Just outside a stall, a groom lies supine near the rear hooves of a horse who turns to glower at the viewer while a bare-breasted hag brandishing a torch leans in through the stable's window. Felled by mysterious forces, the groom is further victimized by a perspective that violently foreshortens his body. The horse too is strategically posed for visual consumption but the awkward yet vigorous turn of its head, the open, down-turned mouth, and the manner in which it fixes the viewer with its gaze signal the animal's smoldering resistance to the imposed perspectival constraints and to any hermeneutic certainties. The woodcut illustrating this bizarre scene bears the prominent mark of its maker; the hapless groom's fallen pitchfork leads the viewer's eye to the simple tablet in the right foreground bearing Hans Baldung's monogram. A preparatory drawing in Basel of the figure of the groom dated 1544 indicates that the woodcut was produced at approximately this time. The artist died in the following year, 1545.

Hans Baldung Grien's woodcut, known as the Bewitched Groom (Fig. 7.1), remains one of the most tantalizing and puzzling images in the history of early modern art. One of the reasons for its interpretive intransigence is that the image runs roughshod over the venerable tradition of equestrian iconography. Titian's portrait of the emperor Charles V at Schmalkalden, painted in 1548 and thus almost exactly contemporaneously to Baldung's Bewitched Groom, depicts the very essence of that iconography. In its display of the powerful stallion's complete submission to his rider's effortless control, the image asserts human rational mastery over an animal irrational other. Titian mobilizes an iconography that functions to assuage the very fears that Baldung's print seems so nightmarishly to evoke. In the claustrophobic confines of the stable, the animal is powerfully present while human rationality seems to have fled the scene.
Scholars have responded vigorously to the gauntlet flung by Baldung’s hand. Some have endeavored to find a textual source that would account for the image’s cast of characters and provide them with a stable and explanatory narrative framework. Various local folktales and legends and even fragments of ancient Roman satire have all been proposed as candidates. Others have taken the relationship between Baldung and his mentor and friend, Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), as the primary basis of interpretation. Linda Hults, Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, and Joseph Leo Koerner are eloquent and convincing proponents of this line of argumentation which essentially sees Baldung engaging in a self-conscious dialog with Dürer. Baldung’s artistic response to Dürer is characterized as everything from comic to terrifying and is understood to indicate that Baldung questioned and indeed rejected the ideals of stability and harmony as the goal of art, or, for that matter, carnal restraint as a viable possibility for human behavior. The Bewitched Groom is thus most often interpreted as a site for the expression of sexual and professional identities that are complex, problematic, ambiguous, and also deeply personal. Scholars tend to focus their efforts on divining the artist’s intent. What was it that Baldung wanted to say in this print? Knowing his intent is tantamount to mastering the print’s meanings.

Fundamental to many of the interpretations sketched above is the understanding of the figure of the horse as a symbol of unrestrained carnality and lust. The classical and medieval texts, the folktales and legends referenced in the articles cited above also serve to provide proof of and precedence for the interpretation of the horse in this manner. For scholars, the animal is interesting only in terms of its function as something else, namely as a one-dimensional symbol of human sexuality and the dangers of its unbridled expression. In these interpretations, the fact that the animal in the print is a horse is entirely secondary to its metaphorical function. As a signifier, the horse can certainly connote sexuality, and by extension, the artist, and artistic expression. And yet, what is it about the horse that allowed it in early modern culture to signify such phenomena? What kinds of attitudes and assumptions about this animal held currency at this time? Antique discourse contributed significantly to shaping these attitudes, but early modern man did not live by Aristotle alone. Attitudes were also shaped by the roles horses played in early modern life; by the horse–human interactions that took place and the physical, practical exigencies that arose from horse-keeping; and, at a further level, by the contemporaneous discourse on just these roles, interactions, and practices.

