

ALTERING A RACE OF JADES:
HORSE BREEDING AND GEOHUMORALISM IN SHAKESPEARE

Ian F. MacInnes

As the essays in this volume make clear, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe was a horse-owning, horse-riding culture, a place where the language of horses and horsemanship was pervasive. In the case of England, it was also a place where both the language and culture of the horse were increasingly connected with national identity. Here, for example, is the well-known passage in Shakespeare's *Henry V* where the French Constable wonders how on earth the English army, which is expected lose, has been doing so well:

Dieu de batailles! where have they this mettle?
Is not their climate foggy, raw, and dull,
On whom, as in despite, the sun looks pale,
Killing their fruit with frowns? Can sodden water,
A drench for sur-reined jades, their barley-broth,
Decoct their cold blood to such valiant heat?
And shall our quick blood, spirited with wine,
Seem frosty? O, for honor of our land,
Let us not hang like roping icicles
Upon our houses' thatch, whiles a more frosty people

(Blue text indicates page numbers of original essay.)

Sweat drops of gallant youth in our rich fields!¹

Now, nationality and national identity have been acknowledged as one of the main subjects of this play, underlying its production history in cases such as the 1944 movie version starring Laurence Olivier. And the second tetralogy as a whole, with its passages on the “sceptered isle” and its use of the word “nation” was once used as a touchstone of patriotic feeling. More recently, critics have disagreed about the nature of the nation being dramatized. Graham Holderness, for example, sees Henry as a purely medieval feudal figure rather than an allegory for [begin page 176] the leader of a new nation state.² Others, like David Cairns and Shaun Richards continue to insist that the play “dramatizes ... the originating moment of nationhood”.³ From this debate has emerged a sense that the play’s version of nation is contingent (Cohen), fragile (Tosi), or imaginary (Womack).⁴ Some critics have begun to call attention to passages like this one to show the extent to which early modern forms of nationhood are rooted in physiology and the environment. Like many depictions of nationality in the period, it invokes climate theory, or as Mary Floyd-Wilson so aptly names it, “geohumoralism”: the belief that regional differences helped determine an individual’s character. Floyd-Wilson argues that geohumoralism is in fact “the authoritative ethnological discourse of the period”,⁵ and as she and others have noted, passages like the one from *Henry V* raise certain difficult climatic questions about the English national character. That these passages also invoke English horses demonstrates the extent to which this animal could serve as a metonymic connection between real agricultural and environmental concerns and the emergent imaginary concept of “nation.”

¹ Shakespeare W., *The Life of Henry the Fifth*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: 1974) 3.5.15-25. All future references to the play are from this edition and will be noted by act, scene, and line number in parentheses.

² Holderness G., *Shakespeare Recycled: The Making of Historical Drama* (New York: 1992) 104.

³ Cairns D., and Richards S., “What Ish My Nation?” in Ashcroft B., Griffiths G., and Tiffin L. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London: 1995) 178.

⁴ See Cohen D., “History and the Nation in Richard II and Henry IV”. *Studies in English Literature*, 1500-1900 42, 2 (2002) 293-315. Tosi L., “A Map of Dis-Unity: Henry V and the Making of ‘England’” in Bassi S., and Cimarosti R. (eds.), *Paper bullets of the brain: experiments with Shakespeare* (New York: 2006). 145-166. Womack, P., “Imagining Communities: Theatre and the English Nation in the Sixteenth Century” in Aers D. (ed.), *Culture and History, 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing* (New York: 1992) 91-146.

⁵ Floyd-Wilson M., “English Mettle” in Kern Paster G. Rowe K. and Floyd-Wilson M. *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (Philadelphia: 2004) 133.

