Chapter 2

Erotic Bodies: Loving Horses

The myth of Chiron, the rational hybrid horse-human, haunts Renaissance anatomy texts, as we saw in Chapter 1, but that is not the creature’s sole domain. In examples like Philip Sidney’s Musidorus, the more generalized image of the rider-as-centaur shows up in chivalric romance, where the centaur’s hybrid nature expresses human triumph in appropriating and exploiting animal power and grace through the aristocratic arts of horsemanship. But other uses of the centaur myth in Renaissance literature register the fragility of the supremacy of human reason, most often undermined by the bodily assaults of lust, gluttony, and rage. The centaurs of Thessaly famously violated their peace with the Lapiths when they became drunk at the wedding of Perithous and attempted to rape the Lapith women; Nessus raped Heracles’ wife, and was the eventual cause of the hero’s death, while Pholus, despite behavior as “civilized” as Chiron’s, breached his fellow centaurs’ communal wine at Heracles’ insistence, leading to an attempt on Heracles’ life.¹ It is thus no surprise that Renaissance authors often seized on the image of the centaur to express the tendency of human beings to degenerate into beasts when under the influence of drink or high emotion.

That is the origin of one mythological strain in depictions of the centaur, but it does not fully explain the physiological and psychic sources and influences that made the centaur myth so widely relevant to the Renaissance in a way that it could not be, for instance, to a postmodern world. To understand those origins and influences, we would have to resurrect the physical, embodied experience of contact with horses, elaborated in some literature but more thoroughly in the dozens of early modern horsemanship manuals that instruct aspiring gentlemen in how to become imitators of Musidorus—to become noble hybrids with their mounts. To be a centaur is to be poised between
absolute assimilation of the body of another, an animal, into one's own bodily consciousness and riding the knife's edge of losing oneself to another, enveloped by and transformed by the union. That is the "oneness" of horse and human that the centaur epitomizes. For postmoderns, such knowledge is not usually available—we are largely uncomprehending of the details, the nuances, the transcendent pleasures, the somatic sympathies, and the reflexes involved in the experience of riding because horses have disappeared from everyday life. Early moderns of any class, however, would have had a glimmering of this ideal through the cultural saturation of horsemanship imagery and discourse. Resurrecting dead horses in anatomies requires merely a good eye and some knowledge of the genre; resurrecting the human-horse relationship in terms of the centaur's unification of bodies is a little more difficult.

There is, however, one common and entirely obvious early modern experience that approximates just such an ontological confusion that is still relevant and widespread today, an experience involving the potential loss of individual identity during an act of physical and emotional excess: sexual intercourse. In fact, Renaissance drama and poetry often borrow various dimensions of centaur imagery to celebrate, deplore, or register the social anxiety caused by the experience of ecstasy and self-transcendence that marks sexual union. Take, for instance, Sidney's sonnet 49 from *Astrophel and Stella*:

I on my horse, and Love on me doth trie
Our horsemanship, while by strange worke I prove
A horseman to my horse, a horse to Love;
And now man's wrongs in me, poor beast, descrie.
The raines wherewith my Rider doth me tie,
Are humbled thoughts, which bit of Reverence move,
Curb'd in with Feare, but with guilt bosse above
Of Hope which makes it seeme faire to the eye.
The Wand is Will, thou, Fancie, saddle art,
Girt fast by Memorie, and while I spurre
My horse, he spurreth with sharpe desire my hart:
He sits me fast, how ever I do sturre:
And now hath made me to his hand so right,
That in the Manage I do take delight.3

The poem's conceit has its speaker practicing his training of his horse, while love performs the same arts on him: he is saddled and bridled with the effects
of his own passion, made a “poor beast” instead of a “horseman” by his own desire. Overthrown by his love for Stella, Astrophel degenerates into something less than human—indeed, the poem teasingly posits a series of subject-position inversions via “bosse,” “spur,” “sturre,” being “made [right] to his hand.” The rider, otherwise masculinized through his pursuit of the manège (the high schooling of the horse), an art associated with male authority, is here ridden, controlled, and so effeminized as well as bestialized by lust’s erasure of will and self-control. His new position as mount mimics the position in which women are traditionally placed, bearing the weight of a man, sexually dominated, tamed, taught to accept, even revel in their inferiority.

Astrophel thus comes to resemble the many female characters associated with horses, bits, bridles, and acts of taming throughout the period’s literature about women, love, and marriage. For instance, The Taming of the Shrew’s Kate is named by Petruchio “my horse, my ox, my ass, my anything” (3.2.232) and is “curb[ed]” (4.1.4), or forced to submit to Petruchio’s training techniques, ultimately like Astrophel, she internalizes his teaching, to proclaim the doctrine of obedience in Act 5 as if it were her own—that is, in the end “in the Manège she takes delight.” Cleopatra apostrophizes Antony’s mount: “O happy horse to bear the weight of Antony” (Antony and Cleopatra, 1.5.21); while Love’s Labor’s Lost (3.1.30–32) and The Winter’s Tale (1.2.276) exploit the sexual meaning of “hobby-horse,” slang for a prostitute or sexually available woman. Lear’s condemnation of his daughters’ lust and treachery references the association between women and centaurs, comparing their “riotous appetite” to that of “the soiled horse” (King Lear 4.6.122–23): “Down from the waist they are Centaurs, / Though women all above” (4.6.124–25). Women and/or horses are thus the dangerous alternative referent informing the centaur imagery, complicating Sidney’s use of it to express heteronormative, heterosexual desire.

Shakespeare’s Sonnet 51 treats a similar theme with the same imagery:

Thus can my love excuse the slow offense
Of my dull bearer, when from thee I speed:
From where thou art why should I haste me thence?
Till I return, of posting is no need.
O, what excuse will my poor beast then find
When swift extremity can seem but slow?
Then should I spur, though mounted on the wind,
In winged speed no motion shall I know.
Then can no horse with my desire keep pace:
Therefore desire, of perfect'st love being made,
Shall neigh, no dull flesh in his fiery race;
But love, for love, thus shall excuse my jade;
Since from thee going he went willful slow,
Towards thee I'll run and give him leave to go.

Whereas the trick of Sidney's poem is slippage of the speaker's position between rider and mount, Shakespeare's derives from the embodiment of the lover's desire in the horse that carries him to and from his beloved, so that desire "neighs" as it sprints ahead of his "dull barker." Sidney's sonnet bes-
tializes its speaker, placing him in the position of feminine sexual partner; Shakespeare's first grossly materializes, then de-materializes its narrator, who becomes a horse of desire—but one of wind, not flesh.

