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WOMEN AND HORSES: THREE CENTURIES OF PATRIARCHAL CONTROL IN  
BRITISH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE

By

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Thesis

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## Women and Horses: Three Centuries of Patriarchal Control in British and American Literature

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Both literary representations of horsewomen and critical responses to such characterizations have largely failed to expose the full complexity of the cultural constraints brought to bear on women's interactions with horses. In this thesis therefore I will argue that in response to feminist activity to dispel stereotypes of *any* group of women, the long development of strong, capable representations of women on horseback spanning the nineteenth through the early twenty-first century prove to be little more than repetitive archetypal images which serve to reaffirm patriarchal controls in western culture. If only threaded together by the ways the literary figure of the horsewoman has been marginalized or even misinterpreted through the centuries, feminist scholarship affords a powerful opportunity to revisit the issue of the horsewoman in novels. Uncovered as deceptive, the oddly plural understanding of the woman-and-horse relationship as sexualized and a basis for female empowerment falls to the more nuanced reading of the relationship as deeply patriarchal. While the patriarchal reading of women and horses offers little in the way of celebrating the success of feminist goals in today's world, this reading does reaffirm the need for continued research in feminist studies. The scholarly pursuit should aggressively seek out representations of women which do not conform to recurring images and types, and use these unique representations to inspire writers to create female characters that break from the expectations of patriarchal constraints and to encourage literary scholars to publish on atypical representations too. In all, the emblematic figure of a woman riding horseback—at breakneck speed, loose hair trailing behind in the wind—calls to mind the necessary future of feminist scholarship instead of the overused symbol of power and liberation.

## Contents

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Prologue / iv

Chapter 1 Introduction / 1

Chapter 2 19th Century Representations of Women on Horseback / 12

Chapter 3 Representations of Women and Horses in the 20th and 21st Centuries / 36

Epilogue / 56

Notes / 60

Works Cited / 63

## Prologue

### *“Horses Don’t Like Pink”*

My sister, Rachael, and I grew up around horses; there are pictures of us astride an old sorrel gelding named “Pablo” while we were in diapers, and we sat with our parents in the saddle to help move our grandparents’ cattle before we could handle a horse on our own. When we reached the age of four-years-old respectively, Dad started teaching us how to ride horseback independently. You see, Dad loves horses. In fact, his sister, our aunt, told our mother before she and Dad married that his first love was horses and that she would always have to compete with these animals for his affection. Mom smiles and laughs when she remembers this conversation with her sister-in-law because, instead of excluding her from this love, he bought her a horse and a saddle and taught how her to ride too. Dad is a generous and unselfish when it comes to horses, and he wanted his girls to grow up loving horses the way he does.

So Rachael and I learned to ride on Pablo and a Shetland Pony called “Swiss Miss.” Before we dressed in jeans and boots to ride, Dad always reminded us, “girls, horses don’t like pink.” If we were wearing pink shirts or accessories, we had to change out of them before we saddled up. When we asked Dad why horses didn’t like the color pink, his reply never varied: “horses are afraid of pink, like the way bulls hate red.” We learned later that horses don’t see color the same way humans do (horses have dichromatic vision which allows them to distinguish between blue and green variations, but variations of red appear green), so Dad’s reminder that horses don’t like pink makes little sense. Rachael and I suspected that Dad simply didn’t like the color himself and projected this dislike onto the horses so he wouldn’t have to look at it, but we were not

certain as to his actual motive. Unlike the other girls our age who were also learning to ride, we did not have pink cowgirl boots, pink saddle blankets, or pink halters with matching lead-ropes. All of our tack was “cowboy” colored: brown, green, or blue.

As we matured as riders, new horses came into our lives and we competed in riding events at the county fair. Rachael and I didn’t resemble the other competitors during riding events because our western apparel and our tack was muted compared to the flashy colors girls wore during competition. But Dad’s old saying “horses don’t like pink” was still in effect, since he was the one driving the horses and ourselves to practices and events. We looked like cowboys rather than hyper-feminine rodeo princesses.

Neither of us ever became superb riders, but we are confident around horses and in the saddle. While Dad didn’t instill in us his passion for the large, temperamental creatures, he managed to give us valuable gift during all these riding lessons nonetheless—he taught us to be self-assured, independent, and tough. And now, looking back, I think that Dad didn’t believe these characteristics could be developed with us wearing the traditional color for girls. The color conjures images of little girls as princesses and, by extension, pink represents gender roles for little girls and women, whereas the life lessons Dad taught us through horseback riding exceed socially dictated behaviors for women. Ultimately, for me, horseback riding is an act of empowerment and a way to demonstrate self-possession; however, not all female riders share this experience. Many women enact traditional female roles as competent horsewomen and this fact has become more apparent as a result of my scholarly pursuits at the University of Montana.

I arrived at the University of Montana in the fall of 2012 to begin my graduate studies from Long Beach, California where I'd been living with my mom's parents. Horses were not readily accessible in Southern California, so when I drove back through the Mountain West horses suddenly reemerged on the landscape and in my imagination. Not surprisingly, as those first seminar courses began, I noticed horses and horse culture in many literary texts. In *Scribbling Women*, a seminar about nineteenth century American women writers, I first picked up on the interactions between representations of women and horses in novels. I pursued this horse topic through a number of other classes including *Dickens, Contemporary Novel*, a nineteenth-century French literature independent study, and finally in an independent study entirely devoted to investigating the relationship between horses and women in nineteenth-century Britain. I noticed that the way these characters acted on horseback did not correspond with my own riding behaviors and experiences. These female characters were not self-possessed, empowered women. In these novels women riding horses only embellished sexual tension between men and women and reinforced a status quo for the sexes.

My thesis which follows is the final product of my quest to understand the conflict between my experience with horses and the experience women have with horses in Anglophone literature. The following chapters are an extended analysis of how horsewomen are represented in literary works from the nineteenth century into the early twenty-first century and how, perhaps, Dad may have been wrong; horses may in fact like pink in the sense that they support patriarchal gender roles in literature.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### I

#### *Centuries of Fictional Horsewomen*

Picture a woman riding horseback. With an image in mind, what adjectives describe the scene, the woman, and the horse? Strength, beauty, control, discipline, teamwork, mutual understanding, and love express a few of the most well-known, idealized qualities indicative of the association between women and horses. While the imagination paints an idealistic scene between women and horses (as demonstrated in the list of adjectives above), the relationship that women and horses maintain with one another is far more complex and, in reality, lacks the empowered position for women it suggests. Here, a woman's power stems from her manipulation of the voyeuristic gaze of males on her body; the position of her body on horseback enhances the number of individuals who may see her at an elevated position—the horse acts a pedestal or another method of display. Thus, while horsewomen seem to exercise a degree of power and agency from the back of a creature much larger and stronger than themselves, the representation actually evidences that horsewomen conform to heteronormative behaviors which support the larger architecture of patriarchal society.

In fact, the image of a woman on horseback does not vary beyond the conceptualization of a “Lady Godiva,” a figure symbolizing the very connection between a woman's sexualized appearance and her ability to exert power and control over individuals participating in a patriarchal society. According to the 11th century Anglo-Saxon legend, Lady Godiva rode through English streets, naked, in protest of her

husband's unfair taxation of his tenants. In representations of Lady Godiva, her sexuality and power are entwined. While women on horseback exude a kind of strength and power other women in western society do not appear to possess, they ultimately function like other women within the well-defined parameters of patriarchal society. Horseback riding motivates and frequently inspires romantic relationships between men and women in works of cultural production which in turn lead to traditional marriages that perpetuate the status quo. The illusion of empowerment that horseback riding lends to women ironically illustrates deep-seated patriarchal values embedded into the act of horseback riding rather than opportunities to exercise an agency all their own as representations and images of women on horseback exemplify.

Images and representations of women on horseback present a conflicted message about the status of women in western society and this tradition has long-standing roots. The legend of Lady Godiva from the 11th century is an early example of the circumvented power women hold on horseback but the presence of control at the expense of the body remains a constant theme in the history of women riding horses. Queen Boudicca of the Iceni in the first century is rumored to have led troops to battle against the Romans naked except for the torc worn around her neck. This rumor evidences the explicit connection between horseback riding and the male voyeuristic gaze that perpetuates patriarchal control. In subsequent centuries, Chaucer's character the Lady of Bath demonstrates the female body-control paradox via elaborate descriptions of her travel and riding wardrobe. And the pattern continues into the three most recent centuries as well. Although scholarship regarding women and horses argues that feminism (advocating for women's rights) and the replacement of equine transportation in favor of

motorized forms altered the ways women are represented on horseback, I find that nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century representations of women and horses hold true to their patriarchal origins.<sup>1</sup> A nostalgia for representations of horses in cultural productions occurs in modern times filled with self-propelled transportation, so the horse continues as a prevalent image in many works of cultural production. Literary figures of horsewomen do not simply disappear after the nineteenth century and re-emerge unexpectedly in arbitrary spaces and times, but rather there are commonalities and features which unify the history of this relatively understudied representation. Both literary representations of horsewomen and critical responses to such characterizations have largely failed to expose the full complexity of the cultural constraints brought to bear on women's interactions with horses. In this thesis therefore I will argue that in response to feminist activity to dispel stereotypes of *any* group of women, the long development of strong, capable representations of women on horseback spanning the nineteenth through the early twenty-first century prove to be little more than repetitive archetypal images which serve to reaffirm patriarchal controls in western culture.

If only threaded together by the ways the literary figure of the horsewoman has been marginalized or even misinterpreted through the centuries, feminist scholarship affords a powerful opportunity to revisit the issue of the horsewoman in novels. Uncovered as deceptive, the oddly plural understanding of the woman-and-horse relationship as sexualized and a basis for female empowerment falls to the more nuanced reading of the relationship as deeply patriarchal. While the patriarchal reading of women and horses offers little in the way of celebrating the success of feminist goals in today's world, this reading does reaffirm the need for continued research in feminist studies. The

scholarly pursuit should aggressively seek out representations of women which do not conform to recurring images and types, and use these unique representations to inspire writers to create female characters that break from the expectations of patriarchal constraints and to encourage literary scholars to publish on atypical representations too. In all, the emblematic figure of a woman riding horseback—at breakneck speed, loose hair trailing behind in the wind—calls to mind the necessary future of feminist scholarship instead of the overused symbol of power and liberation.

## II

### *Feminism and Women on Horseback*

At present, in a number of western countries, women have the same legal status as men and may just as easily operate and procure different modes of transportation, if desired; however, a strange representation remains prevalent in western culture concerning an early kind of travel and leisure: women and horses. This nostalgia for representations of women riding horses in the twenty-first century appears almost as a result of the popularity and accessibility of the bicycle for women of various socioeconomic positions of the previous “long twentieth-century.” The ability to act as an independent entity (recognized by law) and to move about freely were key aspects of early feminism, and the bicycle near the end of the nineteenth century encouraged the development of women’s transportation and freedom of motion on the way to civic empowerment (Wintle 66). Horseback riding does not bear the same distinction of being associated with the feminist movement at any point in time, and for excellent reasons. Compared to the weight (in excess of half a ton) of a horse, not to mention the animal’s strength next to that of a human, a bicycle is lightweight and easy to maneuver.