In my analysis of Baldung’s Bewitched Groom, I argue for additional layers of interpretation by considering two interrelated aspects that have been mostly overlooked by the extant scholarship. One of these aspects is the central importance of the horse. My analysis treats the horse not as a symbol but as a real presence that acted as a locus for physical practice and intellectual discourse. I will argue that if we want to understand the resonances of this profoundly ambiguous and probably intentionally difficult image, we need...
to think about the horse as a physical presence with which most early modern people would have been necessarily familiar. As absent as horses are from most people's lives in the twenty-first century, so were they ubiquitous in the early modern period. They were seen in the fields as agricultural "equipment," on the roads and in the cities as a means of transport for both goods and people, on the tournament swards and racing courses as entertainment, and on the battlefields as instruments of war. Early modern people would have seen, smelled, and touched horses, and many would have had occasion to be pulled in carriages or wagons by them or even ridden them. Furthermore, hippology, that is, the history and culture of the horse, was the subject of lively and copious early modern discourse that flowered in the second half of the sixteenth century and beyond. Between 1550 and 1600, we find well over twenty different printed works in the German language alone that deal with the care, training, and breeding of horses. These works offer the historian valuable insights into practices and attitudes that both shaped and were shaped by human–horse interaction at the physical and discursive levels.

The other aspect, directly related to and interwoven with the focus on the horse, is the possible identity of the print's viewers. I use insights gained from German hippological sources in order to reconstruct an audience for this print. I speculate on what members of such an audience would bring to viewing this work and how they would understand it. Unlike existing scholarship which almost exclusively focuses on artistic intention, I am interested in audience reception, an issue that has received only the most general of considerations in previous literature on the print. I am also interested in following the reception of Baldung's print beyond the context of the artist's own lifetime and into the second half of the sixteenth century.

Poised at the threshold of the stall, Baldung's horse turns to address the viewer directly with a piercing gaze. What are we to make of this animal? Certainly the horse's expression, taken together with the stricken groom and the malevolent old woman, indicates that something strange and threatening is occurring. Whatever that should be, it is happening inside a stable and everything there quite literally points to the horse: the groom's body, the unicorn's horn in the escutcheon, and the hayrack. Indeed, there is no other site on the horizon than the horse: the animal's body is contained by the stall's opening, and the head is tightly circumscribed by the trough, hayrack, and window. It behooves us to follow the lead of these visual signposts and to center our own attention on the horse.

The horse had certainly been—or was about to have been—the focus of the groom's attention, as the pitchfork and curry comb that have dropped out of his frozen hands clearly indicate. But in approaching the horse, was the man's only intention to clean the stall and groom the animal? The probing view between the man's and the horse's legs that the perspective forces upon the spectator, and the presence of flames and several phallic objects (pitchfork, torch, unicorn horn, the curved surface of the curry comb and even its handle) together imply that the groom had intended to act on desires other than those for cleanliness. The print seems to hint strongly that one of the themes it touches upon is bestiality.

While previous scholars have suggested a number of different references insinuated by the print, such as sodomy, or the horse/witch constellation as a metaphor of dangerous female sexual energy, they have delicately skirted the topic of outright bestiality. I believe this is so for two reasons. First, because Baldung included his coat of arms and possibly his self-portrait as the groom, most scholars reasonably assume that the print is a personal statement made by the artist about himself. Therefore, they may be reluctant to think that the artist would be implicated—and much less implicate himself—in such beastly practices. While much of the literature acknowledges and even accepts the possibility that the figure of the groom is a self-portrait, not all scholars agree on this point. Like Sabine Soll-Tauchert who has recently published on Baldung's self-portraits, I too am skeptical about identifying the figure as the artist. The distortion of the groom's face caused by the extreme foreshortening is too great and the presence of a moustache and thick side-burns is too general to allow for a definitive identification. Taken literally, the artist's coat of arms affixed to the stable wall may refer to Baldung as owner of the structure, but it does not necessarily follow that the groom is a member of that same family (much less that he is Baldung himself) because a man who performed such menial tasks as removing manure and cleaning animals would have been a hired employee. Even if Baldung did mean the figure of the groom to refer in some way to himself, later sixteenth-century viewers looking at the print well after Baldung's death would most likely not have caught this reference and would have constructed meanings from the print that did not hinge upon an identification that they could not have recognized. Although in some senses primary, artistic intent nonetheless does not foreclose possible further meanings produced by ongoing interaction between an image and its subsequent audiences. It is the response of such subsequent audiences that interests me in particular.