Even John Donne, who rarely uses images of horses or horsemanship, turns to them at the conclusion of Elegy 7, in which the male lover reproaches his protégé, now educated in the skills of love, but married to another:

Must I alas
Frame and enamel plate, and drink in Glass?
Chase wax for others' seals? Break a colt's force
And leave him then, being made a ready horse?16

Sidney, Shakespeare, and Donne all borrow images of horses, horse breaking, riding, and good or bad horsemanship to convey aspects of wooing, winning, and losing a sexual object. None of these examples would make sense, nor would these metaphors have currency, however, were not the visceral experience of a human on horseback memorably linked to a confusion of bodies that underwrites the shift in horse/rider positions each poem articulates. All three poems also rely on a prior understanding among its readership of the pleasures of riding, pleasures associated with that confusion of bodily boundaries that are physical and even erotic, but again, in ways not entirely clear to a modern audience unfamiliar with the arts and skills of riding.

This chapter focuses on cases of human–horse eroticism. Its argument is also intended to resonate with the material on embodiment that comprises the next chapter—to call attention to the many and varied contexts in which Renaissance human and animal bodies mingle, in pursuits like riding and sex, or as we will see in Chapter 3, in the remedies for both humans and animals.
prescribed by husbandry and medical manuals, and in mutual acts of consumption. All of these instances involve a reciprocal confusion of identities in which human and animal trade places, merge, or inhabit one another’s defenseless, porous bodies. Through these exemplary moments, I argue that early modern human bodies were shared with, invaded by, occupied by, and colonized by animal bodies. This was both an unremarkable fact of everyday Renaissance life and a specter that threatened to dismantle efforts to distinguish the human self from its licit and illicit cohabitants.

The particular case of horse-human erotics, however, raises the issue of animal sexual agency in a way that other examples of shared or mutual embodiment do not. When most critics approach Renaissance examples of eroticized human-animal relationships, they tend to instantly translate them into cases of bestial sexuality. This, perhaps, is both a byproduct of the legacy of the centaur—its lustful sexual predation returns to color even sidelong references to bestial love—and a result of critical resistance to anthropomorphic readings that would seem to endow what we prefer to view as victimized creatures with quasi-human abilities to choose, engage, or resist what is assumed to be a specifically human form of violation. In the analysis of human-equine bodily erotics that I offer here, I hope to nudge the discussion toward a more flexible, less defensive understanding of human-animal interssexualities. While the chapter focuses specifically on horse imagery and horsemanship manuals, I would suggest that some of its arguments apply just as well to the erotics of other interspecies relationships.

Bestial Sex

Renaissance literature offers an embarrassment of riches to anyone seeking examples of horse sex. Shakespeare is, as we’ve already begun to observe, a goldmine. When Hotspur teases his own Kate, rebuking her for questioning him about his love for her, he imitates Petruchio’s association of women with horses, coyly hinting at the kinds of “riding” that men may do with women, as well as horses: “Come, wilt thou see me ride? / And when I am a horseback, I will swear / I love thee infinitely” (Henry IV, 2.3.99–101). The distance he means to put between himself and his wife guarantees that he will “love” her, but of course the lines also invoke the idea that he loves her most when she is being ridden by him (remaining silent like a good beast of burden, instead of quizzing him on the eve of battle): “But hark you Kate: I must not henceforth
have you question me” (2.3.103). Like other shrew tamers, Hotspur longs for a well-managed, or well-manèged mount (the manège being the correct training, or dressage, of the horse), of the sort that the Dauphin lauds in *Henry V*: “I once writ a sonnet in his praise and began thus: ‘Wonder of nature!’ . . . I had rather have my horse to my mistress” (3.4.40–41, 60). “Having good judgment in horsemanship” as Orleans mockingly credits, lets the Dauphin substitute a willing “Prince of Palfreys” for an “unbridled” mistress. The Dauphin and Hotspur, like Sidney and Donne, and a host of other Renaissance writers, consider sex and horsemanship analogous activities.

Excellent work has been done on the kinds of links between sexuality and bestiality that we find in the examples above. Bruce Bocher, Dymphna Callaghan, Jeanne Roberts, and others have plumbed the literary and philosophical nuances and sociocultural implications in the language of bestial desire. But critics have generally read the use of horsemanship metaphors in describing sexual acts as if the only thing at stake is the sexuality of humans essentially interacting with other humans. Thus, for Bocher, cases of “bestial buggery” manifest anxiety that once women have been characterized as less than human, all acts of heterosexual copulation, including those sanctioned by marriage, are acts of bestial sex. Roberts, on the contrary, sees in *The Taming of the Shrew’s* language of animality evidence of Ovidian metamorphosis that allows dissimilar human beings to transform through marriage into something more equal—equus, she notes, may derive from the same root as equal. The result is nevertheless the privileging of human sexual behavior over any “real” interspecies relationship. Dymphna Callaghan does address the manner in which sexuality challenges the boundary that supposedly divides species: in her reading of Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*, “the fundamental distinction between the human and the animal, whose articulation is undergirded by the ostensible sexual integrity of the human species, also depends on what threatens to undermine it, namely sex itself.” Yet even her reading does not confer much equivalent agency on the nonhuman.

These critics chart the broader discursive field in which sexual relations between humans and animals are constructed, a field that must include pets, various sorts of animals, and even plants. However, all work from a model in which the main, indeed the only significant sexual act at stake is clearly an *act of bestiality*—sexual congress with an animal. Noting Renaissance obsessions with the crime of bestiality, Callaghan characterizes Adonis’s choice as one between two versions of criminality: either he must mate with the incestuously maternal Venus, or “mate” with the violent boar and its sharp tusk.
Like Boehringer, Callaghan finds that the identification of women with animals reveals “the fragile cultural membrane that separates the feminine from animal sexuality and the taxonomic confusion that ties them together.” Venus threatens to turn Adonis into a pet, inappropriately inverting the power structure that makes acts of “petting” (which Callaghan defines as “the fondling of both dependent animals and people, but especially children”) aberrant, capable of generating monstrous births. Staying off the threat of degenerate sex by impaling himself on the boar’s tusk, Adonis safely ends the poem in the realm of vegetable art and aesthetics, “A purple flower... chequer’d with white, / Resembling well his pale cheeks and the blood / Which in round drops upon their whiteness stood.”

