and social station. For indeed, that was the point, punctuated clearly by Ramon Lull: “To a knight is given a horse, and also a courser to signify noblesse of courage. And because he is well horsed and high is why he may be seen to be free from fear.”³⁶ For Lull, the “horse” is the knight's warhorse or *destrier*—most probably a sturdy, well-muscled mount of approximately 15-16 hands, or the size and build of an average twenty-first century American Thoroughbred or Quarter Horse.³⁷ This was the horse trained for the head-on charge of the *melee*, or the staged battlefield. The

“courser” is the knight’s hunter: a lighter, more agile horse trained for cross-country galloping, jumping, and negotiating rough terrain. The courser should be both beautiful and energetic enough to cut an impressive figure among other members of the upper crust on a royal hunt, and rough-and-tumble enough to blast through the chaos of the *chevauchée*. As conditions, technologies, strategies, and conventions of medieval warfare changed, so did the breeding and standards of warhorses. Qualities of effective and attractive conformation, however, held true for many breeds and purposes for which horses were put to use, much as they are held today. Men entrusted with management of veterinary care and often the overall management of royal studs, were appointed “Marshalls”:

That horses filled an important role on royal desmesnes is shown by the status of stablemen who were among the key officials working on these estates. They were given holdings of their own in return for which they owed their official services, plus a rent of pigs. The stewards were in general charge of equine management. They decided on stable size, the number of horses occupying them, and how many grooms to allocate to their care. ... Presumably they deputed underlings to do the actual work.³⁸

Full treatises on horse training, or “breaking” as some would call it, from the middle ages are rare and incomplete (primarily imitative of Xenophon). However, by the thirteenth century the importance of applying a certain amount of science, rather than blindly following Aristotle’s *De Animalibus* became clear to the likes of Emperor Frederick II, who inspired his *miles in marestala* (‘knight in the marshalcy’), Jordanus Ruffus of Calabria, wrote an important, *observation*-based treatise titled *De Medicina Equorum*. Because Jordanus was a trained veterinarian working in the royal marshalcy, his worked opened up possibilities for others employed in the marshalcy to write observationally, rather than merely passing on conventional wisdom based in authority (e.g., Aristotle, Vegetius, and the fourth century *Hippiatria*).³⁹ As time progressed, such veterinary marshalls as the fifteenth century English author of *The Boke of Marchalsi* find themselves moved to put down not only remedies for horse

ailments, but also explanations for setting preferences in the conformation of an acceptable noble mount:

An hors of good entayle shal haue
a litil hed, grete, rownd iȝen, short
erin, large front, large noyes-tirles,
and large iowis, and narwe be-twene
þe iowis, long nekke and wel-rising,
aparti cambrend, euyn bak, large
brest with braun hangende, gret braune
be-neþe the sholdris with-owte,
large sidis, brod legis and large, and grete
senwis, short pastrown and gret,
euer þe gretter þe betir it is, hey corounale,
large croupe, large garet,
þe hose of þe pyntil wel forward,
the ballokes wel-hangginde, þe lesse
þat þei ben, the betir it is, þe hepis
well trussid with large braune, short
har and nowt row, þe shorter þat it
is, þe betir it is.⁴⁰

[A horse of good conformation shall have a small head, great, round eyes, short ears, large forehead, large nostrils, and large, narrow jaws; long neck set high and somewhat arched, an even back; a large, well-muscled breast; great, well-muscled shoulders; large sides; broad, large legs with great sinews; short, very sturdy pasterns, as sturdy as possible; high crown (poll),

large croup (hindquarters), large withers; the sheath of the penis well-forward, the testicles well-hung but small, the smaller the better; the hips well-framed and in good muscle; short hair and not rough, the shorter that it is, the better it is] .

For these baseline qualities of style and soundness, according to the author, one should try to obtain Spanish horses, because horses bred in “þe cuntre of Spayne are the beste, for þei be folid in an heyȝe cuntre and in hard lond” [“the country of Spain are the best, for they be foaled in a high country, and in hard (rocky) land”].⁴¹ These Spanish horses, the forerunners of today’s flashy Andalusian, Lipizzan, and Lusitano breeds, were for centuries considered the finest obtainable horses throughout Europe. In the opening of Chrétien’s *Erec and Enide*, Arthur and his courtiers ride on a hunt for the white stag, the high king mounted on a Spanish horse: “*Devant aus toz chaçoit li tois sor un chaceor espanois*” (Chrétien, ll . 123-124, Foerster ed., p. 5) [‘On a spanish hunter, the king was leading them all in the chase’ (trans. Owen, 2)].⁴² Beautiful, good sized, versatile, and graceful, with high-arching necks, tapering heads, large, soulful eyes, small ears, high-held tails, flared nostrils, and dainty feet, these horses resemble many of those in the illustrations and statuary depicting knights at their best of form in sophisticated artwork from the middle ages, such as the famous 1436 Ucello funerary monument to Sir John Hawkwood. Horses like these were bred, nurtured, conditioned, pampered, and sold at extremely high prices. And they were not always easy to find, even for ready gold. In times of war, kings were known to forbid the sale of warhorses to foreign buyers, lest they fall into enemy hands and join the arsenals used against one’s own army.⁴³ The sight of a procession of knights, riding these magnificent animals, draped from helmet to hoof in lavishly ornamented trappings, moving in formation, would have had the desired effect of inspiring awe on days of festive tournaments, and fear in the hearts of ground troops as these mounted warriors amassed before them on the field of battle.