Additionally, bicycles lack the sudden, unpredictable movements of a grassland animal naturally preyed upon. With these distinctions between horses and bicycles in mind, the natural affinity between the first wave of feminism, seeking to empower women civically, and the movement of women riding bicycles isn't a surprise. Yet, by comparison, the appearance of female characters riding horseback in fiction of the twenty-first century appears outdated and, potentially, out of place as a result of the historic distance between the activity and bicycle riding promoted by the early feminist movement.

For centuries, the distance between horseback riding and feminism does not ignore the fact that traditionally women have had access to horses in western European and American culture, and have used them for travel in a similar manner to that of men (Birke and Brandt 190). Horseback riding for men and women continues to be a popular activity, although a restrictive one in terms of cost. Moreover, in a 2012 article, independent scholar Richard Almond found representations of women riding pillion or sidesaddle (typically uncomfortable modes of riding) in visual art balanced by representations of women riding astride during hunts, especially in Medieval and Renaissance painting (39).<sup>2</sup> Almond qualifies his argument stating that only aristocratic ladies had the ability to choose how they rode horses: “the message is clear,” he writes, “women of rank and status were using both methods [of riding] for hunting” (Almond 39). The issue becomes further complicated when the fad for women's riding in the late Victorian period is examined. Increasingly large numbers of women took up horseback riding in the late nineteenth-century for exercise (Munkwitz 74). So, despite establishing a strong precedent for women riding horses, evidence, presented here, supporting the

wide range of equestrian activities available to women over the centuries fails to recognize that the horses women would ride were not also trained by their female riders. The issue of horses not trained by the women who would ride them unearths deep-seated inequalities and debilitating social controls within western culture which I will demonstrate in the next chapters on nineteenth and twenty-first century equestrienne protagonists respectively.

Typically believed to be a dangerous undertaking, horse breaking and training became the work of males in western culture. While women could ride all forms of well-trained or slow-moving donkeys, mules, and horses, known as palfreys, men trained young, spirited animals to be traded as commodities or ridden for sport. Women interacted irregularly, if at all, during a horse's formative training. And even after a woman received a horse to ride, the horse became an addition to the father or husband's stable. If the household were part of the upper-echelon of society, grooms were employed to care for and prepare the horse for a lady's ride otherwise male members of the family saddled and cared for the horses. Thus, missing references to women caring for and keeping horses in novels lead to female characters who interact with horses in an over stylized and socially dictated manner—not in the independent manner readers expect when confronted with passages of women riding horseback. These stylized interactions do follow a consistent pattern, or archetype. The archetype emerges from the elision of labor surrounding horses in fiction because women on horseback devote time to a single, major function rather than to care for horses: in nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century novels, ensnaring males is the priority for horsewomen. Because of the great amount of time spent ensnaring men, the major function of literary representations of

women on horseback throughout the centuries appears as an archetypal figure which I call the “patriarchal equestrienne.”

The patriarchal equestrienne performs the following characteristics and traits. Patriarchal equestriennes are horsewomen to some degree; it is possible for them to be either experts in the activity or relatively new to the elevated and fast-paced position on the back of a horse. The expertise of the rider is of lesser concern to the definition of the archetypal figure because the ultimate function of patriarchal equestriennes is the pursuit and capture of a fiancé or a husband. Thus, the texts which feature patriarchal equestriennes focus largely on male-female relationships that are begun or sustained while horseback riding. Within the novels in question, the patriarchal equestrienne conforms to social norms, generally within the strictures of matrimony. In nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century novels the horsewoman becomes domesticated, her power and potential to disturb coopted by patriarchal control.

In order to clarify the motives behind archetypal representations of women in literature inspired by biological differences between males and females, a methodical study must be performed. Feminism provides the opportunity to study how cultural ideologies create expectations and archetypes for human males and females. The patriarchal equestrienne archetype lends itself to feminist scholarship and theory for critique, particularly to a hybrid form of second and third-wave feminism which I will employ throughout this thesis. In review, there are three waves of feminism. The first wave sought to establish civil rights for women during the early twentieth-century. Second-wave feminism in the mid twentieth-century worked to make the connection between cultural practices and political power clear, while unifying women under a

common standard of “womanhood.” Third-wave resists the second-wave feminist tendency to undervalue the individual experience of women. By a hybrid form of second and third-wave feminism, I mean that I track a pattern of behavior demonstrated throughout a number of texts (the patriarchal equestrienne) in order to undermine the validity of the accepted truth of the behavioral pattern presented as an archetype.

The archetype, such as the patriarchal equestrienne I present, exists because of repeating images and stereotypes of a group of women. Third-wave feminism and feminist scholarship resists repeating images of women because “at best, the biological body is seen as something which can be experienced differently by different individuals” (Birke 29). Along the same lines, Judith Butler writes that gender and identity are performative, but in the sense that humans create the gender experience through the body—the body may be developed and “done.” Butler writes, “By dramatic I mean only that the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant *materializing* of possibilities. One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one’s body and, indeed, one does one’s body differently from one’s contemporaries and from one’s embodied predecessors and successors as well” (521). Here, Butler observes that bodies greatly differ between individuals; however, the archetypal, repetitive ways bodies, particularly the bodies of horsewomen, are represented in novels do not meet the scholarly expectation that each individual possesses a unique set of characteristics with which to interact with horses. Birke and Butler's current scholarship helps critique nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century novels featuring horsewomen. Understanding the goals of third-wave feminism through scholars like Birke and Butler, I’m able to demonstrate how representations of women and horses may simply be

reduced to recurring archetypal images, such as the patriarchal equestrienne, especially as they enact gender norms typical of the century in which they arise.

Third-wave feminism exposes the redundancy of the experience of these horsewomen and leads me to question why their experiences are so similar across a number of centuries. My answer to that question, expounded upon in the following chapters, is that the patriarchal equestrienne archetype reveals rigorous, overlooked societal constraints in representations of women on horseback. In order to describe how these societal constraints operate, I follow the patriarchal equestrienne archetype through a sampling of nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century novels.

### III

With this scholarship in mind, Chapter Two will analyze a sampling of nineteenth century novels featuring women on horseback, using the archetype of the patriarchal equestrienne and the resistance of third wave feminism to expose the operations of a biased society upon a set of seemingly strong female characters. The sampling of novels includes *Mansfield Park*, *Rob Roy*, *Vixen*, *Middlemarch*, and *Kate Coventry*.<sup>3</sup> In addition to these texts, I use Gina M. Dorré's book *Victorian Fiction and the Cult of the Horse* to historicize the sexual politics operating via women and horses. Dorré performs an extended investigation into the social controls imposed up horseback riding activities of the nineteenth century—before the advent of alternative modes of transportations. These nineteenth century works feature horsewomen protagonists largely focused on finding eligible men to marry. The position of a woman on horseback allows advantageous opportunities to demonstrate her suitability for marriage, especially in displaying her body in addition to a disciplined mind.

In the third and final chapter, I refer to a foundational essay on twentieth-century representations of horsewomen and give an analysis of the two twenty-first century novels, *Cloud Atlas* and *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. In the first section of the chapter, I review and discuss “Seizing the Reins” by Gail Cunningham a text which provides an overview of texts featuring horsewomen in the twentieth century but fails to elaborate the subtle patriarchal undertones present in the books she calls empowering to women. I revisit the books she gives as evidence to demonstrate the continuation of the patriarchal equestrienne archetype and the presence of patriarchal constraints that Cunningham ignores. In the second section on twenty-first century literature, I analyze *Cloud Atlas* and *A Visit from the Goon Squad* for examples of stereotypical representations of women and horses. The representations are stereotypical because the novels do not reference the obvious fact that both horses and riders must be trained; the representations portray perfectly trained, independent, and capable horsewomen without establishing how these women became competent riders. The hard work and discipline required to ride is never described in its entirety to evidence why horsewomen are more empowered or capable than other women. While the twenty-first century has yet to establish any definite patterns in its literature, I find that the patriarchal equestrienne archetype establishes an early trend in the new millennium. The trend emerges early because of the carryover of the archetype from the previous two centuries. *Cloud Atlas* and *A Visit from the Goon Squad* are not the only examples of twenty-first century novels to present horsewomen figures, but they are two texts which have received accolades and attention.<sup>3</sup> Relying heavily upon a hybrid form of second and third-wave feminist scholarship to read the horsewomen figures in these recent novels as limiting archetypal figures, I assert that the

feminist project to dispel female stereotypes fails to operate in these contemporary works.

## Chapter Two

### 19th Century Representations of Women on Horseback

The figure of the expert horsewoman is frequently invoked in Victorian fiction as a way to express, examine, and attempt to resolve the contradictions written into women's domestic roles and wrought by the Woman Question. Equestrian skills in women were a compelling sign of class standing, and those who could ride well were certainly admired. As is the case for Gwendolen Harleth in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* [1876], a woman's talent on horseback indicates her high property value, determines her suitability for a rich marriage, and accentuates, according to the designations of her culture, her best points, for in the words of her uncle, Mr. Gascoigne, "a fine woman never looks better than on horseback." (77)

—Gina M. Dorré, *Victorian Fiction and the Cult of the Horse*

#### I

#### *Introduction*

In the excerpt above, Gina Dorré suggests that the figure of a horsewoman presents a space for examining cultural institutions. She discusses the contradictions inscribed into women's domestic roles of the nineteenth-century wherein a horsewoman must, at once, adapt to the domestic sphere of the home while negotiating a public image, under much scrutiny, on horseback; this paradox of the horsewoman's public and private roles informs the concept of the "horsey heroine," which Dorré coins as a label for female protagonists riding horses. While the "horsey heroine" label establishes a positive female role-model for readers, the label ultimately fails to recognize additional cultural constraints upon the characters—namely the presence of patriarchy embedded within the practice of horseback riding.

In nineteenth century British society women were considered the property of men and the equestrienne protagonist was no exception; horseback riding suffers the same

patriarchal controls. In the passage above, Dorré alludes to the value of a woman, especially a fine horsewoman, in British culture, but fails to explain the cultural system according to which women hold value. If a woman's talent on a horse displays a high property value and suitability for marriage, as Dorré asserts, what is the underlying political and economic structure that assigns and determines the value of women? Women hold no inherent value, so who assigns and determines the value placed on women's bodies?

Gayle Rubin's essay "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy of Sex" addresses the value and the determination of value of women's bodies, and characterizes the patriarchal system in which horsewomen hold value. Rubin asserts:

At the most general level, the social organization of sex rests upon gender, obligatory heterosexuality, and the constraint of female sexuality. Gender is a socially imposed division of the sexes. It is a product of the social relation of sexuality. Kinship systems rest upon marriage. They therefore transform males and females into "men" and "women," each an incomplete half which can only find wholeness when united with the other. (179)

Regarding the suitability and desirability of women for the institution of marriage, the ideological system in which individuals ascribe value to others, particularly horsewomen merits further investigation.

Horsewomen characters in nineteenth-century British novels ride primarily to promote male-female unions. As a result, the bodies of these women and the horses they ride serve as objects to attract men and invite appraisal regarding the value of a woman

and her body, as Dorré argues; however, women and women's bodies hold value in the first place because of the kinship system of marriage Rubin exposes. Fathers promote daughters, displaying them in becoming activities or situations which will ultimately cause a young man to become a son-in-law. Marrying, or gifting, a daughter to an eligible and prosperous man guarantees a stable and secure future for the father's family as well as his son-in-law's family. Calling upon Lévi-Strauss, Rubin convincingly argues, "The result of a gift of women is more profound than the result of other fit transactions, because the relationship thus established is not just one of reciprocity, but of kinship. The exchange partners have become affines, and their descendants will be related by blood: 'Two people may meet in friendship and exchange gifts and yet quarrel and fight in later times, but intermarriage connects them in a permanent manner'" (173). But when Dorré writes of a woman's "gender status as mere property in marriage and insinuates the threat of violence within the domestic sphere," she uses Rubin's earlier assertions without sufficiently articulating the property and violence Rubin describes (78). Bringing Rubin into Dorré's argument allows another interpretation of women on horseback that challenges Dorré's blanket understanding of equestrian protagonists.