A second reason why scholars have not considered the topic of bestiality in relation to the print is that most art historians have not taken a close look between the horse's legs. Perhaps because of the animal's power, because the bulging musculature of the neck, shoulders, and hindquarters, most scholars have assumed that the horse is a stallion. But this is not the case. By positioning the viewer behind the horse, Baldung has surely gone out of his way to make sure that we are able to identify the animal's sex: the swishing tail allows us to just glimpse the vulva (the anal opening would be situated higher up, directly below the dock of the tail), and the view between the horse's hind legs would allow us to see testicles (if it were a stallion) or a sheath (if it were a gelding) if these male anatomical features were present. They are not. Such details were not taken lightly by Baldung. In his 1534 woodcut of an aroused stallion preparing to mount a mare, Baldung shows us the female genitalia by similar means: the horse, in
a three-quarter view seen from behind, lifts her tail to swish away flies and in so doing reveals her vulva. The horse in Baldung’s *Beheaded Groom* is also a mare, a biological reality that is literally thrust in the face of the viewer. We are meant to notice and to know.

It is in the compositional proximity of the male groom with the female horse and of their relevant anatomical features in particular that implies a disturbing intimacy between the two beings. In addition, there is the old bare-breasted woman with the torch who is almost always identified by scholars as a witch. The mouths of the three figures—woman, horse, and man—are all open, indicating various expressions of emotions evoked by their experience of one another. Linking bestiality with witchcraft in this image would in fact make sense since intercourse with animals became increasingly understood as evidence of heresy and dealings with the devil in late medieval attitudes. As the devil usually assumed different shapes in order to seduce his victims, the mare in this possible narrative is the devil in disguise, and the old woman acts as a kind of demonic procuress who enthusiastically facilitates an encounter which we are not even sure actually has or at some point will take place. In the early modern period, bestiality was a well-known and vigorously prosecuted activity. Based on familiarity with legal trials, Hani Miletski asserts that “bestiality was well established in ordinary life in Europe” between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Bestiality was linked primarily with sodomy and also with witchcraft, and cases from early modern England, Germany, and Switzerland have been published. Most of the people accused of bestiality were men, and some tried to explain their actions by asserting that they had been bewitched.

But has Baldung’s groom succumbed to his diabolically inspired desire? Although it appears that he has fallen under an evil spell, his copiece is still securely fastened. Nonetheless, he has been unmanned, not only by the witch’s spell but also by the artist’s composition which lays the figure out, utterly defenseless against our spectral examination of the most vulnerable parts of his body. In a further feminization, the central seam of the codpiece which runs directly between the groom’s legs gives his crotch the appearance of a female pudenda with clearly distinct labia. Indeed there is something vaguely ridiculous about the whole image. The position of the groom’s body is so extreme and so humiliating that one could find the view between his legs and up his nose to his bug-like protruding eyes to be cruelly comical. This is a perspective that distances the viewer physically and emotionally from the figure; it provokes disdain more than it evokes empathy. The old hag with her sagging breast and toothy leer is more of a caricature than a figure who inspires genuine fear and loathing. Even the horse who sticks her rear end in the viewer’s face and then turns around to give him a withering stare is faintly funny.

Perhaps Baldung’s audience would have understood this scenario as poking fun at the gullibility of those unenlightened segments of society who believe in the power of witches, as Linda Hults has speculated about the function of Baldung’s earlier witch imagery. The supposed effects of witchcraft in the *Beheaded Groom* are experienced by a stable-hand. To judge from the man’s handsome livery and the appointment of the stable in which he has worked, the groom in the print seems to have a wealthy employer, but he himself would have been a man with little formal education. Not surprisingly, in the cases of early modern bestiality, it is precisely amongst these kinds of men who worked closely with animals where the behavior often occurred. These are also the sorts of men whom many wealthy horse owners would have employed to carry out similar kinds of work, especially in terms of caring for fine horses. Baldung’s groom, spread out before the viewer in his ignominious pose, may therefore be an object of social and moral disdain; the viewer is literally meant to look down upon him as a person unenlightened enough to believe in witchcraft and foolish enough to fall in love with a horse.