Callaghan’s interest, then, is in how Shakespeare’s poem participates in discourses of bestiality, incest, and art: “By repeatedly transgressing the discrete taxonomies of human and animal, nature and culture, the poem’s images render them demonstrably artificial categories.” I wonder, though, whether a different poem would arise from a more thorough reading of an episode Callaghan barely mentions, the long interlude that dominates the poem’s first third involving the courtship of two horses, the famous jennet and coursier. Instead of triangulating desire among a woman, a man, and various animals (and plants), the courser-jennet episode channels erotic energies among a man and two horses. Does this make a difference? And how would a detour through the popular horsemanship treatises of the period elucidate further the content and implications of this episode?

When horses appear in Renaissance texts they usually represent the need for reason to control the (bodily) passions. It is because they establish a hierarchy of mind over matter that horses make perfect substitutes or metaphoric analogues for women, especially, as we have seen, for uncompromising lovers or shrewish wives. Whether they appear in texts devoted to civil government or in comedies about spousal rebellion, horses are there to represent the appetites that should properly or “naturally” be subjected to (masculine) containment in the interests of social or political order. To invoke the centaurs once more, the bestial lusts of the body are either harnessed to social good, as in Chiron’s case, or range free threatening to destroy civilization, as in the case of the battle with the Lapiths. Horses thus provide the bodies through which regimes of self-control are exercised, or by which various forms of hegemony are justified.

Shakespeare, for instance, complexly transposes Venus’s fantasy of fulfilled desire onto Adonis’s “trampling courser,” who woos and then escapes
with the "breeding jennet" he discovers in a nearby copse. Betraying Adonis at a moment of crisis, when the besieged hunter tries to flee Venus's clinging embrace, the animal bursts the bounds of discipline—literally, the bonds that hold his gear together—when "his woven girths he breaks asunder" and "the iron bit he crusheth 'tween his teeth / Controlling what he was controlled with." Such a loss of control is typically a projection of his rider's inadequacies. In Spenser's Faerie Queene, for instance, when Guyon loses his horse to Braggadocio, his unfitness for the task of razing Acrasia's bower and his need for Alma's healing treatment are exposed; Braggadocio, meanwhile, cannot hide from Guyon's mount his own lack of merit, demonstrated by his "burn[ing] in filthy lust" for Belphoebe:

So to his steed he got, and gan to ride,
As one unfit therefore, that all might see
He had not trayned bene in cheualtree.
Which well that valiant courser did discerne;
For he despysd to tread in dew degree,
But chaufd and fam'd, with courage fierce and sterne,
And to be easd of that base burden still did erne.13

Shakespeare likewise often deploys references to the "manage" or training of the horse to denote moral authority. Richard III's unhorsing at the battle of Bosworth Field not only presages his defeat at Henry VII's hands but reflects his moral unfitness to rule; similarly, Richard II's loss of authority is expressed through the image of Phaethon's chariot horses, "Down, down I come, like glist'ring Phaethon, / Wanting the manage of unruly jades" (3.3.177–78). In other contexts, the association of women with horses, needing bridling and "manage" is, as Roberts points out, well established: she cites the example of "A Merry Jeste of a Shrewde and Curst Wife Dress'd in Morel's Skin" (1580) in which the henpecked husband flays his old, decrepit horse, Morel, beats his wife mercilessly, and then clothes his wife in the horse's skin in order to enforce her to the same faithful service that his horse provided for so many years:

For this I trow will make her shrinke,
And bow at my pleasure, when I her bed,
And obay my commannementes both lowde and still,
Or else I will make her body bleede,
And with sharp roddes beate her my fill.14
Whether enforcing gender hierarchy and sexual compliance, exposing moral failings in its rider, or acting out fantasies of bestial lust, literary uses of the horse disseminate the imperative that regimes of discipline and control must triumph over chaotic passion to preserve civil order. But the constant renewal of such images suggests that the imperative is never finally fulfilled. Boehrer finds bestiality’s “ultimate source in the institutions that ostensibly oppose it,” like marriage, which “yokes” together two beings of vastly unequal status—the human male and the dubiously human female, who is, as we’ve noted, most often compared to a recalcitrant horse.  

It is easy to read the courser and the jennet in Shakespeare’s poem as a simple case of transposed lustfulness overthrowing the bonds of social and cultural discipline to engage in bestial sex, in the tradition of the examples above. In such a reading, however, the problematics of identification the poem introduces are lost after all, which is which? That is, does the jennet stand in for Venus, the “breeding” goddess, or is the (female) jennet a substitute for the effeminized Adonis, who would have to submit to a rather macho dictatorial supernatural lover? Is the violently out-of-control (male) courser instead the violently loving Venus, who later defends the horse’s behavior? Or both, since the lusts of Venus threaten Adonis’s hold on masculine superiority? Is the courser’s lust a sign of “nature,” and if so, is Adonis somehow blameworthy (that is, tempted by Venus and what she represents) in failing to control his mount? The binaries seem to stack up: Venus’s lust versus Adonis’s masculine desire for control; the courser’s explosion from the bounds set by his rider versus proper and disciplined use in the hunt; nature versus culture; love of a woman versus love of masculine pursuits; sex versus riding. Yet it is difficult to stabilize the vehicles of these binaries in any meaningful way—the courser and jennet tend to violate the containment of their bodily genders, to burst out of their stalls and run from the orderly boxes of their “stable.”

When Adonis moans, “My day’s delight is past, my horse is gone, / And ’tis your fault I am bereft him so,” he characterizes Venus’s intrusion, and the loss of his mount, as a kind of love affair in which the mount is his first source of pleasure—an erotic pleasure with sexual content, of course, since clearly that is what is at stake between Venus and Adonis himself, as well as between the courser and the jennet; but not purely a sexual pleasure, in that the erotics of the rider-mount relationship do not reduce to a simple sexual act. Indeed, Adonis’s language seems nicely framed to resonate with Renaissance interpretations of Platonic eros as the recognition of a lack that provokes a certain
kind of desire; clearly, Adonis does not “lack” anything Venus has to offer, but without his horse he is “bereft.”

If there is a hint of Platonic eros in this otherwise sexually explicit episode in a sexually explicit poem, it comes as a corrective, not a corollary, to the otherwise genitally oriented sexual pleasures rampant throughout. When Adonis chooses the boar over Venus, the animal over the woman, he is not merely preferring bestial sex, he is choosing a specific type of penetrative pleasure—one that is not available in either heterosexual or homosexual sex with a human. Platonic love, the kind that Adonis might enjoy with his courser, is composed of erotic energies, yes, but it realizes a drive to union that transcends the genital expression of that union. Adonis, to put it briefly, wants to be conjoined with his lovely horse, to be corporeally interpenetrative with a creature that makes him feel complete, instead of united sexually with a woman, even if she is a goddess.