Representations of women on horseback are particularly rich throughout many nineteenth-century British novels.<sup>4</sup> Instances include not only women riding ponies and palfries, but also clearly defined moments which demonstrate that a nineteenth-century lady's interest in riding, or even having a horse, is brought about by a father, father-figure, or suitor. In these moments found in various novels, the dominant patriarchal discourse shapes the behavior of the horse-involved female protagonists. As talented on horseback as these female characters may be and as independent as they may seem,

Dorré's framework of the equestrian protagonist does help to explain that "the horse woman must be managed, tamed, or even broken in cultural discourse as well as in the fiction" (79). Dorré explains the duality of the horsewomen in literature as seemingly free but ultimately upholding rigorous social controls, while Rubin's work overlaid with Dorré's demonstrates the full extent of the patriarchal controls; thus, at the intersection of Rubin and Dorré's work we identify the fundamental connection between horsewomen and patriarchal society.

Using Rubin's explanation of kinship and marriage to contextualize Dorré's framework, I find, as evidenced in a number of representative nineteenth-century British novels, that horsewomen characters ride because males encourage riding and other activities to promote male-female unions which produce legitimate heirs to inherit a father's property. Therefore, horseback riding is not primarily an act of female agency. Rather, women characters on horseback are subject to rigorous social controls written into the etiquette of the activity which exercise power over women and their bodies. The most striking example of male control over horsewomen is the pattern of male characters fostering the first love of horses and riding in the female protagonists. In the next section, I will further analyze these patriarchal controls expressed through horseback riding and provide support to the argument that the horsewomen presented in the novels *Mansfield Park*, *Rob Roy*, *Vixen*, *Middlemarch*, and *Kate Coventry* cannot be understood simply by means of the "horsey heroine" trope by which Dorré explains the repeated image of women on horseback in nineteenth century fiction. Another figure must offer a more complete understanding of nineteenth century horsewomen.

Using Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy of Sex" alongside of Gina M. Dorré's *Victorian Fiction and the Cult of the Horse*, I find that shortcomings of the "horsey heroine" trope emerge and give way to the patriarchal equestrienne archetype that I have identified. The archetype of the patriarchal equestrienne helps to explain the paradoxical representations of nineteenth century horsewomen. As discussed previously, the patriarchal equestrienne comes packaged with the contradictions of power, sex, and subjugation to patriarchal controls built into its repertoire; therefore, I read the following nineteenth century protagonists as patriarchal equestriennes, at once giving the illusion of power and agency while supporting the aims of patriarchal society. Understanding how the roles women enact on horseback uphold dominant patriarchal agendas shows that the label "horsey heroine" no longer satisfactorily explains the actions of protagonists like Violet "Vixen" Tempest, Dorothea Brooke, Kate Coventry, Diana Vernon, and Fanny Price. In one sense, the characters are heroines in that they are the main protagonists and the plots hinge on their participation in their respective novels; however, these protagonists do not perform feats of courage or fortitude that challenge patriarchy or establish an agency for themselves which would define them in the stronger sense of "heroine." Thus, instead of enacting the "horsey heroine," as Dorré characterizes her, these protagonists enact a role of a patriarchal equestrienne.

## II

### *Patriarchal Equestriennes*

Therefore, while a woman's prowess on horseback often communicates her class privilege and validates her right to reign, so to speak, it also emphasizes and provides a critique of her gender status as mere property in marriage and

insinuates the threat of violence within the domestic sphere.  
(78)

—Gina M. Dorré, *Victorian Fiction and the Cult of the Horse*

An early example of the patriarchal equestrienne I propose occurs in Jane Austen's 1814 novel, *Mansfield Park*, in which Fanny Price leaves her family at a young age to live with her wealthy, gentrified aunt and uncle at their estate, Mansfield Park. Hoping to improve her social status via the connections of her wealthy relatives, Fanny has access to activities and opportunities her many siblings do not. Besides an informal lady's education, Fanny receives encouragement from her uncle and male cousin, Edmond, to ride horseback. In order to attract a husband, Fanny must participate in social activities where her body may be admired; horseback riding, here, serves that purpose for the patriarchal equestrienne.

Compared to her two robust and active female cousins, the protagonist is cautious and weak. But Fanny also possesses an unexpected reserve of steadfastness and resolve. Mary Chan writes that in Fanny's character, "what is one day considered obstinacy is considered constancy the next" (7). Fanny has the ability to remain unfailingly true to objectives of her own. In order to strengthen her body exercise on horseback, therefore, becomes an activity for Fanny to promote her health and well-being—the young woman's health being an indication of eligibility and value in marriage, particularly of her reproductive ability. Hesitant, at first, about horses and riding, Fanny quickly discovers an enjoyment in the activity, particularly because it is a way for her to spend time with her cousin, Edmund, the man she adores.

Fanny enacts the patriarchal equestrienne role because she dedicates her existence to captivating her cousin's attention and offer of marriage. Fanny spends time riding horses in order to be with her beloved cousin and future husband, rather than competing alongside of him and other men during hunts and community riding activities. Horses play a critical role in the operations of patriarchal equestrienne no matter if they are ridden in small or large groups. Riding with large groups of men, accompanied by a father or father-figure, to attract a suitor will become the norm for patriarchal equestriennes as the century progresses. Whether or not patriarchal equestriennes are portrayed as strong, robust figures or milder ones, a paradox emerges regarding the level of agency the archetype possesses. Patriarchal equestriennes appear to have power and agency because of their elevated position on horseback and their control over a large animal; in reality, this figure will eventually support the agenda of a gender-biased society. The protagonist, Fanny, conforms to this description of the patriarchal equestrienne. Fanny takes up riding at the insistence of her uncle and cousin. Despite an initial fear of horses and generally of horseback riding, she accedes entirely to what she considers to be the better judgment of her uncle and cousin rather than relying on her own. Recalling her first inhibitions against riding, Fanny describes her trepidation:

Very true. Yes, dear old grey pony! Ah! cousin, when I remember how much I used to dread riding, what terrors it gave me to hear it talked of as likely to do me good (oh! how I have trembled at my uncle's opening his lips if horses were talked of), and then think of the kind pains you took to reason and persuade me out of my fears, and convince me that I should like it after a little

while, and feel how right you proved to be, I am inclined to hope you may always prophesy as well. (Austen 31)

Her fear is in fact dread of the activity; she trembled at the mere discussion of horses. Yet Fanny abandons her reasonable fear of horses at the request of her cousin, which she refers to as “pains” and “persuasion.” Although Fanny’s terror of horses likely refers to the fact the large creatures weigh in excess of a thousand pounds and have nervous dispositions, she eventually admits that she enjoys horseback riding and praises Edmund’s judgment in the matter. She openly privileges his authority about what she will like and appreciate, citing his ability to “prophesy.” The way Fanny speaks of Edmund’s ability to prophesize is particularly important in the larger context of the novel because her unfaltering love and esteem for her cousin eventually leads to his marriage proposal. She loves Edmund and works tirelessly to win his affection—a nod to the resolve Mary Chan identifies in her article “Mansfield Park as Greenhouse: ‘The Effect of Education’ in Mansfield Park.” Fanny’s willingness to accede to Edmund’s opinions and wishes regarding horseback riding and the health benefits the activity provides predisposes, or even conditions, Edmund to think of Fanny as marriageable material although they are first cousins and have been raised to consider one another as brother and sister.

Further into the passage, Fanny clearly demonstrates sycophancy towards her cousin. She insists how “right” Edmund proves to be in his assessment of horseback riding as a necessary activity for the young woman’s health. Fanny plays upon Edmund’s sense of responsibility for her and praises his judgment shamelessly towards an objective of her own: securing a commitment of love from the serious young man. As with horseback riding, Fanny uses reading to monopolize Edmund’s attention. According to

the narrative voice in *Mansfield Park*, “he [Edmund] made reading useful by talking to her of what she read, and heightened its attraction by judicious praise. In return for such services she loved him better than anybody in the world except William: her heart was divided between the two” (26). She revels in the particular attention he gives her asking about which books she reads. In this way, Fanny makes her cousin feel important and useful—a tactic she works into a love connection later in the novel. While the love Fanny has for her cousin is equated to that love for her brother, William, marriage between cousins in the nineteenth century was a common practice. Thus, early in the novel, Austen foreshadows Fanny’s pursuit of Edmund and their marriage. Inevitably, the patriarchal equestrienne gets her man.

Behind this horsewoman are the males of her family manipulating and shaping her opinions regarding an activity she believes to be dangerous and intimidating. With time and coaxing, however, Fanny becomes a willing participant on horseback. Her participatory status, however, comes at a cost: becoming a horsewoman reduces her individual agency within the confines of the text. All of Fanny’s personal preferences are those which she esteems in her cousin and soon-to-be husband. When Edmund reflects on Fanny’s suitability for marriage, he notes, “there was nothing on the side of prudence to stop him or make his progress slow; no doubts of her deserving, no fears of opposition of taste, no need of drawing new hopes of happiness from dissimilarity of temper. Her mind, disposition, opinions, and habits wanted no half-concealment, no self-deception on the present, no reliance on future improvement” (495). When Edmund says that his cousin needs no future improvement in regards to her behavior, he means that her mind, disposition, opinions, and habits are like his own; his bride holds no opinion or individual

perspective which belong only to herself. Thus, in order to “seduce” her cousin, Fanny adopts all of the qualities Edmund admires as well as participates in the activities he esteems, namely an agreeable temperament and an interest in horseback riding respectively.