Like Hults and a number of other scholars, I am hypothesizing that members of Baldung’s original audiences (that is, those accessing his work within a few years after production) included men who were outstanding in their level of education, social status, and economic means. In studying this print in particular, I argue, such men may well have found the explanation for bestiality in literal bewitchment as laughable. To a certain degree, Baldung himself would have belonged to this circle of men. As is already well known, his father, uncle, brother, and cousins were all university-educated and deeply imbedded in elite ecclesiastical, juridical, cultural, and political networks. Not only Baldung’s immediate family gave him access to these networks; so did his own wealth, accumulated through shrewd investments in property, land, civic bonds, and peasant debt. Baldung counted some of the most powerful men in the Germanic lands as his patrons, such as the Habsburg Emperor Maximilian (1459–1519), the Archbishop of Magdeburg Ernst of Saxony (1464–1513), the Margrave of Baden, Count Palatine Philip, Landgrave Ludwig of Löwenstein, and Landgrave Georg of Erbach, as well as local nobility, wealthy merchants, and bankers from Strasbourg. By 1527, Baldung lived in Strasbourg’s most fashionable neighborhood where he rubbed elbows with the likes of patrician clans and cathedral canons. From 1533 until his death in 1545, Baldung belonged to the ruling council of his guild Zür Stielc, one of the eight most powerful and wealthy guilds out of a total of 20, and there is ample evidence of his personal and professional involvement in Alsatian humanist networks.

Baldung thus clearly belonged socially to those ranks of men who would own or at least be familiar with and appreciate fine horses. He may well have owned and loved horses himself, to judge from his keen observation of equine behavior and from the fact that he appears to use the figure of the horse as a vehicle for his own artistic advancement. Even Baldung’s profession as a painter would have provided him with further connections to others involved with horses. Artists and saddlers were often professionally associated in the Middle Ages and into the early modern period. Painters and saddlers both worked with joiners who would provide the former with panels and frames
and the latter with the wooden trees that constituted the structural backbone of the saddle. In some cases, painters and saddlers even belonged to the same guild. This was true of Baldung’s own guild, Zur Stelze, up until the late fifteenth century.³⁵

Furthermore, Baldung’s Strasbourg had a long history connecting horse ownership with strategic civic defense, social status, and personal wealth. Already at the end of the thirteenth century, the citizens of Strasbourg were obligated to support the maintenance of horses (for official use such as in war) in the civic stable, either by a monetary contribution or by an actual animal (or several). In either case, the value of the sum or the horse was calculated according to each person’s economic bracket.³⁶ And in order for a citizen to move up into the ranks of the patriciate, he must be able to prove that as far back as his grandfather’s generation, his family had served the city by personally maintaining and contributing stallions and other horses to public defense.³⁷ Although the city began in circa 1500 to hire professional soldiers to fight its wars,³⁸ guildsmen and patricians continued to supply horses to the civic stable well into the sixteenth century.³⁹ As an institution, the Strasbourg civic stable seems to have been a locus of horsemanship for centuries, as the master of the stable, Caspar Reuschlin, wrote a book on training and bitting horses, dedicated to the members of the Strasbourg city council, and published in the city in 1593.⁴⁰

