

The Horse in Early Modern English Culture: Bridled, Curbed, and Tamed.
Kevin De Ornellas.

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The past fifteen years or so have seen a surge of interest in nonhuman animals in all areas of humanities thinking. Western epistemological traditions that hitherto emphasized a distinction between the being of humans from that of other animals (positioned as objects or others to human subjectivity) have increasingly been challenged. A newer, systemic thought that sees interrelationship between all aspects of the natural world as fundamental has produced, among a range of shifted focuses, a genre of scholarship that attends to the question of the animal. Writings on animals fall into three broad categories: those that attempt to retrieve an animal presence — traces of the animal — unmediated through the human; those that focus on how human-animal interrelationship produces both the human and the animal; and those that consider the roles of animal others in human lives, cultures, and history. Kevin De Ornellas's *The Horse in Early Modern English Culture* situates itself in this third category of animal research, which has often, maybe inevitably, had a particular emphasis on horses as the most economically, socially, and culturally crucial animals participating in Western life from antiquity until the 1930s.

De Ornellas's project picks up on the paradoxical fact that the very centrality of horses to Western history has rendered them, in the taken for grantedness of their voiceless presence, almost invisible. While recent collections of essays on early modern horse cultures routinely allude to the embedding of horse-related knowledge in metaphors of everyday English that are no longer precisely understood ("give her a free rein," "curb his enthusiasm"), De Ornellas's book seeks to examine "the manifold effects of the embeddedness of [horses] in the early modern mindset" (xi) through a detailed and sustained identification and unpacking of horse references and tropes. His book is structured into five chapters, each focused on both a theme and a central text or cluster of texts. These move chronologically from the 1590s to the mid-seventeenth century:

hunger, hungry horses, and the politics of the anonymous untitled play of the 1590s, known as *Woodstock*; gender issues and early modern horse culture in relation to a group of texts surrounding *The Taming of the Shrew*; social satire, shame, and texts narrating the performances of Morocco, the trick horse, and his owner Banks; horse-racing, economic, and cultural changes of the 1630s and James Shirley's *Hide Park*; and horse tropes as providing "liberating potential" or a "force of bridling detention" in relation to the English Civil War.

Each chapter contains a wealth of contextual and textual references, and De Ornellas characteristically moves across a variety of forms of writing and historical evidence, or, as he puts it, "disparately frameworked equine configurations" (134), in order to reveal ways in which these yield complex attitudes and values. Chapter 1 on *Woodstock*, for instance, opens with a quotation about a lack of human and horse food from a 1594 letter by Berwick garrison's governor to Lord Burghley. Interpretation of this provides the terms of discussion for a broader range of texts and for an evaluation of *Woodstock's* political radicalism. But the difficulty that sometimes is produced by the overall assemblage of horse references and the complexity of De Ornellas's interpretation of his sources is that the argument can be hard to identify and follow. Similarly, the argument throughout each of the chapters is structured in an unusual way, at the level of overall chapters, as well as of sections and of paragraphs, so that necessary information for the reader's understanding is sometimes delayed. (In the fifth chapter, we are told, "three texts are examined." But these texts are not all finally named for a further five pages.) And De Ornellas's style is ornate. While this might be considered a refreshing change from the abstraction and dryness of much academic prose, it can also work here to obscure meanings. However, each chapter has a helpful conclusion that summarizes and clarifies its argument, perhaps in recognition of these difficulties. And while this is, in some ways, a difficult book to absorb, there is analysis in each chapter that illuminates the main texts considered (the reading of Shirley's *Hide Park* is particularly successful and stimulating) and that enables greater understanding of the importance of horse talk.

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