Here, then, we have the crux of my problem with readings that simply elide pleasure with sex. They leave no room to ask what kind of pleasure is at stake in loving an animal. Even the apparently clear example of “buggery,” an act with legal and religious content that is specifically sexual, isn’t so clear when we put some pressure on its emotional and pleasure-giving components: does the human participant find it purely sexual release? Is there a specific eroticism of the animal’s body that engages human interest? Is there some indefinable loneliness that only a relationship with animals, and not people, can redress? Would any critic be willing to risk entertaining the notion that the animal is in any way a participating agent in acts of bestial pleasure? Surely not: such a suggestion would disrupt the social coding of bestiality in the twentieth century as a peculiarly human act of dominance, power, and abuse enacted on a silent, passive victim. To indicate otherwise would shuffle off some of the responsibility onto that victim, a double violation; but it is convenient that the assignment of eternal victimhood to the animal enforces a degree of denial of agency, of reciprocity, of mutuality.

Yet both the Renaissance love literature that relies on horse imagery and the literature that describes the training of a horse like Adonis’s courser agree that there is a particular kind of pleasure at stake in “riding,” and they entertain the possibility, raised precisely by their conjunction and by the fact that pleasure is at the heart of horse-human interactions in both genres, that the horse may itself have an erotic connection to the rider and may actively participate in creating the gratifications involved in the experience of “riding.” Indeed, when we look more particularly at horsemanship manuals designed to instruct
humans in how to create the actual or non-mythological centaur—that is, the horse and rider who, like Musidorus, appear to be one—we discover the pervasiveness of this boundary collapse. Anxieties over patriarchal hierarchy and order are as much at stake in the horsemanship manuals as in the literature of the period; yet in their language of pleasure, training manuals repeatedly posit a kind of eroticized commingling of bodies and an actively mutual source of pleasure in the experience of riding that reverses the love literature’s bias toward human genital erosics. In other words, the riding manuals articulate an erosics that is sexualized but not only sexual; unlike the love literature, which cannot escape its investment in a final sexual act, training manuals describe a human-animal erosicism that escapes binarism—one that we might identify as profoundly queer. These manuals also leave room for the appreciation of the animal’s beauty, its nobility, its generosity, which in turn justify the passion of the rider for his mount in ways not available in the love literature. And they insist upon the possibility that the horse can equally invest in pleasures of participation, mutuality, and the creation of beauty. With a detour through these manuals, then, we will return newly informed to our reading of Venus and Adonis to identify further its queer pleasures.

Pleasuring the Animal

Riding a horse is a unique experience for human beings, an experience that is now the domain of a very limited, elite group of people who continue to practice an entirely obsolete art. Horsemen and women have consistently, even obsessively, expressed the nature of this experience in one compelling image: when riding rises to the level of high art, the experience is counted as the union of two distinct bodies and intellects (in Renaissance literature, sometimes spirits or souls) so that they move, think, and act as one—exactly the formulation we have seen in Sidney’s description of Musidorus on horseback. Such oneness is not merely the product of severe and punitive techniques, since union requires the willing cooperation of a creature that Renaissance texts repeatedly assert has its own agenda, its own sensations, and its own character. Elizabeth LeGuin compares the training of the horse to the higher levels of manege or dressage to the education of pupils in music or dance. But she emphasizes that the same one-way channel between master and student we find in dialogues about these human arts does not work for horsemanship manuals: “Horses, however, demand another sort of dialogue altogether:
even as they exhibit extraordinary ability to adapt to human purposes, they challenge human methods through their sheer Otherness."\textsuperscript{18} To produce the "harmony" that so often is invoked in horsemanship treatises, that which makes a Musidorus "one" with his horse, requires tremendous investment in deciphering the physical, as well as the mental, "intelligence" of the horse. As John Astley puts it in his work \textit{The Art of Riding} (1580), horsemanship allows "these two several bodies [to] seem in all their actions and motions to be as it were but one onlie bodie."\textsuperscript{19} The horse is, Astley proclaims, a "sensible creature" who is moved to cooperate "by sense and feeling," but will "shunne such things as annoy him, and . . . like all such things as do delight him."\textsuperscript{20}

This harmony is at the heart of the new training methods that arise with the rediscovery of Xenophon's \textit{Art of Horsemanship} and its translation, redaction, or inclusion in texts of every language throughout the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Punishment, as LeGuin makes clear, is "a delicate business" for the true horseman in these texts, since to crush the horse's spirit makes it useless for the arts of the manège.\textsuperscript{21} Rather, a gentle, gradual disciplining of the body of the horse takes place once the body of the rider has adapted to its own subtle task. Most horsemanship treatises advise riders to have great care to reward their mounts, whether or not they also simultaneously advocate draconian punitive measures. Past scholarship on these texts has focused on their imposition of discipline, not unnaturally given some of the outrageous methods they include for chastising animals. The Italian master Federigo Grisone, for instance, recommends plenty of beatings about the head and shoulders for unmanageable horses, and gives instructions for using a cat on a pole or a hedgehog tied to the tail to inspire stubborn horses to go forward.\textsuperscript{22} However, it is entirely possible that past critics, myself included, have taken at face value a tactic that has little to do with actual training methods from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; it is as likely that these included "training techniques" are purely rhetorical gestures meant either to assure readers that the author has a remarkable new system not available from other competing texts or to impress readers with the lengths to which the trainer is willing to go to impose discipline on unruly beasts. It is also possible that the language of extreme discipline, given the degree of mutuality, of interpenetration of horse and rider, represents the degree of effort needed to recuperate the distinction of human and animal, which should not surprise us, but should instead attest to the degree of anxiety such collapse arouses. Whatever the explanation, it is clear that by the end of the sixteenth century, many trainers were far more concerned with gentle methods for coercion than with spectacular displays of cruelty.
Erotic Bodies

We see this trend especially in the description of rider contact with the horse's mouth, that especially sensitive part through which a great deal of communication must take place. Thomas Blundevill, whose *The Four Chiefest Offices of Horsemanshippe* is a redaction of Grisone, nevertheless scolds his English audience for having the reputation for creating "jades," or hard-mouthed mounts. They should take care to introduce the colt to the bit in a happier fashion by anointing it with honey and salt, to "make him the more to delight in it, and to be always champing the iron, and to stale his mouth more temperately." Gervase Markham advises giving the horse "kinde words, as ho boy, ho boy, or holla love, so my nagge, and such like tearmes, till he have won him to his will" and "carry[ing] a gentle hand, so as you may have a feeling of the Colte, and the Colte no more but a perfect say of your hand, unless extreamitie compel you."