Reuschlin’s book takes us well beyond the date of Baldung’s death in 1545. In addition to thinking about Baldung’s roughly contemporaneous audience, I am interested in following the reception of Baldung’s print into the second half of the sixteenth century. This makes sense because it is at this time that a number of books on the care, breeding, and training of horses, like Reuschlin’s, were produced. These sources provide us with attitudes, practices, and discourses centered around horses and horse-ownership that may well help us to understand Baldung’s print better relative to a plausible audience. Based on the print’s own insistent focus on the horse, I am hypothesizing that men who owned, rode, and bred horses, and men who wrote, bought, and read the kinds of books on horses that I will discuss below, would have been interested in the Bewitched Groom. They would have looked at the print with the same eyes with which they evaluated their horses, studied their books, surveyed the labors of their grooms, stable-masters, horse trainers, and riding masters, and judged their peers’ ability in the saddle. To the viewing of a print in which the figure of the horse plays such a striking and central role, horseman would have brought a keen awareness based on personal experience of issues and attitudes involved in human–horse relationships and practices. These would include attitudes about hired stable-hands, as I have argued above, as well as the issue regarding attitudes about horses themselves. In relation to his animals, what attitudes were appropriate for a horseman to possess? Just how fond of his horse might a rider be? In hippological texts of the second half of the sixteenth century, we find attempts to circumscribe the parameters of proper attitudes and behavior. I argue that audiences for Baldung’s print would have understood the image to reference just this issue by hinting at potential transgressions of appropriate boundaries. They would have seen several indications of improper affection, of unseemly ardor, a dynamic love for horses that goes too far.

Certainly bestiality would occupy the extreme end of a range of behaviors associated with a man’s passion for horses. Elite horsemen would have been familiar with the topic of bestiality through a number of avenues including stable rumors and actual prosecuted cases. Bestiality, particularly between human and horse, was a theme addressed already in antiquity. In his book On the Characteristics of Animals, the second-century Roman writer Aelian tells the story of the groom Eudemus who consummated his desire for a beautiful mare. The story has a bad ending for, as Aelian intimates, even the animal kingdom punishes such unnatural behavior; the foolish groom is struck down and ripped to pieces by the mare’s foal who witnessed the man’s misguided lovemaking. Renaissance humanists eagerly translated and compiled such stories from classical antiquity. They used their access to classical sources and their critical linguistic skills to produce works on a variety of topics, including hippology, itself a classical discourse to which Aristotle, Vergil, Pliny, Columella, and Vegetius, among other ancient authors, had contributed. Such products of humanist hippology printed in sixteenth-century Germany include the Latin translation by Nuremberg humanist Joachim Camerarius (1500–74) of Xenophon’s fourth-century BCE Greek tract on horsemanship (1556), and Johann Fayser von Arnstein’s German translation of classical and Byzantine texts on equine diseases and their cures (1576).³² Marx Fugger (1529–97), the wealthy Augsburg humanist, hippologist, and merchant-banker, wrote his own book Von der Gestiterey (On the Breeding of Horses), first published in 1578, which is full of classical references.³³ Both Fayser and Fugger quote Aelian at length, and Fayser specifically includes the story of Eudemus.³⁴

Thus it is possible that a classically educated man, or an attentive reader of sixteenth-century hippological works such as Fugger’s, might have looked at Baldung’s print and found references on several levels. In attempting to read the relationship between the mare and the groom, such a viewer might have been reminded of Aelian’s story of the love-struck groom Eudemus from antiquity and found it amusingly linked to contemporaneous notions about witchcraft. He might have used the image, for example, to muse about the great arc of human folly spanning antiquity and the present.

Yet there are dangers even for an elite audience of horsemen, hints that in fact encourage an eroticized appreciation of the horse and that could also lead to an excessive kind of fondness. Baldung surely meant the viewer of his woodcut to notice the swelling, taut, curved shape of the mare’s hindquarters. He has accentuated that shape by placing it directly adjacent to the central axis of the image, and by highlighting it as an area of bright light bounded at the top by a heavy dark shadow. In some of the hippological literature, discussion of ideal equine conformation includes comparison between a well-shaped horse...
and a beautiful woman. According to this comparison, both horse and woman should possess a shapely posterior (and breast), a desire to be “ridden,” and the ability to make pleasant movements underneath their “riders.”

If we add to this notions of antiquity transported into the Renaissance about the lustful nature of horses, especially of mares, we can understand how, for a sixteenth-century audience, Baldung’s image practically explodes with sexually charged energy. In the end, total condemnation for the hapless groom is at least blunted by the image’s inescapable sensuality and ultimate inscrutability.