The smells and sights of horses are accompanied by distinctive sounds. From birth, people of all classes living in towns, cities, and even small-but-busy villages throughout medieval Europe would

have heard the sounds of hooves, cart-wheels, and carriages almost constantly during daylight hours. Shod hooves on slate or limestone streets would ring out much louder than unshod feet; paving materials would be roughened to improve footing, and horse shoes could be molded with scalloped shapes (such as the Roman hippo-sandals), or with nubs on the bottoms for better traction. The townsfolk would note the sound of shod horses, and if a troop of them clattered in through the gates, the town smith would stoke his fire and prepare for a busy workday. Dogs would bark and be silenced, armor and metal fittings would clank and jingle as the big horses clopped past gaping children and calling vendors. Though opinions may vary, few vocal noises generated by equine and asinine species could be described as “dulcet” or even “pleasant,” but they do convey meaning. Horses nicker, snort, neigh, whinny and even scream, while donkeys and mules make a variety of huffing, squeaking, and braying noises--all of varying volumes and frequency. Perhaps the most arcane and surprising noise one encounters on first meeting with the horse is the “nicker”: a low, grumbling, half-snorting, half hem-hawing noise, usually made by a horse while standing his ground or approaching. At first the nickering horse may sound somewhat menacing, but the nicker often signals a simple greeting. Likewise, humans have learned that modulating their own vocalizations to a lower tonal range, even adding vibrato sounds can have a soothing effect on the lively horse. Mythology aside, though its hearing is as keen as any prey animal, the horse has never been bred or prized for its vocal ability, nor is the animal prone to constant or even frequent vocalization. Most of the noise generated by an equestrian culture would be that of clattering hooves, rumbling cartwheels, and of course the shouts and curses of the carters, vendors, rakers, tinkers, and drivers themselves.⁴⁴

It might seem odd to include taste in our journey of the senses, however it is a fact of medieval life that horses were also used as meat. Especially in times of famine, severe winter, and of course, seige, horses would be slaughtered and cooked.⁴⁵ Though the horse was considered a noble beast, the often uncertain, plague-ravaged, war-torn, and otherwise beleaguered existence of a comparatively

sparsely-populated Europe in the early middle ages necessitated a “no waste” approach to animal husbandry. Still, the existence of codices on equine veterinary care that survive today in numerous archives and private collections stands as proof of the high value with which many horses were held. In an age when no such care was perceived as necessary for other domestic animals, the horse was subjected to tonics, poultices, surgical procedures, concoctions, charms, spells, and of course that standard of desperate medieval treatment (which nevertheless appears to have worked on occasion): bloodletting.⁴⁶ So although the ailing or crippled horse might find its way to the stew pot, animals valued for their service stood a chance of being treated and occasionally cured.

Last of the senses comes the tactile contact, rider and horse together. For those of the noble classes, riding instruction might begin at age five or even younger, often under the tutelage of instructors within the ranked and titled circles of the marshalcy. For many members of the untitled classes, the care and management of horses would be their primary contact: feeding, grooming, bathing, stabling, and ground handling would be facts of life for all but the most isolated, impoverished, or sequestered members of society. In Arthurian tales, though, the primary characters are gentle-born and they ride. Likewise, a substantial percentage of the primary audience for crafted, literary Arthurian tales written in verse and eloquent prose would also see much of their world from the back of a horse. A few original written treatises on riding and horsemanship survive from the middle ages, though most are heavily influenced by Xenophon and Jordanus Ruffus; and almost none in English, save the *Boke of Marchalsi*, which provides notes on care and feeding, but no wisdom on the subject of riding. By far the most influential written treatise on horsemanship was Xenophon’s *Hippike* (*On Horsemanship*), dating from the classical period. Several thirteenth and fourteenth century copies survive now in Italy; equine historians note that works containing advice on choosing, raising, and training young horses closely imitated Xenophon’s work.⁴⁷ Above all, Xenophon encouraged riders and handlers to employ patience, gentleness, calmness, and humane handling at every stage in the horse’s

career.⁴⁸ One original medieval treatise by Dom Duarte of Portugal (1391-1438) survives in a number of codices. His commentaries and advice on equitation emphasize not only the need for a good rider to exercise both physical and mental fitness, but for a rider to study, practice, and perfect the art of riding on many different kinds of saddles. Specifically, he is concerned that knights be schooled in the different purposes or styles of riding:

And those who have good horses can get very little advantage out of them if they do not really have the appropriate riding skills, as they would not know how to do it. There are horsemen who are very skilled on a specific saddle whereas they are unable to maintain those skills on other saddles. And there are those who, if seen by connoisseurs just riding at a gallop wearing normal clothes, are judged not to be skilled horsemen. But when combating duly armoured in jousts, against other riders, using a spear as the weapon, could not be criticized at all.⁴⁹

Though Duarte's advice is generally sound his initial caution that a good seat on horseback cannot be learned from a book echoes the voices of riding instructors throughout the ages, down to the present. In order to become a rider, one must ride. Horsemanship, then as now, entailed a number of skill sets and several bodies of knowledge, some familiar to the knightly class, some more specialized within the support industries such as farriery, veterinary care, breeding, grooming, driving, fustery (saddletree making), horse trading, and even horse training. All were, at various times and locations, skills governed within a range of guilds or brotherhoods which gladly sold their services to any who had sufficient gold or goods for trade.