The great French equerry, Antoine Pluvinel, describes in *Le Maneige Royal* (1623, 1626) the posture that the graceful and judicious rider must adopt in order to be effective:

He must sit only in the centre of the saddle, taking care not to touch the cantle out of fear of falling. At all times must he sit straight in the saddle as if he were standing on the ground. His two shoulders must be bent slightly and equally forward, his stomach thrust forward, making a slight hollow at the waist. His two elbows must, at all times, be placed parallel, and without constraint, slightly away from the body. The right fist must be close to the left one, at a distance of about four or five fingers from each other. . . . The legs must be thrust forward, the end of the foot pressing firmly in the stirrup; the knees must, as always, be squeezed with all one's strength so that, should the horse become animated, he does not throw my ass [*mon âne*], I mean my man, to the ground.

So ideal is this posture that it can be charted within a rectangle, outlined in the engraved plate for the reader's easy appreciation (Figure 19). With such a seat, notes Pluvinel, the rider will remain in exact communion with the horse's motion, always ready to correct errors and produce the greatest response to spur and thigh; the rider must thus never deviate even an iota from this posture precisely because he has such extreme instruments of control, or "the horse as well as the Horseman, would be thrown out of balance due to the great sensitivity of the horse's mouth and his belly." Astley notes that battle horses "teach
a man to sit surelie, comelite, and stronglie in his seat," in the manner required by Pluvine; likewise, William Cavendish claims "a good seat is of such importance . . . that the regular movement of a horse entirely depends upon it, which is preferable to any other assistance [that is, of bit, spur, or whip]; therefore, let it not be despised. Moreover I dare to venture to affirm, that he who does not sit genteely upon a horse, will never be a good horseman." 26 These authors agree that the control of a horse's extraordinary power, which is combined with such extraordinary responsiveness to the touch of human limbs and instruments, can only be achieved through the complete control of one's own body; those who fail in this self-discipline of bodily movement will be, like Pluvine's "man," an ass (âne), demoted, grounded—denied the superior and gentlemanly pleasures of riding.

For the rider, the pleasure of riding comes in part from the physical experience of rhythmic or explosive motions generated by a body outside of oneself, a body more powerful and agile than oneself, whose efforts fleetingly register as if they nonetheless were one's own. This pleasure can be both exhilarating and dangerous to the rider's sense of self. Recent studies on how tactile-kinesthetic systems contribute to the perception of selfhood in humans suggest that what we call the "self" is more fluid and transposable than is allowed for in most versions of bodily identity. In one study, participants were seated with their left arms resting on a table but screened from their view. Meanwhile a life-sized rubber model of a left arm and hand was placed on the table directly in front of the subject. Participants watched the artificial hand and arm, while two small brushes were used to stroke both the rubber hand and the subject's hidden hand, "synchronizing the timing of the brushing as closely as possible." After only a short while, participants had the distinct sensation that they experienced the stroking and tapping of the artificial hand, when in fact it was their own fleshly hand that was being manipulated. That is, the tactile stimulus was received as if it came from the artificial hand. "Further tests revealed that if the experimenters asked participants, with eyes closed, to point to the left hand with the hidden hand, their pointing, after experience of the illusion, were [sic] displaced toward the rubber hand." 27 For the researchers, this experiment suggests that "our sense of our bodies as our own depends less on their differentiation from other objects and bodies than on their participation in specific forms of intermodal correlation." But the experiment also suggests that humans can, through certain kinds of kinesthetic experiences, either proprioceptively incorporate body parts that are not their own or extend their consciousness into inanimate objects. This is precisely
what riding a horse accomplishes when done well, with the additional complication that proprioception of the human rider can extend to include the complete body of an animate, conscious, and wholly other being.

Current research into the experience of riding by those interested in animal-human communication emphasizes the uniqueness of the horse-rider bond, which relies on a created language of the body. Horses and riders “speak” to one another with their bodies—literally, they communicate through “body language,” albeit in a way that is foreign to most humans because this body language must intersect with equine models of behavior and responses to stimuli. Keri Brandt has noted that one consequence of learning this difficult new grammar is that horse owners and riders become hyper-aware of their movements around their horses because movement always has some meaning for the equine partner; they become, like Pluvinel, Astley, or Cavendish, more thoroughly self-disciplined in the pursuit of a purer language. Psychologists, cultural anthropologists, and animal ethicists have coined a number of terms to convey this kind of bodily communication: Kenneth Shapiro calls it “kinesthetic empathy,” while Thomas Csordas brands it a form of “somatic
attention.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty was perhaps the first to identify it as a “kinetic melody” of body and behavior, a phrase that LeGuin evokes in her work on “harmony” and her comparison of horsemanship with musical study, as well as one that clarifies the role of music in horsemanship performances from the Renaissance through the twenty-first century. The French ethologist and equestrian Jean-Claude Barrey notes that the most infinitesimal and involuntary motion of the rider generates a response in the horse, through “isopraxis”: “The human’s right hand imitates (and anticipates) what the horse’s right front leg will do, the bottom of the back of the rider makes a jerk which is exactly the movement the horse will do to begin to canter, and so on. In other words, according to Barrey, talented riders behave and move like horses.

Since this bodily communication stands outside the language of human speech, it requires its own rhetoric and vocabulary if it is to be taught to another human: a sensitive mouth on a horse (that is, a horse that is instantly responsive to the most minute movements of the bit) is “soft,” a bad mouth (a horse that ignores the bit) is “hard,” a horse that is confident in its posture and is pushing forward to the rider’s hand instead of backing away from it is called “through,” while one that is well-educated enough to be constantly balanced is in “self-carriage” (that is, it does not need as much the support of a rider’s hand or leg). Indeed, new terms are being invented and applied all the time: recently, dressage language embraced the German schwing to describe the impulsion or forward movement in self-carriage of the more advanced horse (hence schwing because the result is the swinging relaxed back of the horse); a vigorous debate rages now in the international dressage community over the use of rollkur or the forced extreme flexion of the horse’s mouth, head, and neck. The strangeness of these terms and others belonging to the world of horsemanship signal the difficulty in finding appropriate spoken vessels for the experience.