Responses to the print may also have included a critical awareness of another kind of love for horses and its related overindulgence, namely the passion of wealthy men for finely bred equines and the potentially vast amounts of money, time, space, and manpower that they lavished on caring for and maintaining these animals. In his book Von der Gestiiterey, Marx Fugger explicitly warns his readers against ruining themselves with related costs. In a chapter entitled “On the Large Expenses Incurred in the Care and Breeding of Horses,” Fugger insists that “every man should care for his horses according to the [limits of] his means and his status, and he should not waste his resources on this. For as God commanded in Deuteronomy chapter 17 a king of Israel should not overburden himself with an excess of horses.”

Possessing horses and squandering income on them were evidently temptations to which wealthy men were particularly prone. Both earlier and later sixteenth-century audiences were aware of this. A woodcut illustration from circa 1520 clearly demonstrates the association between horse-ownership and wealth and the accompanying text criticizes emotional attachment to physical possessions. I am proposing that this woodcut, easily accessible to Baldung, may in fact have influenced his composition and intention in the Bewitched Groom woodcut. The connection between these two woodcuts has not been noticed in the scholarship on Baldung to date and the proposal that Baldung might have used this earlier woodcut is being made here for the first time.

A woodcut (Fig. 7.2), one of 261, was made by the Petrarch Master to illustrate the German translation of Petrarch’s De remediis utriusque fortunae (1358/66). The woodcuts were already completed by August 1520 but the book was not published until 1532 by Heinrich Steiner in Augsburg. Baldung may have come to the book through his humanist connections. Petrarch’s work was known, appreciated, recommended, and published under the aegis of the humanist Sebastian Brant (1457–1521), who, like Baldung, lived in Strasbourg. In the foreword to the 1532 German translation of Petrarch’s De remediis written by the publisher, Steiner specifically states that it was Brant who guided the unnamed artist in producing the woodcut illustrations to the edition. This richly illustrated German translation of Petrarch proved to be very popular. Following the original edition by Steiner in 1532 came subsequent editions in 1539, 1551, 1559, 1572, 1583, 1584, 1596, 1604, 1620, and 1637. Thus the text and its illustrations would have been available to Baldung, his contemporary audience, and a later sixteenth-century audience as well.

The woodcut serves to illustrate Petrarch’s Chapter 127, which deals with worries about what will happen to one’s possessions, wealth, and children after one has died. The text, a dialog between Fear and Reason, has Fear wondering and worrying about what will become of his possessions after his death, and bemoans the fact that he cannot take it with him: “I leave behind such treasures and go naked from hence!” Reason answers: Naked you came into the world, and naked you shall leave it. But you have no reason for complaint, only for gratitude. While you lived, you were given the use of things that never belonged to you in the first place, so at your death nothing that was truly yours is being taken from you.

Petrarch’s fourteenth-century text makes no explicit reference to horses as treasured possessions, but the woodcut does. In fact, in the image we see a number of components that we know from Baldung’s woodcut: a horse seen from behind standing in a stall filled with straw and including a hayrack; a man lying down with the axis from his feet to his head running perpendicular to the picture plane; demonic creatures interacting with the man and with his possessions; even the strange low platform upon which the man’s deathbed is placed and which gives the entire scene a rather theatrical flavor is similar to the edging we see to the right of the groom’s feet in Baldung’s composition.
Baldung may have felt himself challenged by the woodcut’s composition and he also may have been struck by the themes articulated in the interaction between the woodcut image and the text by Petrarch.¹⁴ In Baldung’s woodcut, Petrarch’s text, and the Petrarch Master’s illustration we find a similar accent on prized property that, however, eludes complete possession. The Petrarch Master’s illustration goes beyond the text to include the horse as a prized possession and to depict the demonic influence on the inappropriate attachment to those possessions. Exactly these elements are found again in Baldung’s print.