Equus Mulus: The Medieval Mule

It is important to say a word about mules, and especially about gaited or 'ambling' mules. For it is tempting for modern readers to assume that a mule would automatically be considered a 'downgrade' from the palfrey or even the rouncy as a riding animal. But this is not the case. For the mule is not an 'accident' or 'mistake' of breeding. Quite the contrary: the mule is born of a male asinine (donkey, or

jack) and a female equine (mare), and the result is an intelligent, sensible, usually calm and hardworking animal. Because animals at stud are not usually aroused by species other than their own, jacks must be 'socialized' with female horses, and the reverse is true of mares. As a result, the breeding of good riding mules is and has been a costly and labor-intensive industry in any age. After Enide's palfrey is left behind at the count's castle, for example, Enide is provided with a mule to ride, and she is very happily mounted. Mules, though notorious for 'stubbornness,' in actuality are good mounts for riders who are not well attuned to the stamina and needs of a mount while traveling. Simply put, the mule will make wise decisions on the road, and when it is too tired or achy to keep on, it will simply stop. A mule is a good choice for riders who might otherwise overtire or even kill a horse by pushing the animal beyond its abilities. The mule would probably not perform well as a fighting mount due to its conformation, but a gaited ('ambling') mule, such as the one ridden by Malory's Lynet when she stops the fight between Gawain and Gareth, would be a highly prized mount, pleasant to ride, and quite valuable.⁵⁰

There is obviously neither time nor space to analyze completely the literary, historical, and social implications of all medieval Arthurian horses. The presence of the horse in these tales is often noted, but rarely examined closely from knowledge of horses and horsemanship, or of their history in medieval England and France. In Marie de France's *Lanval*, for example, the shimmering moment in which the young knight first encounters the magical ladies and their loving mistress exemplifies Marie's talent for expressing relationships and revealing character through events and tangible objects.⁵¹ Lanval, dejected and worried over his economic troubles, rides out of town, and comes to a clearing:

39Li chevaliers dunt ieo vus di,
qui tant avait le rei servi,
un jur munta sur sun destrier,
si s'est alez esbaneier.

Fors de la vilë est eissuz;

tuz suls est en un pre venuz.

45 Sur une ewe curant descent;

mes sis chevaux tremble forment:

il le descengle, si s'en vait,

enmi le pre vuiltrer le fait.

Le pan de sun mantel plia

50 desuz sun chief, si se culcha.⁵²

[The knight of whom I speak, / who had served the king so long, / one day mounted his horse / and went off to amuse himself. / He left the city / and came, all alone, to a field; / he dismounted by a running stream but his horse trembled badly. / He removed the saddle and went off, / leaving the horse to roll around in the meadow. / He folded his cloak beneath his head / and lay down.⁵³

The trembling of Lanval's horse might be attributed to its sensing of the nearby *faerie*, but to the equestrian this brief passage near the beginning of the poem reveals critical information about Lanval. Horses tremble when they have been ridden hard or otherwise pushed to overexertion, then left to stand. The knight removes the saddle to protect the *saddle* from being rolled on, and instead of cooling out his horse (by walking it in hand until the trembling stops), he then flops onto the ground to relax and feel sorry for himself. Meanwhile the horse is in danger of tying up (azoturia: acute stiffness of the muscles) or even colicking (severe digestive blockage or “twisted gut”), both serious and well-known conditions. Marie de France in these few lines gives the culture of the *chival* everything it needs to know about this knight: he is young, foolish, selfish, and reckless with his best possessions. No responsible horse owner would neglect his horse this way. One can only assume that, since the horse reappears in the hands of the capable handmaidens as Lanval prepares to leave his new-found lady

love, the damsels themselves have cared for it (possibly rubbing it down with their bowls of fresh water and clean cloths).

Conclusion

The horses of medieval Arthurian tales reveal much about the characters and about the world of the poets' audiences. Marie uses Lanval's horse to provide an accurate first-impression of the young knight, an impression confirmed when he blunders his response to Guenevere's advances. Likewise Chrétien in *Erec and Enide* paints with swift strokes the rash Sir Kay, who on a whim swipes Gawaine's horse Gringalet—possibly the most famous of all Arthurian horses—and soon finds himself groveling and begging the knight who has bested him (Erec, in disguise) to allow him to return the horse to the king's favorite nephew. In the ancient tale of *Peredur* from the *Mabinogion*, the hero's willingness to dismount and lead his horse over craggy, treacherous ground reveals Peredur's practical tenacity.⁵⁴

It is not the purpose of this article to weave a quilt of the 'scraps, patches and rags' of equine science to redress hermeneutical inconsistencies in the prodigious canon of medieval Arthurian scholarship. Rather, in the spirit of addressing the literary and rhetorical richness and complexity invoked by poets writing to a *horsed* audience, it is perhaps time to return the *chival* to our studies of Arthurian *chivalry*, and inform our reading of the knight's charge, the lady's journey, the dwarf's *roncin*, the villain's chase, and the squire's chores, with an eye toward not limiting our perception and analysis of "the horse" as image, symbol, or object. Instead, it should be possible to read the *horses* – each unique and possibly of entelechial or teleological interest as *agency* (if not actual *agent*)—from a standpoint of equestrian knowledge and understanding of classical and medieval horsemanship.