Natural horsemanship, a recent fad in training circles, often associated with famous practitioners like Monty Roberts, Buck Brannaman, and Vicky Hearne, has its own distinct language, as Paul Patton observes, one that privileges concepts of voluntary and mutual association. While Patton accepts that the aesthetico-moral justifications for training an animal are “corrupt” (citing Vicky Hearne citing Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals), he concludes that the inequality and anthropocentrism of the human-animal relationship that characterize even natural training techniques do not preclude ethical treatment of animals: “what we learn from the disciplines of animal training is that
Hierarchical forms of society between unequals are by no means incompatible with ethical relations and obligations toward other beings.” While the language of partnering, of equality, of mutuality is often assumed to conceal a relationship of dominance, obedience, and even slavery, Patton concludes that what natural training does well is to establish “a form of language that closes that gap, which is another way of saying that it enables a form of interaction that enhances the power and the feeling of power of both horse and rider.” I would contend, however, that training has always done just this, even in the historical past where we expect to find only techniques for repression and dominance. Thus we find in early modern horsemanship manuals the same effort to develop a language to further the horse-human bond.

Renaissance treatises on riding, literature on horses, and images of great feats of horsemanship often struggle to express exactly the same range of phenomena of “softness,” of “speaking through the reins” that we encounter in modern training techniques, indicating willing partnership and mingled proprioception. But few take the subject as far as does Astley, whose treatise focuses on “the true use of the hand” with extensive discussion of the pleasures the horse may take from a well-educated rider’s manipulation of the bit. Indeed, perhaps the most common term Astley uses throughout his treatise is “pleasure,” almost always referring to the horse’s response to its rider. Ignorant riders, whose “intemperate hand[s]” can be compared to the gross failures of the intemperate drinker, turn this “sensible” creature into a “senseless block” who feels neither hand nor spur; violence in the use of the bit, “which Nature abhorret,” amounts to a kind of rape of the horse’s mouth, as far as Astley is concerned. Educating the hand to the reins is, according to Astley, comparable to teaching penmanship, and the influence of a master can always be read in his pupil’s hand. He gives detailed descriptions of the mechanics of the bit’s movement and force in the horse’s mouth and constantly reminds his readers that the horse should have a “sweet mouth,” be “champing at the bit with great pleasure,” and “take pleasure of the bit” with a soft and “temperate hand.” Astley emphasizes that the rider will not succeed if he tries to enforce his will on the horse through the bit, “pressing” the animal with it so “that thereby he be put to despaire of libertie.” Only with the freedom to believe himself an equal part of the man-horse centaur does the mount show himself at his best: “Therefore with certain quiet signes provoke him to shew himself lustie and comelie in everie part . . . for he will by this most easily and willinglie doe and performe those things wherewith he himself is chieflie delighted, and wherein he pleaseth himself most. And that he doth take pleasure in those
things aforesaid, let this be a good witnesse." The horse, then, becomes the most beautiful he is able to be in the most natural fashion.\textsuperscript{37} Freedom, liberty, pleasure, delight: Astley's horse is wooed by its rider with "gentle and courteous dealing," "allure[d] and entice[d]" rather than oppressed or abused.\textsuperscript{38} The good rider, the treatises agree, inspires and invites the horse to do what "delights" and "pleases" it, maintaining the horse's agency in the partnership.

What the horsemanship manuals construct, then, is a relationship between horse and rider that revolves around bodily habitation to a balanced position upon the horse, with gentle and loving manipulation of the soft insides of the animal's mouth with the bit, in order to generate pleasure in horse, rider, and spectators. As LeGuin points out, training the rider (and horse) is most akin to training the musician or dancer: Monsieur le Grande indeed compliments Pluvinel on the stillness of the master's position for its "perfect harmony," which when applied in producing a great performance on his Barb, La Bonnitte, results in "the sarabande of La Bonnitte."\textsuperscript{39} In this dance, bodies move in unison, rhythmically; the centaur engages in heart-stopping physical feats, achieving the elevation of an ordinary act, riding, into an aesthetic triumph.

**Erotic Confusions**

Sidney's sonnet 42 relies on all the traditional associations we've drawn so far, between horses and women, horses and lust, horses and the courtship of the considerate chevalier. The rhythms of riding that mimic the thrust of sexual passion, the comingling of two bodies that dissolve into union, the penetration of the soft inward secret places of the beloved, the desire to give as well as receive pleasure, all underwrite the sonnet's use of the manège as its dominant metaphor. They also inform the episode of the courser and the jennet in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, where the possibilities of the conjoined uses of horses and horsemanship imagery in the manuals and in the love poetry lead to the countenancing of the horse's pleasures as much as the human's. Acts of sexuality are figured in Shakespeare's poem as acts of incorporation, or minglings of bodies whose identity is indeterminate or inverted: despite his resistance, Venus's embrace of Adonis nonetheless makes the two "incorporate," while her fantasies insist that "although he mount her" Adonis "will not manage her" (540; 598, punning on the manège). Riding is a kind of sex, requiring the kind of skills applied to sexual encounters, and sex involves the skills of riding. The training
of the horse inflects the use of horsemanship metaphors with connotations of mental and physical discipline; but in *Venus and Adonis*, the subject who seeks to master her beloved, who appropriates the pleasures of being ridden as if they were identical to acts of riding, is the female goddess, not the warlike male partner. The threat implicit in the connections between horses and horsemanship as they are used in erotic poetry, and the construction of the horse in the training treatises as a potentially erotic subject and equal participant in the pleasures of riding, is thus realized in Shakespeare's poem: the mount seizes the reins of pleasure, rises to the top, and masters its/his/her master.

If we bring to Shakespeare's episode of the courser and the jennet some of what we have learned from the horsemanship treatises, new tensions emerge. Although its ostensible purpose is the traditional demonstration of lust released from rational control, the passage's descriptive details eroticize the courser in provocative and unpredictably fluid ways. The poem mobilizes the kind of confusion of horse/rider subject positions that we saw in the horsemanship manuals, along with confusions over the gender of the participants, and the sources and direction of the episode's erotic content:

> Round-hoofed, short-jointed, fetlocks shag and long,
> Broad breast, full eye, small head, and nostril wide,
> High crest, short ears, straight legs and passing strong,
> Thin mane, thick tail, broad buttock, tender hide:
> Look what a horse should have he did not lack,
> Save a proud rider on so proud a back.