But Baldung has transformed the Petrarch Master’s rather predictable variation on the Ars Moriendi theme into a complex and multivalent image in which the horse shares center stage with the human figure. In Baldung’s woodcut, the mare certainly fits the profile of a pampered animal and prized possession. Baldung’s coat of arms located adjacent to her stall may serve to reference the artist himself, but it also characterizes the space of the stable as the property of someone with resources to spare. The pilaster, finely decorated at its capital and base and framing the left side of the horse’s stall, functions similarly. Like the possible resonance with Aelian’s story of Eudemus, the pilaster also serves to introduce a classical note that would have been appreciated by learned viewers. The mare’s full frame, powerful musculature, and luxuriously thick mane and tail coincide with the kind of equine ideal formulated in texts by horseman and in imagery by artists, but they also bespeak of proper and generous nutrition and exercise. Her hooves are expertly shod with heel caulks to prevent her from slipping and damaging her legs. She possesses her own stall and personal groom. Whether she functions as either a broodmare or as a riding horse, in either case she has been the recipient of generous amounts of money, time, and care.³⁶ A later German source on the training of horses in fact exhorts its readers not to fall into “heathenish” ways by lavishing excessive attention on their animals. The author, stable-master to the Saxon dukes, sternly warns against displaying inordinate affection because “that sort of irrational love for horses is unseemly.” Instead, the proper goal of true horsemanship is to render the horse industrious and obedient.³⁷ Indeed, Baldung’s menacing mare seems the farthest thing from industrious and obedient that one could possibly imagine.

Yet it is of course precisely these desires to own, breed, train, and care for horses that must have driven the market for the books discussed above, and perhaps for Baldung’s image as well. Books on just these topics were produced in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and were dedicated to the likes of the Archduke of Austria, the Prince of Orange, the Duke of Upper and Lower Bavaria, the Duke of Braunschweig and Lüneburg, various dukes of Saxony, the Margrave of Brandenburg, the Margrave of Baden, the Landgrave of Hessen, sundry local nobility, imperial counselors and courtiers, and even to members of city governments such as the city council of Baldung’s own Strasbourg. Anticipated readership of these books would have included allies and subjects of the dedicatees. The social and political status of the men associated with the production and reception of such hippological books is very similar to the social and political status of Baldung’s patrons and peers mentioned above.

A critical engagement with hippological culture, which would include not just involvement in practices (such as breeding and riding) but also access to scholarly and technical discourses (such as reading books on horses) as well as to artistic products (such as viewing Baldung’s print) may well have served to strengthen a sense of group identity among such men. Along with the social, economic, and political prestige they enjoyed, such men also presumably shared the knowledge, skill, and resources necessary to the proper care and also to the expert riding of fine horses.

Baldung, his peers, and his later sixteenth-century audiences all belonged to the types of men who would have owned fine horses, employed grooms to look after them, purchased books dedicated to other elite men on the care of horses, and enjoyed the numerous references therein to sources from classical antiquity. Discerning, educated, appreciative of fine things, these men may well also have been the purchasers/ recipients of Baldung’s print. The image’s visual and narrative complexity, its elitist and misogynistic implications, and its odd and compelling eroticism, would presumably all find favor in the eyes of such viewers. So indeed would the print’s focus on the horse. Sixteenth-century audiences steeped in hippological culture would have understood, even from personal experience, that humans’ attraction to horses could be extremely powerful and thus in need of careful physical, moral, and economic control. Poised at the threshold of her stall, and hovering at the limit of rational consciousness, the mare and the groom are together suspended in a moment and in a state that hint simultaneously at the urgent need for and the ultimate impotence of such control. It is the love of humans for horses and its potentially destabilizing effects that act as a kind of centrifugal force holding the print’s disparate and puzzling components together in a single and disquieting orbit.

Acknowledgments

My thanks to Peter Foley, Stacie Widdifield, Corine Schleif, and Miranda Metcalf for their critical encouragement.

Notes

All translations from the German are mine.

The few exceptions to this are Soll-Tauchert, Brinkmann, and Jens Jochen Sroka, Sabine Soll-Tauchert,

Printed books on hippology in the German language from 1562-99 include: Linda Hults Boudreau,

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Fayser, Hippatria, 153v.