From the perspective of this volume we might especially note that this passage gives geohumoralism itself an agricultural, and especially an equine emphasis. When the Constable calls barley-broth the national English diet, he is clearly thinking of English ale. This reputation may be well deserved. If Gregory King's seventeenth-century estimates are correct, the average consumption of beer and ale in early modern England (for both adults and children) was well over a liter a day.⁶ The barley to make the ale came from English fields, and these fields and their products are the main subject of the Constable's thoughts. He dismisses barley-broth precisely as a purely agricultural instrument: [begin page 177] a "drench for sur-reined jades". As it happens, barley-broth was indeed the base for several kinds of actual horse drenches, including one for the staggers in which the reader is urged to take dill, pepper, and saffron, "put them to a pottel of Barley water, and then straine it well through a strayner, and give the Horse a quart thereof to drinke early in the morning".⁷ Finally, the Constable imagines the English sweating "drops of gallant youth in our rich fields" as if they are translating some of their own national characteristics to the French pastures. From the first moment of this play when the chorus tells us that English youths "sell the pasture now to buy the horse, / Following the mirror of all Christian kings" (2.Chorus.5), we are reminded that the English army is itself constructed from the products of English soil. The irony of the phrase "selling the pasture to buy the horse" depends on their close association. The English are exchanging their land for the potentially desperate chance to follow their King to new lands. Henry himself famously exhorts his men to show "the mettle of your pasture" (3.1.27), a metaphor which geohumoralism renders at least partially literal. *Henry V* is also a very horse-centric play, and some of the most visible animal products of real English pastures are English horses. Because of their status and appeal to the elite, the nation's horses attracted more commentary than would be strictly warranted by their share in the export trade. English horses were also the products that for a variety of reasons were most vulnerable to the Constable's question. The relationship between English horses and English fields was very much an open question in the early modern period. In what follows, I argue that the ethnological uncertainties of horse breeding and the anxieties about the English environment are coextensive. For the early modern

⁶ King G., "Natural and Political Observations and Conclusions upon the State & Condition of England (1696)" in *A reprint of economic tracts* (Baltimore: 1936) 35.

⁷ Baret Michaell, *Hipponomie or the Vineyard of Horsemanship* (London, George Eld: 1618) appendix 10.

English audience these issues reflected deep-seated ecological concerns as the quality of both horses and pasture became a fundamental part of the national imagination.⁸

There is good evidence that the issues surrounding real horses in England could underpin their deployment in literary works like *Henry V*. As Peter Edwards revealed in *The Horse Trade of Tudor and Stuart [begin page 178] England*, economics and politics conspired to keep horses, and particularly horse breeding, at the forefront of English national interest for a long time. A sustained increase in demand for horses created a kind of perceived ongoing crisis, particularly after Henry VIII's wars depleted the supply of good cavalry horses.⁹ Laws preventing the export of horses were renewed, breeding programs were constantly encouraged, and the value of English horses soared in international circles. Edwards has pointed out that English horses, once thought to be the worst in Europe, were highly respected by the beginning of the seventeenth century (143). Horse markets became more sophisticated, and questions of breed were more prevalent (13). Horses also appear to have been more ubiquitous in England, even if they were initially thought to be physically inadequate. "By Continental standards horse ownership was widespread in England," Edwards says, "and the number of people who rode on horseback was one of the features noted by foreign observers" (6). What Edwards has described amounts to a revolution in the English horse, a revolution both highly public and perceived as one of national importance. Since national importance was itself a relatively new concept in the early modern period, horses contributed economically to the construction of the idea of "nation". This transformation in the English horse depended almost entirely on changes in production, and attention to the horse was by extension attention to the land and its products. As Edwards puts it, "Because of the vital role that horses played in the social and economic life of Tudor and Stuart England, the means whereby the animals were produced and distributed to those who needed them were matters of great concern to contemporaries".¹⁰

English pastures and fodder were undergoing a similar economic transformation. Historians have been divided about the exact period of England's agricultural revolution, but it seems clear that change was well underway by the end of the sixteenth century. Mark Overton attempts to solve the question by arguing for two periods of revolution, an early one of innovation and a later one of development in farming technology and of

⁸ *Henry V* is not the only literary work to depend in part on this metonymy. Drayton's nationalistic *Poly-Olbion* (1612), for example, which calls the Thames "great pasture's Prince", relies on a deeply metonymized topography in which domestic animals figure not just as products but as representatives of the land that feeds them.

⁹ Edwards P., *The horse trade of Tudor and Stuart England* (New York: 1988) 13.