Another version of the patriarchal equestrienne on horseback appears in Walter Scott’s 1817 novel *Rob Roy* in the form of Diana Vernon, who is not the exclusive protagonist of the novel but maintains an important role nevertheless. In fact, her first appearance is one of the most memorable descriptions of a woman riding horseback. In the passage quoted below, Diana races a difficult steed over challenging terrain while her long, dark hair billows wildly behind her. As far as the reader’s expectation goes for what a woman should look like as she rides, Diana Vernon’s introduction does not disappoint. The novel’s young narrator, Frank Osbaldistone, introduces the patriarchal equestrienne figure through the memory of his first encounter with this exemplary horsewoman:

A vision that passed me interrupted these reflections. It was a young lady, the loveliness of whose very striking features was enhanced by the animation of the chase and the glow of the exercise, mounted on a beautiful horse, jet black unless where he was flecked by spots of the snow-white foam which embossed his bridle. She wore, what was then somewhat unusual, a coat, vest, and hat, resembling those of a man, which fashion has since called a riding-habit. The mode had been introduced while I was in France, and was perfectly new to me. Her long black hair streamed on the breeze, having in the hurry of the chase escaped from the ribbon which bound it. Some very broken ground, through which she

guided her horse with the most admirable address and presence of mind retarded her course, and brought her closer to me than any of the other riders had passed. I had therefore, a full view of her uncommonly fine face and person, to which an inexpressible charm was added by the wild gaiety of the scene, and the romance of her singular dress and unexpected appearance. As she passed me, her horse made, in his impetuosity, an irregular movement, just while, coming once more upon open ground, she was again putting him to his speed. It served as an apology for me to ride close up to her, as if to her assistance. There was, however, no cause for alarm; it was not a stumble, nor a false step; and, if it had, the fair Amazon had too much self-possession to have been deranged by it.<sup>5</sup> (Scott 35-36)

With her long, flowing hair, riding habit, and Amazon-like presence, Diana's introduction in *Rob Roy* strikes a seemingly powerful chord for representations of independent, capable horsewomen.<sup>6</sup> She appears entirely able to command the difficult horse beneath her as well as herself. And rather than feeling intimidated by this woman, the young man looks for any opportunity to speak with this fine "vision" he comes across in the woods. The impetuous horse's misstep affords him the opportunity to inquire if she is in need of assistance, although the text explicitly states Diana possessed too much self-control and ability as a horsewoman to be in want of the narrator's help. Diana commands attention and respect not only in regards to her beauty (discussed at length in the beginning of the passage as "the loveliness of whose very striking features was enhanced by the animation of the chase and the glow of the exercise"), but for her strong, independence on horseback which Frank Osbaldistone highlights here. Unlike timid

Fanny of *Mansfield Park*, Diana Vernon seems to be a genuinely empowered woman who rides horseback to demonstrate her poise and control. Yet, these elements also support another interpretation of the heroine: Diana as a patriarchal equestrienne. Her first appearance in the novel establishes her physical appearance as an attractive one to men. Her exhilarating entrance on horseback foreshadows the romantic intrigue between the narrator and this woman to follow.

Sarah Wintle writes of Frank and Diana's first encounter: "Diana Vernon leaps her horse over a five-bar gate straight into the narrator's heart" (67). Wintle's description of the secondary protagonist leaping "straight into the narrator's heart" helps us to understand the power Diana wields over the narrator. Frank's love-at-first-sight makes him weak and susceptible to any of the horsewoman's desires of him. Yet, the power the narrator claims Diana holds over him proves to be an illusion because she acts first and foremost to support the men in her life. As events in the novel unfold, Diana, though confident and nearly fearless, nevertheless acts primarily to please her father. She succumbs to the greater designs of patriarchal society, therein demonstrating the patriarchal aspect of the patriarchal equestrienne.

The horsewoman's father, Frederick Vernon, who is also the mysterious figure Father Vaughan, surreptitiously supervises Diana's actions throughout the text, at once as the ghost of Osbaldistone Hall and as a visiting Catholic priest. Although in hiding Frederick must be entirely aware of his daughter's hoydenish behavior because he hears of Diana's frequent rides with her male cousins and her participation in various sporting events known throughout the region. Her determination to ride and to do as she pleases really serves to protect her father from discovery. Diana's participation in extreme

activities on horseback, considered dangerous and unladylike, throws off suspicion that her father remains near his daughter. Suspicion disappears as a result of the horsewoman's behavior because men with daughters held a vested interest in maintaining reputations of their daughter's conformity to the feminine ideals of the time, including passivity, submissiveness, and even non-physicality. Therefore Diana probably would not have been allowed such freedom on horseback if extenuating circumstances had not promoted her wild riding behavior as a decoy. An expert horsewoman like Diana would in fact have been chastised in light of the extent of her accomplishment because, as Dorré writes generally in regards to very confident horsewomen, her expert horsemanship would have decreased her cultural capital and suitability in marriage in a more urban setting (78).

While her behavior appears to detract from her cultural value in marriage as well as her acceptance of the patriarchal tradition, Diana's total dedication to her father supports a different interpretation altogether. Her devotion to her father supports patriarchal control, and she will do everything in her power to prevent others in the novel from interfering with her obedience to him. She even goes as far as to rebuke the narrator, Francis, for intervening in her affairs: "But my dear Mr. Francis, be patient and quiet, and let me take my own way; for when I take the bit between my teeth, there is no bridle will stop me" (Scott 60). In addition to the explicit use of horseback riding equipment to argue that her actions will not be restricted (inviting the comparison between Diana and a spirited horse), she uses this bold assertion to preserve her father's clandestine presence at the manor. Diana's actions protect her father, but those actions work to preserve his authority over her as well.

As later events continue to show, Diana dedicates her life to her father. Besides helping to harbor him in the library of Osbaldistone Hall, she rides with him and a small group of men in pursuit of the notorious and thieving cousin Rashleigh. Frederick praises her for her constancy: “ My daughter accompanied me through the perils and fatigues of a march so long and difficult.” In response to this praise Diana asserts that “she will never leave her dear father!” (366). Out of gratitude of his daughter’s faithful service, Frederick Vernon decides the best marriage for Diana is to God: ““she is a worthy offering to that God, to whom,’ crossing himself, ‘I shall dedicate her, as all that is left dear or precious to Frederick Vernon”” (367). Although Diana manages complicated secret affairs with apparent ease, her father reserves ultimate control over whom she will marry, and she defers to his judgment. Once again, we see that this iconic horsewoman upholds the expectations and traditions of patriarchal society. Diana plays a large role as one of *Rob Roy*’s protagonists, but her courageous efforts serve her father and his wishes. She does not exert a will entirely her own; the patriarchal equestrienne archetype takes over Diana’s character with the traits of danger and allure only to support male hegemony.

Next, in G.J. Whyte-Melville’s *Kate Coventry: An Autobiography* (1856), the protagonist, Kate, as a child, receives a rocking horse from her grandfather:

[P]oor grandfather said to me in his funny way, "Kate, you romp, we must get you a rocking-horse." Aunt Deborah lifted up her hands and eyes in holy horror and deprecation. "A rocking-horse, Mr. Coventry," said she; "what an injudicious selection! (Aunt Deborah likes to round her periods, as the book-people say.) The child is a sad tomboy already, and if you are

going to teach her to ride, I won't answer for the consequences in after-life, when the habits of our youth have become the second nature of our maturity." (10)

The rocking horse foreshadows the arrival of the actual saddle horse to follow, and so Kate's grandfather inspires the young girl's love of horseback riding. Although an orphan, Kate lives with her Aunt Deborah and Cousin John, and her grandfather's gift of the rocking horse signifies patriarchal involvement in lieu of the girl's father. In addition to the gift of the first horse in this excerpt, this scene evidences domestic tension regarding horseback riding as well. Aunt Deborah fears a passion for horseback riding will compromise her niece's marriageability, but she frames this fear as concern for Kate's soul in the after-life—a harsh critique, to be sure. Deborah refers to Kate's love of horses as a “tomboy” pursuit. Tomboys are females who partake in activities generally associated with males and masculinity. If Kate enjoys the same activities as men the fear is that potential suitors will fail to consider her as an eligible bride; they will view her instead as a peer and unfit helpmate.

Aunt Deborah's fear regarding Kate's marriage prospects, at least, remains unfounded at the end of the novel despite her niece's tomboy fondness for horses. In fact, the patriarchal equestrienne archetype helps to explain why, despite bearing the tomboy description, Kate succeeds in capturing the attention of men and securing a marriage commitment. The tomboy characteristics Kate demonstrates while horseback riding establish a shared interest between herself and the opposite sex in addition to an approachable demeanor. Kate is not distant or removed as other women prove to be in the novel, so she comes into contact and acquaints a number of eligible men. Rather than a

hindrance to Kate's marriageability, the tomboy nature, indicative to the patriarchal equestrienne in this instance, promotes the male-female union Aunt Deborah wants desperately for her niece.

As Whyte-Melville brings the novel to a close, readers are aware the protagonist, Kate, eagerly awaits an imminent marriage to her cousin, John:

I have such a charming trousseau, though I am ashamed to say I take very little pleasure in looking at it. But kind, thoughtful Cousin John has presented Brilliant with an entirely new set of clothing; and I think my horse seems almost more delighted with his finery than his mistress is with hers. My Cousin and I ride together every day. Dear me, how delightful it is to think that I shall always be as happy as I am now! (Whyte-Melville 224)

"Brilliant" is the name of Kate's marvelous horse, which, curiously, receives a trousseau to match that of the rider. The rider, and her horse according to the text, are pleased with the corresponding trousseaux; they admire the beauty of the finery as well as anticipate the impending marriage. Traditionally, trousseaux contain clothing, household goods, and other personal belongings intended for marriage, but Kate's trousseau is unique in the fact that it contains pieces of riding equipment for her beloved horse. Here, the new trousseau finery for both Kate and Brilliant express the inextricable connection between riding for upper-class women and marriage, and the patriarchal equestrienne archetype facilitates that connection. The gift of the rocking horse as the first scene and the final scene of Kate and her riding horse admiring trousseau items frame the novel well in terms of male family members providing horses and teaching women to ride as a function

of kinship, marriage, and new kinship relations. Using this frame, Whyte-Melville establishes a key component of horseback riding in the nineteenth-century: women on horseback function primarily as mechanisms in the greater patriarchal structure.

What is more, the determined narrator, Kate, recognizes and clearly articulates the extent of the patriarchal controls over women on horseback as she functions, successfully, within them:

But it's quite different with men. They give in to us about everything if we only insist—and it's our own fault if we don't insist; for, of course, if they find us complying and ready to oblige, why, there's no end to their audacity. "Give 'em an inch, and they take an ell." However, they do try to keep us down as much as they can. Now there's that very exercise of [horseback] riding that they are so proud of. They get us a side-saddle, as they call it, of enormous weight and inconvenience, on which they plant pommels enough to impale three women; they place us in an attitude from which it is next to impossible to control a horse should he be violent, and in a dress which ensures a horrible accident should he fall; added to which, they constantly give us the worst quadruped in the stable; and yet, with all these drawbacks, such is our own innate talent and capacity, we ride many an impetuous steed in safety and comfort that a man would find a dangerous and uncontrollable "mount." For my part, I only wish I had been born a man—that's to say, if I could keep my own ideas and feelings. (12)

Kate notes the oppression in which men “keep us down.” Phrases like “keep us down” combined with the reference to restrictive horseback riding equipment, like the side-

saddle, riding habit, and palfreys specifically designed to inhibit freedom of movement demonstrate an awareness of the social controls exercised over women. But despite the known operations of patriarchal values to ensure that women conform to societal expectations, the young horsewoman remains assured of her own abilities; she rides difficult and uncontrollable steeds better than many of the men she meets within the space of the novel, all the while using her power to command her horse and to seduce those very men. For example, Kate recalls a horseback race where she beats Bob Dashwood, a young gentleman in London for the season:

I rode a race against Bob Dashwood the other morning, once round the inner ring, down Rotten Row, to finish in front of Apsley House, and beat him all to ribbons. Wasn't it fun? And didn't I kick the dirt in his face? He looked like a wall that's been fresh plastered when he pulled up. I don't know who told Aunt Deborah. It wasn't the coachman, for he said he wouldn't; but she heard of it somehow, and of course she said it was improper and unladylike, and even unfeminine—as if anything a woman does can be unfeminine. I know Bob didn't think so, though he got the worst of it every way. (11)

Kate thoroughly beats Mr. Dashwood and covers him in dirt from the hooves of her face-paced horse. Bob Dashwood may have very easily been angry with Kate for “beating him to ribbons” in the race down Rotten Row and for the covering of dirt, but that anger is not referenced. Instead, Kate insists that Bob finds her hoydenish behavior feminine and perhaps even charming, despite what her aunt says about horses and racing being unfeminine.