- ¹ Malory, Sir Thomas. 'The Tale of King Arthur,' in *Malory: Works*. Ed. Eugène Vinaver. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971. pp. 19-20. (33)
- ² Lynch, Andrew. *Malory's Book of Arms*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997. p. 52.
- ³ Malory, Sir Thomas. *Malory: Works*. Ed. Eugène Vinaver. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971. pp. 19-20
- ⁴ See, for example, Norman, Donald, *The Design of Everyday Things*. New York: Doubleday, 2002. Machines used in contemporary everyday life, and especially for military life, are specifically designed for human usability. The horse, despite breeding for traits, temperament, conformation, and soundness, still poses a daunting 'usability' interface. As a vehicle and weapon of war it is often counterintuitive, buggy, and to the unfamiliar human user may seem totally lacking in discernible constraints, feedback, and affordances. Dom Duarte's (n. 48, below) claim that it is important for a noble to learn how to ride on every kind of saddle is accompanied by his admonishment that there are specific ways in which a horse can unseat its rider, ways in which a rider's attitude can instill confidence in the horse (thus increasing the "safety" of both), and ways in which a less skilled man may increase his ability and thus decrease his embarrassment when riding on horseback.
- ⁵ Dekoven, Marianne. 'Why Animals Now?.' *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association* 124, no. 2 (2009): 361-369. p. 365.
- ⁶ Bhabha, Homi K. "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation." in Homi K. Bhabha, ed. *Nation and Narration*. 291-322. p. 297.
- ⁷ Taylor, Angus. *Animals and Ethics: An Overview of the Philosophical Debate* 3rd Edition. Peterborough, Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2009. pp. 9-10. Here Taylor cites Stephen R.L. Clark's *The Moral Status of Animals*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.
- ⁸ Davis, R.H.C. *The Medieval Warhorse: Origin, Development and Redevelopment*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989. pp. 135-138.
- ⁹ Hyland, Ann. *The Medieval Warhorse From Byzantium To The Crusades*. Gloucestershire, UK: Sutton, 1994. p. xi.
- ¹⁰ Lull, Ramon. *The Order of Chivalry*. Translated by William Caxton. F.S. Ellis, Ed. Barrie, Canada: Sovereign Press, 2009. p. 16.
- ¹¹ For historical analysis of the complexities of medieval breeding, development, maintenance, loss, and reestablishment of equine bloodlines see R.H.C. Davis' *The Medieval Warhorse: Origin, Development and Redevelopment*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1989.
- ¹² Ayton, Andrew. *Knights and Warhorses: Military Service and the English Aristocracy Under Edward III*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994. p. 36.
- ¹³ Davis, R.H.C. *The Medieval Warhorse: Origin, Development and Redevelopment*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989. pp. 33-34.
- ¹⁴ This excerpt from Dent and Goodall's *The Foals of Epona* (Dent, A. A., and Daphne Machin Goodall. *The Foals of Epona: A History of British Ponies from the Bronze Age to Yesterday*. London: Galley Press, 1962. p. 91) illustrates the complexities inherent in the basic economy and practicality of launching a mounted warrior into the musters and thus onto the field of battle:

The knight and his destrier, as the basic fighting unit of the medieval army, needed a minimum of three other horses to keep them in action day after day, even through the six-week campaign which was the medieval strategist's ideal operation. Preferably there should be a second destrier, because the Great Horse, despite its other virtues, was rather soft. In any case it was meant to be ridden only in action. But a second destrier meant a second squire, which came expensive unless the knight had a second son who must be provided for anyhow. There must be a palfrey for the knight to ride when not in action and a cob or rouncy (runcinus in Latin) for the

squire to ride while leading the destrier. Also a pack-horse to carry the knight's armour. When chivalry reached the pitch of elaboration where the destrier too wore armour, then there must be two armour-carrying pack-horses who could be put to a small wagon when the axis of advance (or retreat) lay along a carriage-road.

For additional details, see also Chapter 3 'The Horse Inventories: Documents and Administrative Processes' in Ayton, Andrew *Knights and Warhorses: Military Service and the English Aristocracy Under Edward III*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994. pp. 49-83).

¹⁵ Salisbury, Joyce E. *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages*. New York: Routledge, 1994. pp. 54-55.

¹⁶ Raber, Karen, and Treva J. Tucker. 'Introduction.' In *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline, and Identity in the Early Modern World*, Karen Raber and Treva J. Tucker, 1-41. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.