¹⁰ Edwards, *The horse trade of Tudor and Stuart England* 140.

social change.¹¹ The sixteenth century [begin page 179] certainly witnessed a marked demand for agricultural products as recorded in rising prices. Of course, prices increased everywhere during the century, but they did so more rapidly in agriculture. Joan Thirsk's *Agrarian History of England and Wales* records twice as great an increase for agricultural products as for industrial ones between 1500 and 1600.¹² These trends rewarded innovation. As Peter Bowden puts it in his section on agricultural prices in Thirsk's *Agrarian History*, "Under the stimulus of growing population, rising agricultural prices, and mounting land values, the demand for land became more intense and its use more efficient".¹³ And English agriculture itself was increasingly animal based. By 1696, when Gregory King made his attempt at an agricultural census, animals and their feedstock (both from pasture and fodder crops) constituted a majority of agricultural produce, and the number of large farm animals exceeded the number of people.¹⁴ Because rights to common land pertained in some areas to all inhabitants, animal ownership was widespread, even if it sometimes consisted of a single cow and a couple of sheep.¹⁵ One modern historian argues that the livestock density in England doubled in the first half of the seventeenth century.¹⁶ All of these creatures had to eat, and their growing appetite resulted in increasing concern over the productivity of English pastureland and the quality of English hay, oats, and other green stuff. Much depended on these, and much more was thought to depend. The issue was not one of arable land versus pasture because arable land and husbandry were so interrelated in English agriculture: "Improvements in arable and pastoral husbandry went hand in hand, each helping the other, and both serving to promote the specialization and interdependence of regions".¹⁷ Rather, the response to the increasing demand for pasture, fodder, and other crops is evident in a number of phenomena from the various projects of land reclamation and technical improvements [begin page 180] like Roland Vaughan's famous watermeadows, to the

¹¹ Overton M., *Agricultural Revolution in England: The Transformation of the Agrarian Economy 1500-1850* (Cambridge: 1996)

¹² Thirsk J. (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales* (London: 1967) 609.

¹³ Bowden P., in Thirsk J. (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales* 593.

¹⁴ King G., "Natural and Political Observations and Conclusions upon the State & Condition of England (1696)" in *A reprint of economic tracts* (Baltimore: 1936) 35.

¹⁵ Thirsk, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales* 185.

¹⁶ in Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England* 111.

¹⁷ Thirsk, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales* 199.

outpouring of books devoted to farming methods, and even to the astonishing number of mathematical works devoted to the landscape.¹⁸

Concerns about the pasturing and feeding of many animals might be a pressing issue, but it remained a purely domestic one in the case of animals like cows and sheep. However, because the whole system of horse improvement depended on importation and careful breeding, the national interests involved unavoidably bound questions about horse pasture, oats, and other horse-fodder to more intangible questions about the origins of racial characteristics. Issues of breeding and of stock are deeply physical, and the idea of there being a particular kind of “English horse” raised concerns that were physiological rather than economic. What made a good horse was a matter of constant debate, particularly concerning the role regional differences in climate played in determining the character of a horse. Almost all treatises on horses or riding in the early-modern period begin by describing and comparing the different types of horses, types which were invariably linked to a particular region. Thus, although horse breeds became a subject for deliberate intervention, they began as regional identities. Edward Topsell, whose work as a compiler brought him face to face with this tendency, even goes as far as to assert, “there are as many kindes of Horses as Nations”. This coequality between horse and nation has been recognized particularly by scholars working in the late seventeenth century like Karen Raber and Richard Nash, but it is present from very early on.¹⁹ Thus we constantly hear about the relative merits of the Neapolitan courser, the Irish hobby, and many others. Such descriptions frequently refer to climate as a way to support their claims. “The almain or high Dutch horse”, says Nicholas Morgan, “being bred in a coole fruitfull climate, rich in pure ayre and wholesome springs, is a horse of wonderfull tall stature and big of bone”.²⁰ The Sardinian horse, Morgan argues, since it is bred in a climate like [begin page 181] that of Naples, must resemble the Neapolitan horse.²¹ Morgan does not argue that horses reflect the origins of their progenitors (a modern person would say, for example, that Neapolitan horses reflect a Spanish influence since

¹⁸ Based on the works represented in Taylor E.G.R., *The Mathematical Practitioners of Tudor & Stuart England* (Cambridge: 1954), survey techniques were second in popularity only to navigation.

¹⁹ Raber K., “A Horse of a Different Color; Nation and Race in Early Modern Horsemanship Treatises” in Raber K. – Tucker T., *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline, and Identity in the Early Modern World* (New York: 2005) 225-244. See also R. Nash’s “Honest English Breed” in the same volume (245-272).