There are variations on this comparison between a good woman and a good horse, and while the comparisons differ sometimes in details, the main point is the same: that both women and horse should be beautiful to look at and pleasant to use. The earliest reference to this that I have come across is in Herwart von Hohenburg, Kunst der Regency (Tegernsee, 1577), 3v; see also later references in an anonymous broadsheet from 1618, “Kurtzer und eigentliche Beschreibung deren 16 Eygenschaften / welche ein schön und wolproportioniertes Pferdt an sich haben sol,” Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, IP 55.

See for example Aelian, Characteristics of Animals, vol. I, 125v; and later echoes of Aelian in the anonymous Ein Neue und bewerte Rotfästnuy (Strasbourg, 1583), 7.

Fugger, Von der Gestiiterey, 36v.


For Baldung’s connections with humanists, see Sergiusz Michalski, Hans Baldung Grien: Buchholzschnitte aus Augsburger Beständen (Augsburg: Schroff, 1992). As it turns out, Baldung’s woodcut was probably made in the year before his own death. Baldung was then approximately sixty years old. We know nothing about the state of his health at this late stage in his life. But perhaps he had taken up Petrarch’s famous book on how to deal with both good and bad fortune, including its numerous chapters on meeting various fears at the hour of one’s death, to find comfort for his own concerns.


Petrarch, Franciscus Petaricha, 170v.

Baldung may have been influenced in fact by a second woodcut by the Petrarch Master in the Steiner edition: the illustration to Chapter 31 in Book 1 features a groom currying a horse, another animal seen directly from behind in the left foreground, and, perhaps significantly for his earlier 1534 woodcuts, a herd of horses in the background forest. See Karl A.E. Enenkel’s insightful discussion of the Petrarch Master’s illustration to this chapter, “Text-Bild-Verhältnis,” 114–22; Enenkel, however, does not mention Baldung’s prints.

Mares were certainly used as working horses in the transportation and agricultural sectors, and as riding horses as well as broodmares; see Fugger, Von der Gestiiterey, 75v–80v.

E.A. von Dehnen Rothfelser, Von Abrichtung und Zaeumung (Dresden: Berg, 1637), irr.

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**On the Bit: Prince Maurits, Simon Stevin, and the Spanish Warhorse**

*Ingrid Cartwright*

Two storied warhorses, one fated and one feted, are at the center of the mythology surrounding the Battle of Nieuwpoort, a short-lived yet violent contest between Dutch and Spanish forces on 2 July 1600. The unlucky casualty was one of Spanish governor general Archduke Albert’s (1599–1621) favorites—a light-colored horse killed by a musket shot to the neck at close range. The horse allegedly saved the Archduke’s life that day by rearing to take the fire aimed at the Spanish governor, allowing Albert to escape with only a wound behind his ear thanks to “il cavallo noble.” As an honor, the horse’s skin was mounted on a wooden statue and returned to a memorial stall in the grand stables of the Archduke and Archduchess Isabella.1 The stuffed horse still exists in a museum in Brussels as does the large gaping bullet hole near the horse’s throat, a testament to its sacrifice in the Eighty Years War.2

The other horse made famous at Nieuwpoort was also Albert’s, but that near-white stallion ended up as the pride of the victorious Dutch. Perhaps because the Archduke’s mount was lost from under him, the commander of the Dutch cavalry, Lodewijk Günther of Nassau-Siegen (1575–1604) seized another stallion from Albert’s prized string—one ridden by the Spanish commander-in-chief, Don Francisco de Mendoza (1547–1623). Mendoza was taken prisoner and the handsome stallion presented as booty to Maurits of Nassau (1567–1625), Prince of Orange and leader of the Dutch troops.3 In the Dutch Republic, the striking horse quickly gained notoriety as a symbol of Spanish loss and Dutch gain, appearing as patriotic symbol in prints and paintings over the following decades. Jacques de Gheyn II (1565–1625) painted the famous horse in an unusual life-size work that is possibly unprecedented (Fig. 8.1).

The immense canvas, completed in 1603, illustrates Maurits’ pride in his military prowess and also his great esteem for his “four-footed brood,” which poet and Dutch States’ secretary Constantijn Huygens (1596–1687)