¹⁷ Hasty, Will. 'Theorizing German Romance: The Excursus on Enite's Horse and Saddle in Hartmann von Aue's *Erec*.' *Seminar* 43, no. 3 (2007): 253-264 on the trappings of Enite's horse; other examples of essays foregrounding the horse in medieval Arthurian literature include Breeze, Andrew. 'Gryngolet, the Name of Sir Gawain's Horse.' *English Studies* 2000, no. 2 (2000): 100-101; Sayers, William. 'Norse Horses in Chrétien de Troyes.' *Romania* 125 (2007); Rowland, Beryl. 'The Horse and Rider Figure in Chaucer's Works.' *University of Toronto Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (1966): 246-259; Glenn, Jonathan A. 'Sir Launfal and the Horse Goddess.' *Medieval Perspectives* 7 (1992): 64-77. A particularly delightful discussion of medieval literary references to the (possibly apocryphal) punishment of being drawn apart by wild horses appears in Rex, Richard. 'Wild Horses, Justice, and Charity in the Prioress's Tale.' *PLL: Papers on Language & Literature* 22, no. 4 (1986): 339-351. Rex argues that the expression that one would 'rather be torn apart by wild horses' was merely hyperbolic rhetoric, although drawing and quartering was, historically speaking, carried out as punishment for treason both on the continent and in England. Malory makes reference to drawing twice, first in the tale *Of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius*, when Pryamus uses the phrase rhetorically, to indicate he is relieved to have been bested by none other than the princely Gawaine:

'Now am I bettir pleased,' sayde sir Pryamus, 'than thou haddest gyff me the Provyunce and Perysie the ryche, for I had levir have be toryn with four wylde horse than ony yoman had suche a loose wonne of me, other els ony page other prycker sholde wyne of me the pryce in this felde gotyn.' (Malory, p. 138)

Malory's second reference to such grisly action in the tale of *Lamorak de Galys* is more sinister, for it indicates that such a killing has actually been done to Sir Nanowne le Petite by 'Nabon le Noyre, a grete myghty gyaunt':

...And thes fysshers tolde sir Lamerok all the gyse of syr Nabon, how there com never knyght of kynge Arthurs but he distroyed hym. And the laste batayle that ever he ded was wyth sir Nanowne le Petyte, and whan he had wonne hym he put hym to a shamefull deth in the despyte of kynge Arthure: he was drawyn lym-meale. 'That forthynkes me,' seyde sir Lamerok, 'for that knyghtes deth, for he was my cosyn, and yf I were at myne ease as well as ever I was, I wolde revenge his deth.' (Malory, p. 274)

Rex points out that the despicable nature of drawing was not so much the grisly act itself, but that only *the king* could order such punishment for the specific crime of treason. To do so without royal edict would be a treasonous act in itself. From a point of view informed by contemporary knowledge of wild horses and horsemanship, to attempt such a "drawing" with feral animals would most likely result in injury and havoc for victim, aggressor, horses, and any bystanders within galloping distance of the panicked, thrashing, entangled beasts.

¹⁸ Raber, Karen, and Treva J. Tucker. 'Introduction.' In *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline,*

and Identity in the Early Modern World, Karen Raber and Treva J. Tucker, 1-41. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005, p. 3.

¹⁹ Consider that even a lowly medieval slave, serf, servant, or peddler performing errands or tasks would know not to place goods or foodstuffs in close proximity to a tethered or unsupervised horse. Unlike the parked car, the horse will rummage in food-sacks for apples, grain, or sweets; he will paw or trample items left on the ground; and, when frightened, he will easily break a lead rope, or fence-rail or other object to which he has been tied, a frequent enough occurrence to reinforce the knowledge that horses must be taught to stand quietly where tied; they are not mechanically 'secured.' Horses are often compared in temperament and intelligence to 5 year-old human children, and have a talent for getting into mischief. Most medieval bystanders would have at least a nodding acquaintance with basic grooming, ground handling, tacking, and overall equine etiquette.

²⁰ Xenophon. "On the Art of Horsemanship." Vol. 7. Trans. E.C. Marchant. *Xenophon in Seven Volumes: VII Scripta Minora*. Ed. Brownson Carleton. Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1925. 7 vols. 333. Print.

²¹ Verbruggen, citing the *Lex Ribuaria*, MGH, Leges, V, tit. 36 11, p. 231, provides the following chart, illustrating the heavy cost of putting warhorses and mounted knights into the field, noting these costs remained comparative throughout the middle ages, so that only the most well-heeled of landed nobility were capable of launching full companies of knights into the field of battle:

It is important to consider the cost of equipping an armoured cavalryman in the middle of the eighth century, at the time when the Frankish heavy cavalry was being developed. The Ripuarian Law gives the price of weapons and equipment as well as the value of horses, oxen, and cows.

The helmet	6 solidi
The <i>brunia</i> or byrny	12 solidi
The sword and scabbard	7 solidi
The sword alone, w/out scabbard	3 solidi
The leggings	6 solidi
The lance and shield	2 solidi
The horse	12 solidi

A sound ox with horns was then worth two *solidi*, a sound cow with horns anything between one and three *solidi*, a sound mare three *solidi*. The equipment of an armoured cavalryman thus cost as much as fifteen mares or nearly twenty-three oxen, an enormous sum of money.

Verbruggen, J.F. *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe During the Middle Ages*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997. p. 23.