²⁰ Morgan Nicholas. *The Horse-Mans Honour, or, The Beautie of Horsemanship* (London, Helm and Marriott: 1620) 3.

²¹ Morgan does display some skepticism about local origin as the only marker of a horse’s quality, but as with any dominant discourse, geohumoralism remains his only real avenue for thinking about breed qualities.

Naples was part of the empire). Instead, he focuses on local climate. Ostensibly these descriptions of what we would now call different breeds of horse are designed to help the reader select a horse appropriate for a given task. But they constantly participate in the broader discourse of geohumoralism, reinforcing and giving practical dimension to this way of categorizing nationality. Indeed for a well-bred Englishman in the early seventeenth century, the selection of a horse was the moment at which he would be most reliant on geohumoralism, an otherwise somewhat speculative field. As the Scottish author John Barclay says, “to examine all other climats with the same diligence, were more for the curiosity of pleasure, then the profitable use of commerce or conversation. For who but Merchants goe into Affrick?”²² The relative character of Europeans and Africans might have been of theoretical interest, but the nature of a horse one might be about to spend good money on was of pressing immediate concern.

The problem, of course, is that no one was ever quite sure exactly how and when climate affected a particular horse. What happened when a Neapolitan courser was brought to England? Could a horse change by moving from one climate to another, and if so, how fast? This was an important question, not just because England imported horses, but because the answer would determine the course of any breeding program. Nicholas Morgan, the same writer who mentions climate so insistently when describing particular breeds of horses, voices exactly this question. He wonders whether certain countries with “excellent air, water, ground ... can altar a Race of Jades to good horses, or whether they bee onely good that are there begotten and bredde, and no other”.²³ Although Morgan concludes that neither air, water, nor “ground” (pasture) can affect the nature of a horse, he is still surprised that England, which he thinks has good air and [\[begin page 182\]](#) water, had not previously been thought to produce good horses. The quality of English horses is always of great concern to English writers, who tend both to over generalize and to take as their subject the elite animals in what was surely a fairly motley and slowly changing genetic pool. As time progressed, the dominant sentiment was that the best English horses were just as good if not better than any others, and that those who ran after foreign beasts were either being too fashionable or disloyal. Markham considers the English horse to be second only to the Neapolitan courser, and Morgan calls English horses “beasts of strong and great stature, stout courage and good shape”.²⁴ These writers’ attempts both to investigate and to defend the evolving nature of the “English” horse are evidence of a controversy that contributes to the construction of nationality itself. Of

²² Barclay John, *The Mirror of Mindes, or Barclay's Icon Animorum* (London, I. Beale:1631) 61.

²³ Morgan, *The Horse-Mans Honour* 18.

²⁴ Morgan, *The Horse-Mans Honour* 8.

course, as Peter Edwards has shown, the best English horses really had improved by the seventeenth century. William Cavendish, the Duke of Newcastle certainly thought they were satisfactory, and his authority far exceeds writers like Morgan and Markham. But on the other hand, Cavendish praises what he sees as a totally hybrid product: “Certainly English Horses are the Best Horses in the whole World for All Uses whatsoever, from the Cart to the Mannage; and some are as Beautiful Horses as can be any where, for they are Bred out of all the Horses of all Nations”.²⁵ Cavendish seems secure in the idea that horses will derive their qualities from their “sires” rather than from the climate, but his deliberate refusal to praise a native horse demonstrates the persistence of the controversy. In the end, this controversy had less to do with reality than with the larger anxiety brought on by the metonymic connection between horses and national character: a nation of excellent horses is also perhaps a nation of excellent men. A nation of weak horses, on the other hand, did not bode well for its inhabitants. The debate over the value of the English horse was thus part of a larger concern with the relationship between constant and inevitable climatic influence and attempts to improve a “breed”. These concerns tended to move the register of discourse far beyond real horses toward a much more theoretical construct of the “English horse.”