While her stated confidence and ability on horseback demand respect, Kate nevertheless wishes she had been born a man. From her perspective and astute observation, the patriarchal constraints exercised on women are simply too rigorous—being born a male would have limited the number of controls during horseback rides as well as expectations to marry. She realizes her only choice as a woman in nineteenth-century Britain is to conform to and perpetuate dominant values of patriarchy; however, she does make a gallant effort to manipulate this fate to her favor via patriarchal equestrienne archetype.

Another particularly confident horsewoman appears in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 1879 novel, *Vixen*. Violet Tempest, nicknamed "Vixen" by her father, pursues a love of horseback riding also inspired by this man. He provides her with her first pony and horse and brings her along on regional fox-hunts, where she develops the reputation of an exquisite horsewoman with little regard to proper etiquette and conduct for a young lady: "It was late for the little lady of Tempest Manor to be out on her pony; but then it was an understood thing within a radius of ten miles or so that she was a self-willed young person, and even at fifteen years of age she had a knack of following her own inclination with that noble disregard of consequences which characterises the heaven-born ruler" (Braddon 2). The description of Vixen with a disregard of consequences like that of "the heaven-born ruler" sets the protagonist at a heightened level of power in the text compared to other characters. Vixen seems above all social and gender norms of the time, and may do exactly as she pleases.

However, the image of power given at the beginning of the novel falters as the protagonist's dedication to her father and potential suitor becomes apparent. While riding

and hunting with her father, Vixen attracts the eyes of many potential suitors. Her father cultivates the men's interest in his daughter during these times and works to establish possible kinships with the promise of Vixen's hand in marriage. Her mother, later known as Mrs. Winstanley, also promotes her daughter's feminized and fetishized position on horseback during hunts to attract a husband:

"The language of fashion and commodity also show the reader the way in which Mrs. Winstanley fetishizes her daughter's appearance and her ineffectual attempts to mother Vixen by turning her into one of Marcus's "live dolls." Mrs. Winstanley's main sensual outlet in the text is her attention to her dress and her desire to outfit her daughter" (Brecke 3). Vixen's mother dresses her in riding apparel which highlight the young woman's physical appearance and attract the male gaze. When a female neighbor, Lady Mabel, ridicules Vixen's appearance with, "red hair, and a green habit with brass buttons, a yellow waistcoat like her papa's, and a rose in her button-hole. How I should like to see her in Rotten Row!" Rorie defends Vixen insisting, "I'll warrant there wouldn't be a better horse-woman or a prettier girl there" (28). Vixen's abilities as a horsewoman and appearance, the work of her parents to attract a husband for their daughter, contribute to the young woman's characterization as a patriarchal equestrienne.

Fitting of Vixen's love of horseback riding and hunting with her father, the pursuit for Rorie's kinship takes on the language of the hunt as the horsewoman works to win Rorie's affection:

"I've asked you to dinner, and you've accepted," cried Vixen, pulling him out of the stable by the lapel of his shooting-jacket. He seemed to relish that mode of locomotion, for he allowed himself to be pulled all the way

to the hall-door, and into the glow of the great beech-wood fire; a ruddy light which shone upon many a sporting trophy, and reflected itself on many a gleaming pike and cuirass, belonging to days of old, when gentlemanly sport for the most part meant man-hunting. (Braddon 8)

Here, Rorie “seems to relish” Vixen’s confidence which she uses to pull him physically into the abbey. As with the command of her horse, Vixen holds such a position of authority over Rorie that he succumbs to her wish and “allowed himself” to be transferred into the trophy room. Once inside, the use of the phrase “man-hunting” further evidences Vixen’s power over Rorie. Clearly, Mr. Tempest and his daughter engage in a man-hunt of their own: a hunt for a husband and son-in-law. “Man-hunting” refers specifically to bygone days of war, and the equipment symbolic of war, the pike and cuirass, exemplifies the violence associated with patriarchy and the means it uses to solidify power. Ushering Rorie into a room decorated with trophies of war forces the young man to consider his intentions towards the squire’s daughter while illuminating the hopes of Vixen and her father in regards to acquiring the neighbor as a sort of trophy.

Vixen’s patriarchal equestrienne status as a horsewoman in the eponymous novel aligns directly with patriarchal values and traditional modes of consolidating power within that ideology. Her horsemanship, riding costumes, and the man-hunt she conducts with her father elaborate the operations of the patriarchal equestrienne archetype as an agent of patriarchal support rather than one of independence.

The last horsewoman to be discussed in terms of the patriarchal equestrienne is Dorothea Brooks, the protagonist of George Eliot’s celebrated 1874 novel *Middlemarch*.

Encouraged as a young woman to ride by her guardian-uncle, Mr. Brook, the serious young woman finds herself a commodity on horseback:

Most men thought her bewitching when she was on horseback. She loved the fresh air and the various aspects of the country, and when her eyes and cheeks glowed with mingled pleasure she looked very little like a devotee. Riding was an indulgence which she allowed herself in spite of conscientious qualms; she felt that she enjoyed it in a pagan sensuous way, and always looked forward to renouncing it. (7)

In this brief but suggestive passage, Dorothea's presence on horseback draws attention to the young woman as a potential wife and mother. While riding, Dorothea and her body are on display for the males of her community. Her youth and health are key indicators of her eligibility for marriage. Dorothea's youth and health exude from a fresh appearance in her glowing cheeks and looks of pleasure. Her cheeks and looks contribute to the "bewitching" figure she becomes on horseback that draws admiring looks from men. Here, "bewitching" suggests a mysterious female quality that casts Dorothea as desirable marriage material. Again, the connection between horseback riding for women and marriage becomes explicit and casts Dorothea as another patriarchal equestrienne.

Adding to the patriarchal equestrienne characterization, Dorothea expresses conscious recognition of a pagan, sensuous enjoyment that contributes to her strong, healthy appearance. "Pagan" and "sensuous" suggest a sexuality that, for the nineteenth century, is inappropriate for a woman to display. In fact, Dorothea recognizes her taboo feeling when she rides horseback and swears she will give up the activity after she marries, alluded to in the phrase "looked forward to renouncing it." Here, social

expectations to control women's bodies hinder Dorothea's ability to express both physicality and sexuality. A hint or a glimpse of a sexual nature is enough to secure a marriage and kinship ties, but as soon as a woman becomes a wife, according to the hegemony which governs Dorothea's understanding of marriage, she loses the opportunity to strike a bewitching or sexualized figure—she belongs exclusively to one man. Dorothea tries to articulate these thoughts when Sir James, one of her potential suitors and a neighboring land owner, questions her reasons for wanting to give up riding especially when she is such a “perfect horsewoman” (14). The protagonist replies to Sir James' question of “oh why” with, “It is quite possible that I should think it wrong for me” to continue to ride (14). Instead of elaborating upon the reasons why she thinks it wrong to ride, Dorothea allows Mr. Casaubon to interject with, “We must not inquire too curiously into motives” (14). Here, Casaubon's interruption doesn't clarify her decision, but demonstrates the extent to which Dorothea submits to the will of men in the novel.

As *Middlemarch* progresses, Dorothea secures a spouse. She marries Mr. Casaubon, a man guaranteed not to arouse her sensual nature because of his advanced years and single-minded scholarly pursuits. And true to her word, she gives up her horseback riding pursuits when she marries. The beloved activity must end upon marriage because it no longer serves as a utility of the far-reaching controls of patriarchy. Dorothea sees no point continuing to attract the attention of men using her status as a patriarchal equestrienne after she attains what she considers to be a desirable marriage.

Dorothea's pursuit of a suitable marriage isn't the only evidence of patriarchal constraint on the horsewoman either. The horsewoman's family structure before marriage differs from the traditional nuclear construction but demonstrates patriarchal operations

nevertheless. Dorothea and her sister, Celia, live with their uncle, Mr. Brooke.

Interestingly, Mr. Brooke's role as the sisters' guardian does not adhere to the expected role of the family patriarch. In novels already discussed, the father, or patriarchal figure, assumes the responsibility of procuring or approving marriages for any daughters in the family. Mr. Brooke actually cautions Dorothea *against* marrying Mr. Casaubon citing the extreme differences in age as reason not to go through with the nuptials (25). Dorothea does not heed her uncle/guardian's advice and goes on to marry the man twenty-seven years her senior. The act of refusing her uncle's advice, which should serve as the advice of her father, does not constitute a rejection of the patriarchal structure and a step towards independence, but rather symbolizes Dorothea's move to fill the vacant space of her actual father. In her mind, Mr. Brooke does not act the role of a patriarchal figure. As a result, her uncle's warning holds little sway over her decision to marry. In her search for a husband, Dorothea looks to fill the role of the patriarchal father-figure with a much older focused man. Responding to her uncle's query if she would prefer a man closer in age to herself, Dorothea confidently states:

“I should not wish to have a husband very near my own age,” said

Dorothea, with grave decision. “I should wish to have a husband who was above me in judgment and in all knowledge.” Mr. Brooke repeated his subdued, “Ah?— I thought you had more of your own opinion than most girls. I thought you liked your own opinion— liked it, you know.” “I cannot imagine myself living without some opinions, but I should wish to have good reasons for them, and a wise man could help me to see which

opinions had the best foundation, and would help me to live according to them.” (Eliot 25)

Ultimately, Dorothea’s search for a husband also proves to be the search for a father-figure. The young woman’s desire to marry stems from another desire to improve and shape her opinions. Rather than desiring a traditional marriage to bring children into the world, Dorothea wants a marriage to an older, wiser man who will round out her education by building a strong foundation from which to survey her opinions and live according to them. While her reasons for marriage emerge as atypical, Dorothea continues to uphold patriarchal values by deferring to a husband/father-figure rather than relying upon her own judgment and ideas. Thus, just as she swears to give up horseback riding after she marries, her individual opinions are subject to terminate or, in the very least, change dramatically according to her husband’s wishes.

As with the other horsewomen protagonists, Dorothea accepts the patriarchal structure willingly, and therefore functions as another patriarchal equestrienne rather than Dorré’s so-called “horsey-heroine.” Despite the opinionated and independent facade Dorothea sports, she, like the other horsewomen protagonists Fanny, Diana, Vixen, and Kate, all act in ways that support the male-dominated society in which they live. Far from this pattern dwindling into the next century, it becomes apparent in the following chapter that the patriarchal equestrienne archetype continues through the twentieth and into the beginning of the twenty-first century upholding the patriarchal tradition.

## Chapter Three

### Representations of Women and Horses in the 20th and 21st Centuries

#### I

#### *20th Century Patriarchal Equestriennes*

Since horses are no longer an integral part of modern society, they do not, naturally enough, figure largely in the contemporary novel. Certain forms of popular fiction, however, have in recent years used the horse motif in a way which develops the sexual resonances of horses for women both from the nineteenth century novel and from the children's pony book genre.

—Gail Cunningham, “Seizing the Reins”

Gail Cunningham, editor and contributor to the anthology *Image and Power:*

#### *Women in*

*Fiction in the Twentieth Century*, identifies the twentieth-century genres featuring women on horseback; however, her work does not preclude the protagonists she discusses from the application of the patriarchal equestrienne archetype. Although she asserts that “the horse has, from the nineteenth century at least, occupied a unique and significant place in the empowerment women” (65) I will show that her own close-readings of girls fiction and romance novel protagonists illustrate, once again, the restraints of a gendered society operating through the archetypal patriarchal equestrienne rather than any definitive form of empowerment or independence. Identifying the patriarchal equestrienne archetype in the novels of the twentieth-century and beyond, demonstrates the continuity of this trend and helps to establish the need for feminist scholarship to challenge such overarching and scholarly critical representations of women.