For a detailed account of costs, provisions, accounting, and compensation for warhorses from the crown in the fourteenth century, see Ayton, Andrew. *Knights and Warhorses: Military Service and the English Aristocracy Under Edward III*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994. Chapters 3 and 4, pp. 49-137. Ayton discusses the appraisal of horses and the *restaurum equorum* in fourteenth century England:

The [inventories] were working records, drawn up as an army's warhorses were appraised at the start of a period of paid military service and designed to be consulted and annotated during and after the campaign. The [*restaurum equorum* accounts], consisting of lists of horses lost on active service, were based on information contained in the full horse inventories, but were usually compiled long after the dust of the campaign had settled, as part of a formal set of accounts. (49)

²²Hyland, Ann. *The Medieval Warhorse: From Byzantium to the Crusades*. Gloucestershire: Sutton

Publishing, Ltd., 1994. p. 64.

²³ Hyland, Ann. *The Medieval Warhorse: From Byzantium to the Crusades*. Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, Ltd., 1994. p. 3.

²⁴ Both Ann Hyland (*The Horse in the Middle Ages*. Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, Ltd., 1999) and John Clark ('Horseshoes' in *The Medieval Horse And Its Equipment*, ed. John Clark, New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004. pp. 75-123) offer cautious historical and archeological evaluation of Roman use of horseshoeing, and of horseshoeing in general before the Norman Conquest. Some evidence of an 'equisandal,' a forerunner of the horseshoe, appears in the archeological record, but full-blown 'marshalcy' including the farrier's equipment as we understand it today probably emerged in the eleventh century. Saddles and saddlery, however, appear in works of art from the Far East all the way to western Europe from early ancient times forward.

²⁵ For a lively, current discussion of historical and archaeological Arthurian Britain, see Reno, Frank D. *Historic Figures of the Arthurian Era: Authenticating the Enemies and Allies of Britain's Post-Roman King*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2000.

²⁶ For analysis of attitudes toward Arthurian tales in the middle ages see Thomas Crofts' work on Caxton's preface in *Malory's Contemporary Audience* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006). Crofts includes discussion of the politics and economic power struggles that influenced authorship and publication of medieval Arthurian literature:

Especially interesting to us is that this change [the idea of political cause-and-effect which began to crowd out salvation as the ordering principle of reality] occurred at the same time as King Arthur entered the Latin British historical narrative, that is, with [William of] Malmesbury's *Gesta* and the *Historia regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth (c. 1100-1154). These were not the first texts to mention Arthur; by the twelfth century, he was a Celtic hero-king of long standing. Malmesbury and others sought to rectify the historical record by separating the historical truth about Arthur from the exaggeration of his exploits in popular tales, tales which had no written authority behind them. ...The history of Geoffrey's book demonstrates the influence which a genre and its accompanying expectations may wield over texts themselves and, in this case, over the historical imagination. But subsequent readers and writers did not, as many critics presume they did, fail to recognize this effect. Rather, they seemed to make room for it. Wace and Chrétien understood what a paper-thin proposition Arthur's historicity was; this understanding did not require them to reject it, however: it merely reminded them to attribute that proposition to other texts. Arthur's historicity seems always to have been provisional: it is to be expected, then, that he would thrive in a historiography that had lowered its gaze from the horizon of universal history and begun to answer to local requirements, and to serve secular interests. (pp. 36-37)

²⁷ Maddox, Donald. *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and future fictions*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1991. p. 3 (emphasis in original).

²⁸ Though Frank D. Reno (*Historic Figures of the Arthurian Era*. London: McFarland & Company, 2000) makes a meticulous and compelling case for an almost certain historical *Ambrosian* period, equating with much cross-referencing of sources and charting of authorial timelines an "Arthurian" milieu with that of the fifth century Aurelius Ambrosius, it must be said somewhere that insisting upon the 'accuracy' of one early medieval chronicle over another, all of which post-date the events by decades if not centuries, texts which present themselves with no discernibly provable credentials of truth other than their own claims and disclaimers, is hardly the last word in Arthurian historicism.

²⁹ Hyland, Ann. *The Medieval Warhorse: From Byzantium to the Crusades*. Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, Ltd., 1994. pp. 1-21.

³⁰ Clark, John. 'Horseshoes.' *The Medieval Horse And Its Equipment*, ed. John Clark, New York:

McGraw-Hill, 2004. pp. 75-123. p. 10.

³¹ Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec and Enide*. Ed. and Trans. Careleton W. Carroll. New York: Garland, 1987. pp. 102-105.

³² Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec and Enide*. Ed. and Trans. Careleton W. Carroll. New York: Garland, 1987. p 105.