The geohumoral connection between horse and nation meant that early modern discussions of English horses extended almost seamlessly [begin page 183] to discussions of English people, since humans and animals shared a humoral constitution. On the whole, animals were just thought to demonstrate the principles of climatic influence more quickly and visibly. James Howell, describing the effect of the Dutch climate, says,

that when people of more vivacious temper, come to mingle with them, at the second generation, they seeme to participate of the soyle and Ayre, and degenerate into meere Hollanders; the like is found dayly in Horses and Dogs, and all other animals.²⁶

The questions for both are frequently the same. Are the English people a “race of Jades” or not? If they are, in fact, somehow constitutionally defective, can they be altered, and what would it take? Geohumoralism is the source of the connection. It is also both notoriously slippery and so commonplace as sometimes to seem invisible. But the ways in which geohumoralism was deployed, even casually, frequently betray larger uncertainties about the relationship between determinism and agency on a national level. On the one hand, and depending on how the climatic zones were read, England occupied

²⁵ Cavendish William, *A new method, and extraordinary invention, to dress horses, and work them according to nature as also, to perfect nature by the subtilty of art, which was never found out* (London, Thomas Milbourn: 1667) 59.

²⁶ Howell J. and Edward A., *Instructions for forreine travell : 1642 ; collated with the second edition of 1650* (London: 1869) 62.

a privileged position. One of the most common features of geohumoralism from classical times into the early modern period is the tendency of various writers to argue that their own countries are “temperate” while all others, north and south, lean to excess in one way or another. Early modern writers were aware of this tendency, but their wry admission of it did not prevent them from duplicating it. The anonymous French work translated by Robert Ashley, *A Comparison of the English and Spanish Nation*, argues that when Aristotle says Greece is the most temperate country, “the love of truth gave place to the love of his countrie”.²⁷ But Ashley’s author, who wants the French to ally with the English, ends up claiming that France and England share the perfect climate, the former by virtue of its placement at 45° north latitude, the latter by virtue of the warm water that surrounds it. Reverting to the military implications, as so many works do, this one says that the English are therefore both warlike and wise. On the other hand, the English sometimes perceived of themselves as climatically challenged. Thomas Proctor, an English military theorist, seems to argue in *On the Knowledge and Conduct of Warres* that his climate is perfect, but he also seems to [begin page 184] feel that English military success requires explanation:

For what is in want or lett that the Englisheman... should not excell other nations in deades & exployctes of Armes...? Surely the defectes are, lacke of endeavour, & discipline.²⁸

These supposed faults betray the fact that England may not be as well situated as many would have it. “Lacke of endeavour” is a fault of the phlegmatic individual. And England, with its cool, wet, and fertile climate, was constantly at risk of being assigned this character in geohumoral debates, although not always directly. John Barclay, who prides himself on his honesty, calls his southern neighbors lazy by reason of the fecundity of their countryside.²⁹ Jean Bodin repeatedly argues that “a fertile country breeds effeminate people”.³⁰ Although he doesn’t refer to England’s special fertility, he associates both seacoasts and islands with a dangerous kind of ease of life.

When geohumoralism enters literary works like Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, we can see that that the fundamental uncertainties about both the nature and the effect of English environment are reflected in a kind of double vision. On the one hand the play sometimes

²⁷ Ashley Robert, *A Comparison of the English and Spanish nation: composed by a French gentleman* (London, John Wolfe: 1589) 33.

²⁸ Proctor T., *Of the knowledge and conducte of warres (1578)* (New York: 1970) preface iv.

²⁹ Barclay, *The Mirror of Mindes* 106.

³⁰ Bodin J., *The six bookes of a commonweale (1606)* (New York: 1979) 565.

tries to suggest that the English climate is actually superior. On the other hand it also suggests that the English succeed *despite* their unfortunate climate. As we might expect, this debate is conducted primarily through references to the bodies of horses, sometimes real, sometimes ideal or imaginary. Ultimately, the contradictory terms by which Shakespeare celebrates English nationality mirror the contradictions early modern horse texts with regard to breed.

In his most famous passage, the Constable of France begins by insulting the English climate, but the very same geohumoral model he uses also operates against his France. According to Levinus Lemnius, whose 1576 book *Touchstone of Complexions* is deeply geohumoralist, the French are not naturally valiant but “wavering unconstant, captious, deceitful, falsehearted, desirous of alterations and tumultes, babblative, and full of much vaine tattling”.³¹ The most famous scene of vain tattling in the play must be the Dolphin’s raptures over his horse. The scene begins with mutual praise of armor and horses, but the Dolphin takes his bragging to extremes: [begin page 185]

DOLPHIN I will not change my horse with any that treads but on four pasterns. Ça, ha! he bounds from the earth, as if his entrails were hairs; *le cheval volant*, the Pegasus, *chez les narines de feu!* When I bestride him, I soar, I am a hawk: he trots the air; the earth sings when he touches it; the basest horn of his hoof is more musical than the pipe of Hermes.