In “Seizing the Reins” Cunningham begins with a discussion of the pony book genre (fiction written primarily for adolescent girls). Novels which are a part of the pony

book genre range from Josephine Pullein-Thompson's 1951-1957 publications of *The Radney Riding Club*, *One Day Event*, and *Pony Club Camp* to Bonnie Bryant's more recent 1988-2001 *The Saddle Club* series. Cunningham focuses her discussion of pony books on Pullein-Thompson's works and contends that these works provide a space for young girls to compete equally with males because the horseback riding activity circumvents the biologic differences between human males and females. While the opportunity for equality is compelling, the girls fiction novels, like realist texts, sensational fiction, and bildungsromans of the nineteenth century featuring horsewomen, ultimately rely upon the intrigue of male-female relationships to move the plot.

At the same time Cunningham touts the empowering nature of the pony books, she recognizes the inevitable that books featuring horseback riding focus on the interactions between girls and boys. To demonstrate this focus, Cunningham discusses Pullein-Thompson's young protagonists, Noel—given characteristically “feminine” qualities like self-deprecation—and Henry of *The Radney Riding Club* and other books in the series (71). She writes, “Gender distinctions are never ignored in the relationship between Henry and Noel; rather, they become pointed and stimulating in a sort of childhood version of Beatrice-and-Benedick or Jane-and-Rochester verbal banter. And in the horsey milieu, of course, the potential for physical competitiveness is ever present” (Cunningham 72). Here, the Beatrice-and-Benedick relationship from *Much Ado About Nothing* and the Jane-and-Rochester relationship of *Jane Eyre* are analogous to Henry and Noel's interactions. But the analogy in Cunningham's essay comes across ironically. While these characters are relatively young, pre-adolescent in fact, Cunningham inadvertently suggests that horseback riding facilitates romantic involvement between

boys and girls which will eventually lead to marriage as the comparison to the Shakespearean and Brontë characters indicates. In texts supposed to be about independence and empowerment for girls, the girls fiction establishes an additional expectation of marriage which undermines the forward-thinking one Cunningham suggests.

Male-female interactions, although equalized somehow by horses in these texts, still occupy a significant amount of time in texts featuring horsewomen. Rather than the books centering around horse and rider training as well as horse care, the game of seduction between males and females (epitomized by the references to canonical literature which end at the marriage of the two main characters) shares the stage with the novel's horse theme. Seduction being one of the attributes of the patriarchal equestrienne, it isn't difficult to imagine the young girls of the pony club using their advanced knowledge of horses and horseback riding to engage the attention of the boys riding with them. At one point, Noel comments to Henry, "I think I know what I'd do with him [the horse] if he were mine, but I'm probably quite wrong, and I don't suppose you'll agree, but if he belonged to me, I'd put him back in the snaffle" (Pullein-Thompson 37). The use of the conditional tense, here, emphasizes the cat-and-mouse game between the young protagonists. Careful to mediate her knowledge about horses with uncertainty and doubt, Noel engages Henry's attention without making herself superior to the young man; she captures his attention while inflating his ego. The girls fiction Cunningham promotes as a powerful form of female empowerment falls to the larger patriarchal expectations for men and women.

The next genre featuring horsewomen that Cunningham supports as empowering for women is the sex-and-riding romance novel, and the form fares no better under scrutiny for evidence of social restraints on women. Here, Cunningham focuses mainly on Jilly Cooper's *Polo* (1992) to represent what she names the sex-and-riding genre. The romance novel is a part of a much larger series: *Polo* belongs to the *Rutshire Chronicles*. One of the appeals of the series is that it features women horseback riding as a constant theme.

In *Polo* the protagonist, Perdita, must seduce a married man, Ricky, in order to fund her ambitions of becoming a world-class polo player. Referencing the seduction, Cunningham writes, "Perdita is thus able to use her body as a passport into the polo world and its wealth" (74). Perdita's seduction strategy to accomplish a larger, personal goal aligns with the qualities of a patriarchal equestrienne; however, as with other patriarchal equestriennes, she finds herself seduced by another man by the end of the story. Perdita's story isn't entirely about pursuing her polo dream and caring for her animals. Again, the story of a woman's unparalleled love of horses inevitably gives way to the intrigue of more complicated relationships between men and women. The marriage Perdita worked to disrupt repairs and realigns along traditional patriarchal lines, while the horsewoman protagonist falls in love with a single, well-accomplished horseman, Luke. The promising new relationship hints at an eventual marriage between Perdita and Luke, and thus reaffirms the connection between the horsewoman and marriage. Cunningham's strong belief in the empowerment that horses bring women receives sharp critique when an oppositional reading of the same texts is performed. No longer does the assumption stand without question that women on horseback symbolize a strong independence.

Nuances of patriarchal influence upon the practice of horseback riding cannot be ignored.

The trajectory of the patriarchal equestrienne continues into the twenty-first century and illustrates how patriarchy functions in the contemporary world despite an established scholarly tradition of feminism having taken hold. While *Cloud Atlas* and *A Visit from the Goon Squad* have inspired literary criticism, topics like feminism and the presence of horses have received little or no scholarly attention. Criticism on these novels centers greatly on the fractured and disjointed narrative presentation common to both works. So, as with earlier chapters, I will follow images of horsewomen who appear to be empowered individuals but embark into relatively untouched scholarly territory with these contemporary texts.

## II

### *Patriarchal Equestriennes in Cloud Atlas*

The elision of labor pertaining to horseback riding is particularly significant in light of the number of times a female character in *Cloud Atlas* steps up on a horse. Of the six metanarratives featured in the novel, three portray horsewomen who appear as patriarchal equestriennes because the novels show how these women interact with men rather than the horses they ride or have ridden. “Letters from Zedelghem” shows prickly seventeen-year-old Eva Myrs as a horsewoman; “Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery” alludes to the fact the protagonist, Luisa Rey, grew up taking horseback riding lessons; and finally Meronym in “Sloosha’s Crossin’ An’ Ev’rythin’ After” rescues the narrator, Zachry, on horseback (Mitchell 53, 414, 294). Rather than blending into the background of the text, horses and horsewomen are a significant feature of *Cloud Atlas*

because of the frequent number of times a woman interacts with a horse or an allusion is made to her riding abilities. Horsewomen in *Cloud Atlas* are a major feature, albeit an unexpected one in a contemporary novel. In addition to their central position in the text, this particular set of characters paints a different sense of the empowered women-and-horse representations in contemporary culture; instead of taking an independent stance in the novel, horsewomen illustrate the controls of male-driven society via the archetype of the patriarchal equestrienne that develops out of the elision of labor between women and horses.

At first, the representations appear refreshing and new in terms of female independence in western culture, but the fact that the women appear strong and capable as a result of their horseback riding experience is contrived. The only other female protagonist in *Cloud Atlas* who is not featured as a horsewoman is an engineered “fabricant,” Sonmi 451, whose humanity falls into question anyway. It appears that in order to be a woman in the world of *Cloud Atlas*, characters must also be horsewomen to some degree. But this observation that horsewomen are strong, self-actualized individuals in the novel falls short because they conform to the patriarchal equestrienne archetype of horsewomen I’ve explored throughout the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries.

Eva Ayrs, in Robert Frobisher’s “Letters from Zedelghem,” is the first patriarchal equestrienne in *Cloud Atlas*. The most memorable occasion featuring this character on horseback comes in response to the question of the narrator, Robert Frobisher, “what in hell are you doing here?” when Eva and her horse, Nefertiti, surprise him near one the lakes on her family’s estate (63). Furious that Robert has the audacity to question her right to wander her family’s property, Eva’s retort, “Ce lac appartient à ma famille depuis

cinq siècles! Vous êtes ici depuis combien de temps exactement? Bien trois semaines! Alors vous voyez, je vais où bon me semble” literally forces the young man to step away from the horsewoman and right into the lake (64)!<sup>7</sup> Eva holds a position of power and authority on horseback in this scene, yet instead of seeing Eva as at least an equal in this confrontation, Robert represents the young woman as an object of supreme interest; she is spirited in a lively, dangerous sense thrilling to the youth. And Robert finds himself attracted to the horse riding daughter of his employer.

Even when she is not astride her horse, Eva carries herself as if she were elevated on horseback. This elevation seems to lend her a position of dominance above Robert and those associated with the Crommelynck estate, but the pose merely illustrates her function as a patriarchal equestrienne:

Eva still a prissy missy, as hateful as my sisters, but with an intelligence to match her enmity. Apart from her precious Nefertiti, her hobbies are pouting and looking martyred. She likes to reduce vulnerable domestics to tears, then flounces in, announcing, “She’s having another weeping fit, Mama, can’t you break her in properly?” She has established I am no soft target and embarked on a war of attrition: “Papa, how long is Mr. Frobisher to stay in our house?” “Papa, do you pay Mr. Frobisher as much as you pay Hendrick?” “Oh, I was only asking, Mama, I didn’t know Mr. Frobisher’s tenure was a delicate subject.” She rattles me, hate to hand it to her, but there it is. (63)

Perceiving the teen as potential threat to the security of his position as her father’s amanuensis, Robert recognizes Eva’s intelligence as well as her strength in this passage.

He notes that she uses her wits to manipulate those around her—not to conform to her opinions or desires, but to establish a kind of dominance over them. In addition to bullying domestics, Eva attempts to belittle and undermine Robert’s role as her father’s amanuensis. The narrator, Robert, even admits to her degree of success: “she rattles me, hate to hand it to her, but there it is.” Eva’s ability to instill a level of discomfort in those around her speaks directly of the power Eva appears to carry as a result of her horseback riding skills. But this power she seems to wield doesn’t intimidate her nemesis, Robert; rather, the narrator becomes attracted to her. Patriarchal equestriennes balance a combination of danger and allure to manipulate men. Eva, both on and off horseback, manages this same kind of manipulation by “rattling” Robert’s confidence.

Another striking moment in this passage which speaks to the patriarchal equestrienne archetype is Eva’s phrase “break her in properly” referring to the vulnerable servant. In terms of horse rearing and training, “to break” a horse means to tame and ride a two-year colt or filly. Through the use of this kind of jargon, Mitchell casts Eva as a capable horsewoman endowing her with an authority implicit to her actions of horseback riding. In other words, she seems to speak the language of those who interact with horses at all levels of training and riding. Yet, readers are only aware in *Cloud Atlas* that Eva knows how to ride a horse: the novel lacks an in-depth assessment of the type of interaction Eva maintains with her horse, Nefertiti. Eva rides Nefertiti around the Crommelynck estate; readers never see the young girl care for or prepare the animal for a ride. Always, Robert encounters Eva astride her black horse or in another elevated position of power. So Eva holds a position of respect, if not fear, in Robert’s narrative, but the authority of horseback riding, which that respect builds upon, appears naive in

terms of Eva's ability to handle her horse outside of the saddle. Because Eva is not the knowledgeable horsewoman around the stable as she is in the saddle, we see that role of the horsewoman in the novel demonstrates an ulterior purpose. That purpose is the association of horseback riding with male-female relationships which take up importance in "Letters from Zedelghem" to show the subtextual presence of patriarchal tradition in the interactions between men and women.