> Sometimes he scuds far off, and there he stares;
> Anon he starts at stirring of feather.
> To bid the wind a base he now prepares,
> And whe'r he run or fly they know not whether,
> For through his mane and tail the high wind sings,
> Fanning the hairs, who wave like feath' red wings.

> He looks upon his love and neighs unto her;
> She answers him, as if she knew his mind.
> Being proud, as females are, to see him woo her,
> She puts on outward strangeness, seems unkind,
> Spurns at his love and scorn the heat he feels,
> Beating his kind embraces with her heels.
Then, like a melancholy malcontent,
He vails his tail, that, like a falling plume,
Cool shadow to his melting buttock lent;
He stamps, and bites the poor flies in his fume.
His love perceiving how he was enraged,
Grew kinder, and his fury was assuaged. (295–318)

The courser is the paragon of horses, whose every part is the epitome of physical virtue in a horse; that he “lack[s]” only “a proud rider on so proud a back” would seem to confirm the need for his lusty behavior to submit to the reins of reason. But to end a poetic blazon of the animal’s physical beauties, a blazon comparable to that anatomizing a woman in the vast array of sonnets and love poems, with the image of the rider on his back contributes an erotic charge to the act of riding that defeats its exclusive association with reason. What would a “rider” ride, in this instance, but a beauteous body, a sexualized hybrid creature, who would submit his “thick tail, broad buttock[,] and] and tender hide” to the rider’s caresses?

Meanwhile the jennet leads this courser a merry dance—literally, making him hop, bow, leap, and spin—performing the expected coy resistance of love poetry’s scornful lady. She “beats” “his kind embracements” with her heels, and “spurns at” him, as if fully self-aware about her performance as a performance. The “beats” of her hooves become the measure of the dance; the distance between spurning his advances and spurnig at his advances marks the distinction between reality and representation. This jennet is a self-conscious, musically trained, disciplined, and cooperative partner in the best tradition of the horsemanship treatises.

Finally, at the point of the fair lady’s capitulation, the courser is portrayed with his tail “vailed,” so that it falls like a “plume” over his “melting buttock.” The double reference in such a short space to the courser’s buttocks bestializes this encounter (apparently “appropriately,” in the sense that it is a courtship between two beasts, but also metaphorically casting Venus’s wooing as equally bestial, which is proper to the poem’s gender politics), but also draws attention to the species of sexual attention being negotiated. When the jennet waxes “kinder” the pun is on kind as categorization by species, which undergirds her welcoming posture—she is more like a horse (or a woman?) when she stops performing resistance and submits. But what would the act she allows look like? As a horse, the courser would naturally mount his “fair breeder” from behind. But to “vail” his tail, that is to let its hair cascade over his buttocks.
requires that the courser first lift the dock of his tail. That gesture is characteristic of any horse in an excited state, regardless of gender. The dock is the fleshy extension of the spine from which the tail grows; it is usually carried at rest low, settled between the two flanks, lifted only for defecating. However, in copulation, raising the dock of the tail is the signal given by the mare that she is ready to mate, because it grants access by revealing the vulva. So a stallion "vailing" his tail confuses the gendering of the participants and inflects this passage, I would argue, with a slippery erotic energy that does not resolve to any clear sexual (and therefore human or even human-horse) binary. And for whom might that stallion's tail be raised? The courser "rides" his mare; but he is also ridden by a rider, who is at this juncture the only thing he "lacks," a rider who desperately loves him. The fact that the poem doubles Adonis's lack of his horse, of whom he is "bereft," with the courser's lack of its rider suggests not merely a failure of control and reason, but mutual erotic desire. Finally, whose is the gaze that appreciates this performance? That receives and enjoys the image of the courser's erotically beautiful and noble physique? Adonis? Venus? The jennet? The reader? In sum, this courser becomes a supremely confused and confusing object and agent of erotic desire. So too the identity of his jennet, and the desire expressed migrates from one subject position to another until it is difficult to discern absolutely which participant in the poem is the "masculine" aggressor, which the "feminine" pursued, or who loves whom, who wants whom. Of course, that is exactly the poem's drama, since its primary characters shift positions with equal fluidity, until its climax in the goring of Adonis by the boar: "And muzzling in his flank, the loving swine / Sheathed unaware the tusk in his soft groin."

In fact, the poem does not stop at the species barrier of the equine in its description. The courser's flighty actions, startling at a feather, lead to his characterization as another kind of animal, a bird: "For through his mane and tail the high wind sings, / Fanning the hairs, who wave like feather'd wings." The hints of animate nature even in the wind's song, the tendency toward species mobility in the courser's own motions, suggest a horse that is always something else, somewhere else, impossible to pin down. Whereas Callaghan reads the poem's references to the vegetable world for their ability to reinstall poetic control over the implications of bestiality and hybridity in Adonis's union with the boar, I would read the courser and jennet as examples that the poem cannot establish any stable set of divisions that would make species categories possible, something that is true long before the boar appears, and long after Adonis is dead.
Beautiful Beasts

Shakespeare’s treatment of the courser and jennet is as much a commentary on aesthetics as on animal love or human sexuality. The consequence of the jennet’s performance of love, and of the blazon of the courser’s beautiful body, is to emphasize the role of the reader-observer, whose appreciation of these carefully staged poetic moments knits them together with the rest of this very visual poem. Shakespeare’s loving description of the animals’ bodies, his celebration of the courser’s speed and power, evokes and probably derives from the visual record of equine subjects in the art of the period.

Horses rarely appear either in horsemanship treatises or in poetry without inspiring awe at their unique blend of power and grace. Much of the great art of the Renaissance and the baroque period features the horse, whose form can be manipulated to demonstrate elements of its rider’s character, or to manifest an artist’s skill with anatomy, or to confirm ideologies of nobility, good governance, military authority, and so on. Leon Battista Alberti, otherwise best known for his theories of painting and architecture (and for his written family structure), penned Il Cavalli Vivo, which blends commentary on the horse’s extraordinary beauty with analysis of the ethical obligations of leadership. Juliana Schiesari points out that Alberti’s discussion of the horse as an aesthetic object, albeit a living one, relies on classical models—“in order to take up the technical aspects of formal beauty, beauty must first be understood as the realization of the ‘natural inclinations’ of horses.” Because the horse is a privileged “servant” among domesticated creatures (which, Schiesari notes, include women or wifes, other animals, and even vegetation), given its unique combination “of a pleasing physique that combines great power housed within a fiery soul with a sweet and potentially docile disposition,” its rider’s actions are the more magnified, for better or worse: a worthy rider who governs in the interests of expressing the “nature” of his mount will be accepted, even loved by his animal, while a poor rider, who cannot modulate his methods in accordance with the horse’s needs and capabilities, will “fail to live up to his own ‘nature’ and obligation to rule effectively.”