ORLEANS He’s of the colour of the nutmeg.

DOLPHIN And of the heat of the ginger. It is a beast for Perseus: he is pure air and fire; and the dull elements of earth and water never appear in him, but only in Patient stillness while his rider mounts him: he is indeed a horse; and all other jades you may call beasts. (3.7.11-24)

Bruce Boehrer sees this passage, and others like it, as evidence that Shakespeare is devaluing the “aristocratic culture of the horse”,³² but in many ways the caricature is entirely conventional on national grounds, especially given geohumoral discourse of the times. John Barclay, who begins his *Mirroure of Minds or Icon Animorum* with the premise “that there is a proper Spirit to every Region, which doth in a manner shape the studies, and manners of the inhabitants” (table of contents) says young Frenchman are like young wines: extraordinarily bold and rash. They have “unconstant mindes, and [are] easily carried away with any rumors; sometimes impatient of idlennesse, sometimes of

³¹ Lemnius Levinus, *Touchstone of Complexions* (London, Elizabeth Allde: 1576) 20.

³² Boehrer B., “Shakespeare and the social devaluation of the horse” in Raber K., and Tucker T., (eds.), *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline, and Identity in the Early Modern World* (New York: 2005) 93-6.

business; a foolish ostentation and braging of their lusts... and indiscreet scoffings, which spare none”.³³

Geohumoralists also have good things to say about the English, whom Lemnius calls “of statue comely and proportionable, and of body lustie and well complexioned”.³⁴ When King Henry becomes angry at the French at the beginning of the play, he plays the part of the kind of Englishman that Lemnius thinks is typical: a man who when he is made angry, is not easily satisfied. And the English think of themselves as constitutionally opposed to vain tattling. At one point Henry is talking to the herald Montjoy and stops himself saying “forgive me, God, / that I do brag thus! This your air of France / Hath blown that vice in me. I must repent” (3.6.150-152).

Elsewhere in the play, however, ill opinions of the English climate go unanswered. The French lord, Grandpré, is not far wrong when he [\[begin page 186\]](#) describes the English army on the night before battle. “Big Mars”, he says, “seems bankrupt in their beggar’d host”:

The horsemen sit like fixed candlesticks,
With torch-staves in their hand; and their poor jades
Lob down their heads, dropping the hides and hips,
The gum down-roping from their pale-dead eyes
And in their pale dull mouths the gimmel bit
Lies foul with chew’d grass, still and motionless. (4.2.45-50)

This collection of alleged symptoms does not suggest that the English forces are simply fatigued or under supplied as is hinted at elsewhere in the play. Rather, Grandpré is suggesting that the English horses and men are constitutionally unfit for war. The lowered head, the “dropping” hips, the gummy eyes, pale mouth, and undigested food are frequently attributed in horse texts of the period not to any specific disease or mismanagement but to a faulty constitution. The detail most suggestive of disease, the runny eyes, is almost never mentioned in veterinary treatises.³⁵ To understand the force of the Frenchman’s remark we would do better to look at descriptions of ideal horses, like Gervase Markham’s of the perfect warhorse:

³³ Barclay, *The Mirror of Mindes* 86.

³⁴ Lemnius, *Touchstone of Complexions* 18.

³⁵ Only Leonard Mascall in his *First Booke of Cattell* (London, John Wolfe: 1587) mentions the symptom, in connection with a condition he calls “forspoken”.