The patriarchal tradition and the societal constraints which accompany the tradition appear clearly as "Letters from Zedelghem" progresses. At once, Eva seems to have the upper-hand when she argues with Robert, but in reality, Robert maintains the power in these interactions. He is privileged socially as a male in his ability to act as his own, independent agent. Eva remains the dependent of her parents, although she tries desperately to establish an identity of her own.

Hostilities continue on the Eva front. Of concern is how she sniffs something rotten between my father and me. She wonders, publicly, why I never receive letters from my family, or why I don't have some clothes of my own sent over. She asked if one of my sisters would like to be her pen-friend. To win time I had to promise to put her proposal to 'em, and I might need you [Sixsmith, a friend of Robert's] to do another forgery. Make it very good. The devious vixen is almost a female Me. (Mitchell 71)

Here, Robert sees Eva as an opponent in a kind of game between them. The young woman relentlessly looks to undermine Robert's reasons to take up residency in her home town of Zedelghem, asking specifically about the Frobisher family's relationship with

their son and brother, while Robert thinks of ways to “win” in terms of throwing her off the scent of his puzzling appearance in Switzerland. Instead of using “bide” or “stall,” the narrator employs “win”: win, as in winning a game or match. The emphasis on winning brings to mind opponents who must compete to determine a victor and a loser. In this passage, Robert seems confident he can beat Eva with a forged letter from his friend, although he concedes the young woman is almost his female equivalent. Readers understand that Robert holds or believes he has an upper-hand in the rivalry with Eva. Not only does Robert explain his strategy to beat Eva to the readers, but he derides his opponent just after expressing a degree of respect for her.

Identifying Eva as a “devious vixen” complicates the relationship between the pair of opponents. In terms of male-female power dynamics in western culture, the label of “devious vixen” degrades Eva from esteemed opponent and capable horsewoman to a sexualized, but uncooperative figure. Eva, possesses just enough spark and spite to antagonize Robert but not to beat him in a game of wits. Thus, it is safe for Robert to admire Eva’s appearance and seemingly dangerous demeanor from ground-level as she rides because Robert’s confidence in his own intelligence mediates any real threat she poses to him as the narrator. As a result of his confidence, Robert ascribes Eva a new identity as a vixen in the quotation. The term vixen denotes a female fox, as well as a spiteful or quarrelsome women. Quarrelsome Eva is, but the connotation of the word vixen also implies her physical appearance attracts Robert. Despite Eva’s attempts to drive Robert away from her family, the young man continues to work for her father and Eva eventually marries. The patriarchal equestrienne eventually conforms to societal expectations.

The next female protagonist appears in the following section “Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery” and also fits the description of a patriarchal equestrienne. Luisa’s characterization as a patriarchal equestrienne receives support when Luisa’s mother reveals the tough, no-nonsense reporter grew up attending ballet classes and summering at various horse riding camps: “Once upon a time, I had a baby daughter. I dressed her in frilly frocks, enrolled her for ballet classes, and sent her to horse-riding camp five summers in a row. But look at her. She turned into Lester anyway” (415). Lester Rey, Luisa’s father and esteemed war reporter known for his acts of courage, serves as his daughter’s role model. With her statement, Luisa’s mother shows how her daughter manifests the aspects of a patriarchal equestrienne. Hardworking, driven, and exuding a kind of feminine charm that Luisa’s mother associates with ballet dancing and horseback riding, Luisa catches the eye of older man. Luisa channels her father’s dedication to “the case” throughout the this section of *Cloud Atlas* which leads to love interests between herself and male scientists and engineers exemplifying the connection between horseback riding and patriarchal contrived male-female relationships.

The comment made by Luisa’s mother regarding how ballet and horseback riding lessons taught her daughter to act according to stereotypical behaviors for women refers to the fact that women riding horseback are often conceptualized as dressage princesses, rodeo queens, or other hyper-feminine individuals. Presumably, Luisa’s mother sent her daughter to summer camp where this kind of horseback riding could be developed in young girls because she draws a parallel between frilly dresses, dancing, and horseback riding as the elements appealing somehow to the male gaze. The patriarchal equestrienne formulation appears at work because the values of horsemanship Luisa would have

learned at horse camp are conspicuously missing in the text; the information readers receive that she rode horseback in her youth merely suggests that the character was taught to enact certain gender roles. The missing references and explanations of how Luisa actually would have interacted with horses make room for the archetype to take hold instead in this pastiche section and elucidate the how men and women behave to one another. Therefore, the subtext of “Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery” emphasizes male-female interactions and marriage, indicating a continued patriarchal tradition into the early twenty-first century.

Meronym is the last equestrienne representation in *Cloud Atlas*, and she appears in “Sloosha’s Crossin’ An’ Ev’rythin’ After.” Meronym belongs to a group of individuals known as “prescients.” Prescients are the keepers of knowledge and advanced technology in a devolved, post-apocalyptic society. As a prescient, Meronym must travel to different tribes and groups of people around the world and record their languages and cultural practices. In addition to being erudite and prescient in this central section of the novel, Meronym also happens to be an accomplished horse rider, although this ability is only revealed upon a heroic rescue of the narrator, Zachry:

I asked Meronym why a Shipwoman rode horses as good as any Kona. She ’fessed most Prescients cudn’t ride no animal, but she’d lived with a tribe called the Swannekke what lived way past Ank’ridge an’ way past Far Couver. The Swannekke bred horses like Valleysmen bred goats, yay, an’ their littl’ uns could ride b’fore they could walk, an’ she’d learnt durin’ her seasons with them. (296)

The fact that Meronym manages a brilliant and daring rescue of the narrator from Kona attackers comes across, however, as a convenient plot device because at no other time does the prescient share any information regarding her riding experience, although it is a quality unique to Meronym as most prescients don't ride horses or other animals. Again, the labor of women riding or training horses is suspiciously absent in the description of how the female character became a rider. The lack of information regarding how Meronym learned about horses and how to ride allows the patriarchal equestrienne characteristics to emerge. In the excerpt above, Meronym supplies Zachry with a satisfactory explanation for her sudden appearance on horseback to save him from slavery or death at the hands of the Kona and nothing more. Meronym, without a doubt, is a heroine and a quick strategist as she boldly saves Zachry from his Kona captors. But the only real connection to her perceived leadership ability and physical strength in this section of *Cloud Atlas* is her position on horseback. Zachry sees Meronym as a woman bringing trouble to his community.

While the visiting prescient is considerably older than the young narrator, Meronym is not without powers of attraction over members of Zachry's community, as to be expected of a patriarchal equestrienne. Rather than using youth and beauty as powers of seduction as other patriarchal equestriennes have, Meronym brings gifts to the community. Meronym, the patriarchal equestrienne, goes on to illustrate residual social constraints. After Meronym saves Zachry from the Kona attackers, she has the opportunity to return to her home on the island, Prescience. She has the choice to return or to save the narrator, Zachry. Because Zachry suffers a wound in his calf during the attack, Meronym decides to remain with a man who distrusts her:

Now my friend had a choice to settle, yay, see, either she loaded me in that kayak or left me on Big Isle not able to walk nor nothin' jus' a short ride off from Kona ground. Well, here I am yarnin' to you, so you know what Meronym settled, an' times are I regret her choosin', yay, an' times are I don't. The chanty o' my new tribe's rowers waked me halfway 'cross the Straits. Meronym was changin' my bleded bindin', she'd used some Smart med'sun to numb its pain a hole lot. (308)

Zachry's use of "settle" throughout this passage evidences a patriarchal tradition in the devolved world he shares with Meronym and other tribal individuals. "Settle" implies a marriage or union of some kind between Zachry and Meronym that happens after the events of the story he narrates. A union between Zachry and Meronym receives additional strength in that Zachry's son, and presumably Meronym's as well, ends the narration of "Sloosha's Crossin' An' Ev'rythin' After." In the end, an accomplished scholar and horsewoman becomes the lover of a man deeply suspicious of her presence on the big island. She even settles down with him in a traditional kind of marriage. She gives up a life of scholarly pursuits to become part of simple Zachry's story of male survival and triumph. Once again, the equestrienne figure reveals overlooked instances of patriarchy.

As horsewomen, Eva, Luisa, and Meronym are written to appear as strong, powerful individuals in their own right; however, investigating how these women interact with horses from a practical standpoint (looking for whether or not these women care for or train the animals they ride), it's clear that these characters are precluded from the labor involved with horseback riding. In turn, this elision of labor allows the patriarchal

equestrienne to operate through these horsewomen characters and elucidate how these seemingly empowered women actually support patriarchal tradition. The patriarchal equestrienne representation of horsewomen also appears in Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*.

### III

#### *The Patriarchal Equestrienne of A Visit from the Goon Squad*

Kitty Jackson is the final instance of the horseback-riding patriarchal equestrienne. Kitty, a fresh, young actress, captivates individuals from the silver screen and in person; according to the text, she has a set of charms which set her apart from other young actresses. Jules Jones, her interviewer and the narrator of chapter 9, makes it his mission to identify those charms and share them with his readers. After he notes that Kitty's effect on other people is the most interesting feature of the actress, Jules asks her about her history of jumping horses as they eat lunch (Egan 171). In his reporting-style he writes, "In the same way, Kitty Jackson has some sort of bottom bread that is, presumably, "her," or the way Kitty Jackson once behaved in suburban Des Moines where she grew up, rode a bike, attended proms, earned decent grades and, most intriguingly, jumped horses, thereby winning a substantial number of ribbons and trophies and, at least briefly, entertaining thoughts of becoming a jockey" (171). Jules uses the phrase "most intriguingly" to describe Kitty's proficiency in horse competitions, but his explanation as to why this hobby is so interesting does not receive explanation. Realistically speaking, jumping horses in Iowa is an entirely plausible activity. Iowa is a Midwestern state with a history of farming and ranching in which horses played an important role in transportation and land development. Why does Jules indicate that

Kitty's ability to ride is unique or odd, then? The unique quality or intrigue regarding Kitty's riding hobby stems from the lack of information provided about the details of the woman's knowledge of horses. The missing details contribute to the allure of the young actress. The actress's powerful effect upon those around her as well as the narrator's strange fascination with her riding past (the two most interesting features of the nineteen year-old according to Jules Jones), involve Kitty in the patriarchal equestrienne tradition.

As the allotted time of the interview draws to an end, Jules finds Kitty's charms as well as her powerful, graceful horse-like features intoxicating. Her legs, "which are long, considering her modest height, as well as brown, and not that orangey brown of tanning salons, but a rich, tawny chestnut that makes me think of—well, of horses" (179). Kitty's charm and physical appearance cause the recently dumped and lonely reporter to come onto the young star aggressively, or so Jules claims. After polite rebuffs from Kitty, Jones moves to assault her in Central Park (183). In fact, just after she shares details about her horse, Nixon, that Jules attacks Kitty. Kitty's sex appeal and horse riding lead up to the assault; thereby exemplifying the connection between horses and the assumed patriarchal right to women. Fortunately, before any harm befalls the actress, Kitty sinks the dull blade of her pocket knife into Jules' calf to escape.