Alberti’s concept of beauty as the realization of a thing’s soul or nature, however, tends to shift the emphasis we find in other texts and images of horses away from the physicality of the animal toward an abstraction that purports to express that physicality better than the thing itself. Most equine art refuses to adopt this paradigm; the massive materiality of the horse is what is at stake in...
equine aesthetics, much as we observed it was in the Renaissance anatomy texts. Take, for instance, Albrecht Durer’s two images of a soldier and his mount (Figures 20 and 21). Although one is supposedly “large” and one “small” (they are called simply “Large Horse” and “Small Horse” in the critical literature), both are massively fleshed with muscle and fat. The larger of the two, shown from the rear, is especially extravagant in its depiction of the animal’s buttocks, which are disproportionately large in part because its hind end is raised on a dais.

Since we just witnessed Shakespeare’s rather involved contemplation of his courser’s back end in Venus and Adonis, this attention to a horse’s ass should not be so surprising. But it does raise the question of what aesthetics is involved in painting a horse’s anatomy with such a perspective. Kenneth Clark believes that there are fewer horses painted in medieval art because they have too many curves for the limited techniques of medieval painters, which are precisely what instead fascinate more expert Renaissance artists. “The splendid curves of energy—the neck and rump, united by the passive curve of the belly, and capable of infinite variations, from calm to furious strength—are without question the most satisfying piece of formal relationship in nature.” Advances in the knowledge of anatomy naturally enhanced the representation of the horse in art, something Clark notes is most evident in Leonardo da Vinci’s studies of the animal. However, the aesthetic appeal of the horse rests in the confusion of visual, tactile, and ethical domains registered in Clark’s words. While equine subjects may have had special status for Alberti as aesthetic animals because of their ability to convey moral and social ideology, they “satisfy” in most art and literature because of the plasticity of their physical embodiment, “capable of infinite variations.” Erotically mobile, equine subjects prove to be also aesthetically fluid. Passive/active, docile/enraged, hard/soft, submissive/assertive—the horse slides between these binaries, confusing them as it does the compartmentalization of hetero/homoerotic.

Eat Me

“Come,”declaims Hotspur in 1 Henry IV,

“Let me taste my horse,”
Who is to bear me like a thunderbolt
Against the bosom of the Prince of Wales.
Harry to Harry shall, hot horse to horse,
Meet, and ne’er part till one drop down a corse. (4.1.119–23).
Figure 20. Albrecht Durer (1471–1528), Large Horse (1505). Trustees of the British Museum.
Figure 21. Albrecht Durer (1471–1528), Small Horse (1505). Trustees of the British Museum.
Chapter 2

Having analyzed the horsemanship manuals with their appreciation for the sensitivity of the animal, combined with their fluid eroticism of the art of riding, we should find that this passage sounds far less odd than it might otherwise. Hotspur, true to his name, is here champing at the bit to slaughter Prince Harry in battle; “tasting” seems obviously to signify that Hotspur savors the rush to arms, rather than that he intends to slaughter and fricassee his horse. In the Renaissance, tasting still carried its original meaning of touching or feeling with the hands, so it is appropriately used to suggest Hotspur’s gentle and gentlemanly caressing of his mount’s sides (rather than an abrupt or crude use of spurs, rejected by the horsemanship manuals). However, its more common usage was obviously associated with eating, and therefore with the mouth, so Shakespeare is surely inviting his audience to consider other implications in Hotspur’s choice of words.  

After all, putting such a word in the mouth of this character, who claims to love his wife never more than when he is on horseback, begs us to read in this brief passage another conflation of eroticized acts involving a horse, this time involving gustatory processes. Hotspur’s thighs, we might imagine, will kiss his horse’s flanks, as he relishes the sensation of pounding across a field toward Hal: the opened thighs of a man astride a powerful beast are thus implicitly figured as a mouth around a piece of food. The moment belongs in the same tradition of the centaur-horseman that makes horse and rider incorporate, one flesh, exemplified by Musidore and other idealized riders. But it does so via a new point of communion, the mouth, which I would argue is an important shift of bodily emphasis. This is also a moment when Hotspur’s identificatory confusion extends through his and Hal’s “hot horses” to their own fusion, “Harry to Harry,” which will result in the erasure of one of the two in combat. Hotspur fantasizes that having physically merged with his horse, he will strike Hal’s “bosom,” and the resulting heat of their mutual (passionate) union will dissolve two bodies into one, until death parts them.

Hotspur’s character, more than any other in the literary tradition, seems addicted to the physic of riding—he must satisfy his impulsive need for action, his lust for battle, and so must resort to tasting his steed from time to time. Unlike the Norman in Hamlet, for instance, another Shakespearean character who is “incorpsed” with his mount (4.7.81–88), and who figuratively dies only in order to become “deminatured / With the brave beast,” Hotspur is very nearly too full of life and lust, too “hot” from excessive spurring of his mount and himself. Using up his mount this way does not produce a philosophical Chiron, but rather a raging, appetitive centaur bent on murder. Eating, riding,
and sex: in Hotspur’s case, these actions align in a peculiar way to convey the culmination of fiery pleasure in riding a powerful beast that surges between one’s thighs, a horse that carries one through the bloodletting of war and the assault on a fellow rider who shares one’s own name, a horse that facilitates the absorption of the hated-beloved. The result is the mastication of the equid as well as of the enemy. His gluttonous appetite for war leads Hotspur to swallow a succulent, eroticized “hot horse.”

It is not, however, that great a distance to travel from the horsemanship treatises’ analysis of the means by which horse and rider become “one” to Hotspur’s consumption of his mount in a frenzy of identity exchanges, and finally a thorough destruction of self. As the next chapter illustrates, losing oneself in the bodily pleasures of riding brings some literary characters into a far closer alimentary relationship with the equine Other than is comfortable for modern and postmodern readers. Eating your horse, or parts of it or its excreta, while you ride it into battle is, it turns out, a relatively tame version of the digestive exchanges Renaissance medical and husbandry texts recount. As we will see, for at least one famous Shakespearean character mutual consumption loses its promise of “physic” and instead completely expresses the kind of mutual annihilation hinted at in Hotspur’s lines.