If you would have a Horse for the Wars, you shall choose him that is of a good tall stature, with a comely lean head, an out-swelling forehead, a large sparkling eye, the white whereof is covered with the eyebrows, and not at all discerned, or if at all, yet the least is best. A small thin ear short and pricking is preferable, but if it be long, well carried and ever moving is tolerable while if dull or hanging, most hateful.³⁶

The quality of a horse's eyes is particularly important. Some authors, like Morgan, believed that one could assess the boldness of a horse simply by looking at its eyes. "The physiognomy of a horse is more certain [than that of man] for he can not keep secret or conceale as man can... a bolde horse has a broad forehead, a great black full eie standing out like an hares eye".³⁷

Unlike the English horses with their dejected demeanor, the French horses are naturally valiant. "Hark, how our steeds for present service neigh!" the Constable exclaims. "Mount them", the Dolphin replies, [begin page 187] "and make incision in their hides, / That their hot blood may spin in English eyes, / And doubt them with superfluous courage" (4.2.9-11). Here "hot blood" is synonymous with "superfluous courage" and something that the English do not appear to possess. The eyes which "faintly through a rusty beaver peep" (the human eyes) or are "pale-dead" with the "gum down-roping" (the horses' eyes) are lacking precisely this element of heat and courage. They are almost lacking life itself. Grandpré calls them "island carrions, desperate of their bones":

Description cannot suit itself in words
To demonstrate the life of such a battle
In life so lifeless as it shows itself (4.2.53-55)

All of this description is part of the French attempt to encourage themselves before the battle, but it does accord with many notions of the regional differences between French and English bodies. The English climate is cold and wet; the English themselves, like their horses, should be cold, pale, and gummy. Indeed, phlegmatic faults were precisely what military writers like Proctor saw as the greatest problem with English troops.³⁸

In this context, the fact that the English succeed means that they are producing the humorally unexpected. Shakespeare is not the only one to locate this unexpected triumph solely in the person of Henry V. The very passage from Proctor that calls English soldiers phlegmatic praises the "endeavour" and "discipline" first of Alexander

³⁶ Markham G., *The Compleat Horseman (1607)* (Boston: 1975) 33.

³⁷ Morgan, *The Horse-Mans Honour* 65.

³⁸ Whether English soldiers were *actually* "lacking in endeavour", as Proctor puts it, is an unanswerable question.

the Great, by whose abilities tiny Macedonia “subdued the mightie Monarchie of the Persians”, and then of “the mightie and victorious Alexander of Englande, whose most renowned battaile of Agincourte, and su[n]dry triumphant conquestes in Fraunce, made the whole worlde to shake”.³⁹ Geohumoral writers like Lemnius always admit that climate that can sometimes be overcome by discipline. Northerners may be naturally stupid, he says, but King Eric of Sweden had through his own recent efforts, trained his countrymen to “more civil order” and had “adorned” their minds:⁴⁰

Education, institution and discipline, altereth the usuall nature, and ordinary conditions of every Region: for we see the common sorte and [begin page 188] multitude, in behavior and maners grosse and unnurtured whereas the Nobles and Gentlemen (altering theyr order and diet, and digressing from the comon fashion of their pezantly countrey men) frame themselves and theirs, to a verye commendable order, and civill behavior.⁴¹

Henry extends this process from himself to his men, primarily through his powerful public exhortations. In these he addresses himself constantly to the physical bodies of his subjects. “Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide”, he tells them, “Hold hard the breath and bend up every spirit / To his full height,” “Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood, / Disguise fair nature with hard-favour’d rage (3.1). In these terms the English victory over the French becomes a triumph of leadership over the unruly body. Given the insistence on climate throughout the play, that unruliness is not accidental or merely human. It is the English climate at work.

The discourse of early modern horsemanship had a remarkably similar answer to the particularly English question about what makes a Jade (or conversely what makes a good horse). As Michael Baret puts it, in his *Hipponomie or the Vineyard of Horsemanship*, “some have made Jades of them that have beene both very beautiful, and also as well bred as could be wished”.⁴² For him, Jades are made, not born. Appearance (things like color and conformation) and breeding are not determining. Rather, he thinks horse’s bodies always need refashioning through disciplined intervention. Good horsemen must have “the true facility of hand and body to helpe with the agility of their body the unaptnesse of the Horses body”.⁴³ Such arguments did not make questions about

³⁹ Proctor, *Knowledge and Conduct of Warres* iv.

⁴⁰ Lemnius, *Touchstone of Complexions* 16.

⁴¹ Lemnius, *Touchstone of Complexions* 18.

⁴² Baret Michael, *Hipponomie or the Vineyard of Horsemanship* (London, George Eld: 1618) 11.

⁴³ Baret Michael, *Hipponomie* 8.

the value “English horse” less urgent, but they did relocate the concerns from breeding to training. National character, in horses and perhaps in people, was sometimes a matter of will and judgment. Baret’s opinions were still in the minority, however. The debate over the source of breed characteristics is never fully resolved in the early modern period. Its resistance, and even its persistence testifies to the way that that intangible and often literary questions of national identity were constantly implicated in physiological discourse about human and animal breeds.