³³ Horses are measured from the ground to the top of the withers, which is the protruding ridge formed on the topline of the horse where the neck and back meet. The measuring device, usually called a 'stick,' is held at the top so that it hangs perpendicular to the ground next to the horse, then the cross-bar slide is brought down to touch the withers. Height is stated in four-inch units called 'hands' (named so for the average width of a human hand). A horse measuring 62 inches at the withers is said to be 'fifteen hands, two inches' or more commonly in abbreviated form, 'fifteen-two.' For example, notation would be '5.2 h.' Care should be taken that the horse is standing squarely with front and hind feet set evenly beneath him, and that the stick is placed perpendicular from the point or top of the withers, not angled toward the front or hind feet, so that the measure is accurate. Expert opinions differ concerning the size and weight of medieval warhorses. Most agree that the hobyn, small rouncy, and what we today would call a 'pony' sized animal would measure at about 14h and under. The warhorse we would currently class as a 'charger' or 'destrier' (circa A.D. 700-1200), depending of course upon weaponry, geography, preferences of various armies, and availability of animals who will actually 'do it' as contemporary jousters would say, most likely measured 15-16h, and would weigh in with a size and shape like that of the modern adult Quarter Horse, Thoroughbred, or Swedish Warmblood. Later in the middle ages (1250-1500), the 'great horse,' bigger than the original charger but not yet the size of the 'heavy horses' used in Renaissance tournaments (what we today would class as 'draft' horses) was introduced. Though most of the great horse bloodlines have long since disappeared, the Friesian and Holsteiner breeds are still popular, often measuring between 16-18h in height. For full historical analysis, see Clark, John, *The Medieval Horse and Its Equipment*, 2004; Davis, R.H.C. *The Medieval Warhorse: Origin, Development and Redevelopment*, 1989; Hyland, Ann, *The Medieval Warhorse: From Byzantium to the Crusades*, 1994. For an entertaining and illustrative introduction to the practicalities of warhorsemanship, I recommend viewing the independent film *American Joust*, dir. Richard P. Alvarez, 2005; the film documents the daily lives, routines, and performances of contemporary Renaissance fair jousting performers in the U.S.

³⁴ Sayers, William. 'Norse Horses in Chrétien de Troyes.' *Romania* 125 (2007): 132-47. pp. 143-145.

³⁵ *Goldener Psalter (Psalterium aureum) von St. Gallen*. St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 22, p. 141 (www.e-codices.unifr.ch). All horses in the picture are clearly not only small in proportion to their riders (whose feet hang to their mounts' knees), but whether due to inaccuracy or stylistic choice, the figures are unrealistically disproportionate as well. The horses' heads are too small for the proportions of their bodies (they are, in fact, no larger than the heads and hands of their riders), and the knights' bodies are oddly out of proportion, with hands larger than feet, forearms larger than thighs, and so on. Clearly none of the the illustrations in the Golden Psalter employs a sophisticated or meticulous level of perspective, proportion, ratio, or rendering. It is rather a stylistic, brief telling of a tale, dashed off with strong lines, and bold, bright, unnatural colors. Pointing to such illustrations as evidence that knights in the 9th and 10th century rode 'small' or 'pony-sized' horses would be equivalent to arguing that castle walls were barely shoulder-high, for even the castles and landscape are disproportionately tiny in relation to the size of the knights. Archaeological and anthropological evidence seems to indicate that the 'knightly' class of horses used for battle and jousting were in many cases, well-muscled, calm mounts of a medium size, between 15-16 hands, though warhorses such as the Holsteiner, which date to the 8th century, easily topped 16 ½ to 17 hands (see Hyland and Davis). High quality images of the Golden Psalter of St. Gallen can be

viewed on the web at the e-codices Virtual Manuscript Library of Switzerland:

<http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/csg/0022/141/medium>

³⁶ Lull, Ramon. *The Order of Chivalry*. Translated by William Caxton. F.S. Ellis, Ed. Barrie, Canada: Sovereign Press, 2009. p. 71

³⁷ Hyland, *The Medieval Warhorse: From Byzantium to the Crusades*, pp. 85-86.

³⁸ Hyland, Ann. *The Medieval Warhorse From Byzantium To The Crusades*. Gloucestershire, UK: Sutton, 1994, p. 62; see also Davis, R.H.C. *The Medieval Warhorse: Origin, Development and Redevelopment*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989. pp. 83-84

³⁹ Davis, R.H.C. *The Medieval Warhorse: Origin, Development and Redevelopment*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989. pp. 100-103.

⁴⁰ *The Boke of Marchalsi: A 15th Century Treatise on Horse-Breeding and Veterinary Medicine, Edited from MS. Harley 6398 with Introduction, Notes, and Glossary*. Edited by Bengt Odenstedt, In Stockholm: Stockholm Theses in English, Stockholm University, 1973. pp. 15-16.

⁴¹ *The Boke of Marchalsi: A 15th Century Treatise on Horse-Breeding and Veterinary Medicine, Edited from MS. Harley 6398 with Introduction, Notes, and Glossary*. Edited by Bengt Odenstedt, In Stockholm: Stockholm Theses in English, Stockholm University, 1973, p. 20.

⁴² Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec und Enide*. Vol. 3. In *Christian von Troyes: Sämtliche Werke*, Wendelin Foerster, p. 190. Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1890, p. 5; translation by D.D.R.Owen, from *Chretien de Troyes: Arthurian Romances*, London: Everyman, 1993 (first ed. 1987), p. 2.

⁴³ Hyland, Ann. *The Warhorse: 1250-1600*. Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, Ltd., 1998. pp. 13-14.

⁴⁴ Clark, John, Brian Spencer, and D. J. Rackham. 'Introduction: Horses and Horsemen in Medieval London.' In *The Medieval Horse and Its Equipment c. 1150-c.1450*, Ed. John Clark. London: Boydell Press, 1995. pp. 1-32

⁴⁵ Salisbury, Joyce. *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages*. London: Routledge, 1994. pp. 55-56; see also Hyland, Ann. *The Warhorse: 1250-1600*, pp. 103-104.