Bibliography

- ASHLEY Robert, *A Comparison of the English and Spanish nation: composed by a French gentleman* (London, John Wolfe: 1589).
- BARCLAY John, *The Mirror of Mindes, or Barclay's Icon Animorum* (London, I. Beale: 1631).
- BARET Michael, *Hipponomie or the Vineyard of Horsemanship* (London, George Eld: 1618).
- BODIN J., *The six bookes of a commonweale (1606)* (New York: 1979).
- BOEHRER B., "Shakespeare and the social devaluation of the horse" in RABER K., and TUCKER T., (eds.), *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline, and Identity in the Early Modern World* (New York: 2005) 91-112.
- CAIRNS D., and RICHARDS S., "What Ish My Nation?" in ASHCROFT B., GRIFFITHS G., and TIFFIN L., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London: 1995) 178-180.
- CAVENDISH William, *A new method, and extraordinary invention, to dress horses, and work them according to nature as also, to perfect nature by the subtilty of art, which was never found out* (London, Thomas Milbourn: 1667).
- COHEN D., "History and the Nation in *Richard II* and *Henry IV*", *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 42, 2 (2002) 293-315.
- EDWARDS P., *The horse trade of Tudor and Stuart England* (New York: 1988).
- FLOYD-WILSON M., "English Mettle" in KERN PASTER G. ROWE K. and FLOYD-WILSON M., *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (Philadelphia: 2004) 130-146.
- HOLDERNESS G., *Shakespeare Recycled: The Making of Historical Drama* (New York: 1992).
- HOWELL J., and EDWARD A., *Instructions for forreine travell : 1642 ; collated with the second edition of 1650* (London: 1869).
- KING G., "Natural and Political Observations and Conclusions upon the State & Condition of England (1696)" in *A reprint of economic tracts* (Baltimore: 1936) 12-56.

- LEMNIUS Levinus, *Touchstone of Complexions* (London, Elizabeth Allde: 1576).
- MARKHAM G., *The Compleat Horseman (1607)* (Boston: 1975).
- MASCALL Leonard. *The First Booke of Cattell* (London, John Wolfe: 1587).
- MORGAN Nicholas. *The Horse-Mans Honour, or, The Beautie of Horsemanship* (London, Helm and Marriott: 1620).
- NASH R., "Honest English Breed': The Thoroughbred as Cultural Metaphor" in Raber K., and Tucker T., (eds.), *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline, and Identity in the Early Modern World* (New York: 2005) 245-272.
- OVERTON M., *Agricultural Revolution in England: The Transformation of the Agrarian Economy 1500-1850* (Cambridge: 1996) 8-9.
- RABER K., "A Horse of a Different Color; Nation and Race in Early Modern Horsemanship Treatises" in RABER K., and TUCKER T., (eds.), *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline, and Identity in the Early Modern World* (New York: 2005) 225-244.
- PROCTOR T., *Of the knowledge and conducte of warres (1578)* (New York: 1970).
- TAYLOR E. G. R., *The mathematical practitioners of Tudor & Stuart England* (Cambridge: 1954).
- THIRSK J. (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales* (London: 1967).
- TOSI L., "A Map of Dis-Unity: Henry V and the Making of 'England'" in BASSI S., and CIMAROSTI, R. (eds.), *Paper bullets of the brain: experiments with Shakespeare* (New York: 2006) 145-166.
- VAUGHAN Rowland, and Davies John, *Most approued, and long experienced water-workes* (London, George Eld: 1610).
- WOMACK P., "Imagining Communities: Theatre and the English Nation in the Sixteenth Century" in AERS D. (ed.), *Culture and History, 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing* (New York: 1992) 91-146.

Index Nominum

Arber, Edward
Bodin, Jean
Cavendish, William (Duke of Newcastle)
Davies, John
Howell, James
King, Gregory
Lemnius, Levinus
Markham, Gervase
Mascall, Leonard
Morgan, Nicholas
Proctor, Thomas
Shakespeare, William
Vaughan, Rowland

This essay, published in 2011, appears courtesy of Brill Publishing..