⁴⁶ *The Boke of Marchalsi: A 15th Century Treatise on Horse-Breeding and Veterinary Medicine, Edited from MS. Harley 6398 with Introduction, Notes, and Glossary*. Edited by Bengt Odenstedt, In Stockholm: Stockholm Theses in English, Stockholm University, 1973, p. xxxv. In the introduction to his 1973 edition of the anonymous 15th century *Boke of Marchalsi*, Odenstedt summarizes the detailed, sometimes quite sensible, and occasionally bizarre remedies for equine ailments. Here is an excerpt:

Blood-letting is of course a favourite remedy. The seats of bleeding vary according to the location of the chief symptoms of the disease in question. For cataract the horse is to be bled from a vein beneath the eye (f. 19a4), for canker sores in the mouth from three sublingual veins (f. 26a4), for vives [strangles] and farcy [glanders; bacterial infection] from the jugular vein (ff. 21B8, 29a5), for lameness from the metacarpal or digital veins (f. 44a10), etc. In some cases the reader is recommended to stop the bleeding with a plaster of horse-dung, when a sufficient quantity of blood (usually a quart) has been drawn.

Incantations are prescribed twice. One, an elaborate charm against farcy, is included in the present edition; the other is a short French charm for staunching blood.

(*Boke of Marchalsi*, p. xxxv)

Though the *Boke* identifies the recitations as 'charms' to be spoken while administering treatment, they are actually prayers, in the form of entreaties to Jesus Christ to heal the horse of its malady, and appear entirely Christian in nature, free of heretical invocations or pagan references.

⁴⁷ Davis, R.H.C. *The Medieval Warhorse: Origin, Development and Redevelopment*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989, p. 110.

⁴⁸ Xenophon. "On the Art of Horsemanship." Vol. 7. Trans. E.C. Marchant. *Xenophon in Seven Volumes: VII Scripta Minora*. Ed. Brownson Carleton. Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1925. 7 vols. A

characteristic excerpt demonstrates Xenophon's articulate voice and masterful understanding of the equine species:

The one best rule and practice in dealing with a horse is never to approach him in anger; for anger is a reckless thing, so that it often makes a man do what he must regret. Moreover, when the horse is shy of anything and will not come near it, you should teach him that there is nothing to be afraid of, either with the help of a plucky horse—which is the surest way—or else by touching the object that looks alarming yourself, and gently leading the horse up to it. To force him with blows only increases his terror; for when horses feel pain in such a predicament, they think that this too is caused by the thing at which they shy. (325-327)

⁴⁹ Duarte, Dom. *The Royal Book of Jousting, Horsemanship and Knightly Combat: A Translation into English of King Dom Duarte's 1438 Tratise Livro Da Ensinança De Bem Cavalgar Toda Sela*. Translated by Antonio F. Franco Preto. Steven Muhlberger, Ed. Highland Village, Texas: Chivalry Bookshelf, 2005. p. 6.

⁵⁰ There is more to say about the mule than merely to point out that it is sterile, as though the mule were a negative symbol of aridity and waste. The truth is that jack mules when not gelded (castrated) are quite aggressive in their mating behaviors. Equine castration, surprisingly, was not common practice in medieval western Europe. Jennies tend to cycle as often as horses, sometimes disruptively so. The difference is that, when traveling through foreign lands and estates, one's mule cannot be charged with covering the local mares (perhaps ruining the breeding program for one or more mares of high quality). Likewise, riding a jenny mule guarantees one's mount cannot become pregnant if inadvertently covered by a chance encounter with a wild or unsupervised jack donkey or stallion. The truth is, a well-trained, socialized, good tempered mule was and is a prized mount of high quality. Gaited mules, though unusual, are bred and much sought-after to this day.

⁵¹ Rothschild, Judith Rice. 'Marie de France and the Folktale Narrative Devices of the *Marchen* and her *Lais*.' In *Quest of Marie de France: A Twelfth-Century Poet*, Chantal A. Maréchal, 138-147. Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen, 1992. pp. 142-143. Rothschild observes that 'another distinguishing feature of the fairy tale genre utilized by Marie for her own artistic purposes is the 'need to express relationships and feelings through external events and visible objects.' Rothschild cites Max Lüthi's *Once Upon a Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales*, (NY: Frederick Ungar, 1970), giving a number of examples that illustrate similarities between the *Lais* and stylistic qualities of fairy tales.

⁵² Marie de France, . 'Lanval.' In *Die Lais der Marie de France*, Karl Warnke and Reinhold Köhler, Halle, Germany: Max Niemeyer, 1885. pp. 87-88, ll. 39-50

⁵³ Translation from: Marie de France, *Lanval*. Translated by Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante. In *The Lais of Marie de France*, 105-125. Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth Press, 1982. p. 106, ll. 39-50.

⁵⁴ *The Mabinogion*. Translated by Jeffrey Gantz. New York: Penguin Books, 1976. pp. 236-237. Even such seemingly small elements as Peredur's dismounting from his horse while moving cautiously through the mountain crags and into the forest tells the reader a great deal about the hero. For despite admonitions such as those in the Boke of Marchalsi that horses should be able to navigate uneven, stony ground, there is in fact no shame in dismounting one's horse when the going is perilous. Peredur in fact shows that he is a well-seasoned traveler, and knows when it is best to take extra precautions in dangerous, unknown territories.