Jules' reporting career fails miserably as a result of his attack on Kitty and the subsequent jail sentence he receives, but Kitty's acting career also flounders after the incident. Despite being the victim, Kitty receives a kind of larger, societal punishment as well; because Jules fails, she cannot advance either. In light of the attack, Kitty becomes the victim of attempted sexual abuse and loses her role as an entirely independent figure. Although she fights back, the attack exposes her vulnerability to men and the patriarchal

system. The tragedy of the patriarchal equestrienne, here in the example of Kitty Jones as with the many other horsewomen figures, is the reestablishment of the status quo for men and women. While the stories of horsewomen in literature most frequently end in marriage, Kitty's story elucidates a more contemporary feminist issue. Here, women cannot successfully progress their careers at the expense of men. When Jules loses his livelihood, Kitty's separate career suffers too. Men being able to advance ahead of women, and women placed second to men is a lingering characteristic of patriarchal society and an issue that continues at the forefront of feminism today. Patriarchal equestriennes fall under the constraints of patriarchal society, thus horsewomen characters are not the empowered female figures as previously believed.

Whether represented in the nineteenth century or in the twenty-first century, horsewomen demonstrate a similarity between the ages regarding the residual power of a seemingly outdated ideology. The stability and repetition of the stereotypical representation of women on horseback is monolithic. After this textual analysis of works across three centuries, the following questions remain: what does the future hold for the study of horsewomen in culture and literature? And what does the presence of the reductive stereotype into the twenty-first century mean for feminism generally?

#### *IV*

#### *Conclusion*

The history of literary horsewoman representations spans many centuries and manifests many examples of this figure in the last three especially. While this history is rich, it certainly isn't varied. As I've demonstrated by applying the patriarchal equestrienne archetype to a cross section of British and American novels, horsewomen

representations follow a relatively rigid conceptualization in Anglophone literature. The representations are ultimately conventional because they do not reformulate or recast the female characters in different ways to achieve a breakdown of female stereotypes. Most notably, the patriarchal equestrienne reveals deep-seated constraints operating on women. This revelation directly contradicts the conclusions of feminist scholars of history and literature—like Gail Cunningham—who argue that horseback riding *empowers* women and, to an extent, Lynda Birke and Keri Brandt as well. The illusion of power inscribed on horsewomen figures fails to motivate further feminist inquiry into how and why these women can be classified as empowered beings. As I've demonstrated in the last two chapters, these figures on horseback are not what they seem.

Patriarchy disciplines the behaviors of women horseback riding and reduces the variety of representations portrayed in literature. Thus, a kind of tension exists between current scholarship regarding horsewomen and third-wave feminist theory. Horsewomen characters maintain a predictable set of actions and behaviors, the repetition of which reflects and reinforces a definitive stereotype. I've used the patriarchal equestrienne archetype throughout my thesis to delineate the male-centered world of the horsewoman and to elucidate the presence of a stereotype in the first place. Exposing the inadequacies of horsewomen representations and correctly identifying the representations along the lines of a common stereotype, my thesis suggests a new line for scholarly inquiry into the rich past and hopeful future of women figures riding horseback in literature.

I hope to contribute to the third-wave feminist project in regards to the challenging figure of horsewomen in literature by showing resistance to stereotypes of any group of women. In their conclusion to their article "Mutual Corporeality: Gender

and Human/horse Relationships," Birke and Brandt express this sentiment regarding the future study of horsewomen through a feminist lens: "And, while we have argued that the embodiment with the horse helps to perform gender in specific ways, it is also an embodiment that could carry a multitude of meanings and fluidities. Indeed, we might even say that the act of riding allows us potentially to transcend—even momentarily—our engagement with merely human modes of conduct" (196). I gravitate strongly towards their suggestion that women, specifically horsewomen for my purposes, *can* carry a multitude of meanings and fluidities both in reality and representation. Not only do Birke and Brandt offer another avenue for feminist scholarship to pursue, suggesting that horses help diminish the presence of gender dimorphism between men and women by "transcending human modes of conduct," but these scholars help fuel my conviction to search for horsewomen representations which do not conform to the archetypal figure I've identified. At this point in my project, I believe in the possibility for horsewomen to exist in a multitudinous or fluid sense that departs from the archetypal figure.

## Epilogue

Early in my thesis project I discovered a nineteenth century horsewoman representation which did not fit the mold of the patriarchal equestrienne. This unique horsewoman is the protagonist of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 1863 work of sensation fiction, *Aurora Floyd*. Uncertain as how to proceed with the main character, Aurora, I tabled any further research into the oddities of her representation; however, now armed with the long history of horsewomen in literature, I feel I'm able to note the differences between Aurora Floyd and other contemporary equestriennes.

In the case of *Aurora Floyd*, the ability of the protagonist to ride horseback doesn't symbolize empowerment or independence. Although fearless on horseback, Aurora is just as susceptible to the male gaze as other nineteenth century protagonists. The difficulties and challenges associated with the etiquette and expectations of patriarchal society remain very much in the foreground of the novel. The novel really departs from the patriarchal equestrienne archetype in the elucidation of the main character's inability to navigate the legal aspects of marriage; Aurora inadvertently becomes a bigamist, and the resources necessary for her to correct the legal mistake are beyond her grasp as a woman in nineteenth century Britain. As both her marriages arrive as a result of a mutual love of horses and riding, Aurora's status as a horsewoman comes to symbolize the need for continued change in Britain's marriage laws, beyond that of the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act, particularly the ability of a woman to initiate divorce proceedings. The feminist activism implicit in Braddon's fearless horsewoman pushes for this particular character to be read along different lines than the patriarchal equestrienne

archetype. As a result, Aurora functions as an early horseback riding prototype for the bicycle-propelled New Woman of the 1890s seeking civil rights for women.

Arriving some twenty years before the *fin de siècle* literature of the “bicycling, cigarette-smoking Amazon,” horsewoman Aurora displays developing characteristics of the New Woman including connections to the middle and working class from which the cultural icon arose (Richardson 12). The New Woman prototype shares the strong, independent characteristics with Aurora Floyd, especially of a “perceived newness, autonomous self-definition,” as well as the “determination to set her own agenda in developing an alternative vision of the future” (Richardson 12). While Aurora Floyd doesn’t entirely part from the tradition of the horsewoman in literature, since she must operate within the clearly delineated confines of patriarchal society, her potential as an activist symbol places her at the beginning of a discussion about the “multitudinous” representations of horsewomen. Instead of a patriarchal equestrienne, Aurora becomes an activist symbol to advocate for social change and a developing social equality for women.

For example, In contrast to Whyte-Melville’s Kate Coventry, Aurora, as a girl, specifically asks for a rocking horse instead of a doll. While Kate’s indulgent grandfather expresses the need for a rocking horse without the young girl showing any particular interest in it, Aurora possesses an interest in horses and riding which she communicates directly to her doting father. Aurora knows exactly what she wants and how to go about securing the things she requires. Even at the tender age of six years old, the horsewoman acts upon her own thoughts and desires:

At six years of age she rejected a doll and asked for a rocking-horse. At ten she could converse fluently upon the subject of pointers, setters, fox-

hounds, harriers, and beagles, though she drove her governess to the verge of despair by persistently forgetting under what Roman emperor Jerusalem was destroyed, and who was legate to the Pope at the time of Catherine of Aragon's divorce. At eleven she talked unreservedly of the horses in the Lenfield stables as a pack of screws; at twelve she contributed her half-crown to a Derby sweepstakes among her father's servants, and triumphantly drew the winning horse; and at thirteen she rode across country with her uncle Andrew, who was a member of the Croydon hunt. It was not without grief that the banker watched his daughter's progress in these doubtful accomplishments; but she was so beautiful, so frank and fearless, so generous, affectionate, and true, that he could not bring himself to tell her that she was not all he could desire her to be. If he could have governed or directed that impetuous nature, he would have had her the most refined and elegant, the most perfect and accomplished of her sex; but he could not do this, and he was fain to thank God for her as she was, and to indulge her every whim. (Braddon 21)

As a protagonist, Aurora distinguishes herself considerably from the aforementioned equestrienne protagonists, like Kate Coventry, operating as patriarchal equestriennes only to support societal hegemony; she tries to act as her own agent and pursue her own agenda. While Aurora isn't the only 19th century British horsewoman to participate in the hunt and discuss the quality of horseflesh, her participation in gambling activities with her father's servants suggests the possibility of financial independence: a radical notion for 19th century women and a nod to working-class activism. The potential for financial

independence as well as middle-class activism in this excerpt demonstrate that Aurora anticipates the New Woman figure. With Aurora, I propose to challenge representations of horsewomen in literature and advocate for the continued academic presence of feminism.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Gail Cunningham writes in her chapter “Seizing the Reins” of *Images of Power*:

As the horse became progressively displaced by the bicycle and subsequently the car as the preferred means of individualised transport, so its potential for naturalistically evoked sexual symbolism diminished in literature. Cars were annexed at the outset by men as requiring mechanical expertise and carrying phallic associations, and there is nothing remotely erotic about a bicycle. However, the horse did not entirely lose its special position as a potent image of female independence and disguised sexual power. It receded first into the specialised form of girls fiction and has recently re-emerged in contemporary bestsellers by, and predominantly for, women: a sort of sex-and-riding genre. (69)

Here, Cunningham emphasizes the lack of horses in modern society, rather than considering the weight of the many centuries of women riding horseback for travel and leisure. Additionally, the absence of horses in contemporary culture does not indicate that women have discontinued riding today for recreation and sport. In fact, horseback riding remains accessible, although costly, to women throughout Great Britain and the United States exemplifying that Cunningham’s prescription of two, limited genres to portray the rich context of women riding horses overlooks the possibility of many dynamic equestrienne characters to emerge in many forms of literature.

<sup>2</sup> Pillion is defined as riding as a passenger behind an individual astride a horse, while sidesaddle is a riding position where the rider (most commonly female) sits with both feet over a single side of the horse. Riding sidesaddle generally requires long,

complicated skirts. To ride astride a horse means to straddle a horse's back with one leg over each of the horse's sides.

<sup>3</sup> *Cloud Atlas* was adapted into the eponymous 2012 film. *A Visit from the Goon Squad* was a national bestseller, the winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award, a PEN/Faulkner Award finalist, and a *New York Times Book Review* Best Book. Other contemporary novels featuring horsewomen protagonists include Molly Gloss's 2007 novel *The Hearts of Horses*.

<sup>4</sup> *Mansfield Park*, *Rob Roy*, *Vixen*, *Middlemarch*, and *Kate Coventry* are all nineteenth-century British novels, but there is a set of nineteenth-century American novels which feature women on horseback in pursuit of husbands as well. These novels include *The Hidden Hand, or Capitola the Madcap* by E.D.E.N Southward and *The Wide, Wide World* by Susan Warner.

<sup>5</sup> George Sand models her horsewoman, Lavina, the protagonist of the 1834 novel by the same name specifically after Diana Vernon as represented in this passage: "Il la vit passer rapide comme un diam, effleurant les bruyères, foulant les plaines giboyeuses de son parc, lançant sa haquenée noire à travers les marais; rieuse, ardente et fantasque, comme *Diana Vernon* ou comme les fées joyeuses de la verte Irlande" (Mistacco 45). ("He saw her pass in front of him, throwing her black hackney horse through the marshes, the horse's hooves barely touching the heather and treading the game-filled plains of the park; she was laughing, passionate and unpredictable, as Diana Vernon or as a joyous sprite of green Ireland.")

<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, the French word “amazon” refers to a woman’s horseback riding habit which Frank Osbaldistone describes in the passage of his first encounter with Diana Vernon just before he refers to the young woman as “Amazon-like.”

<sup>7</sup> Eva’s icy remark translates as: “This lake has been in my family for five centuries! You’ve been here for how long? Three weeks? So you see, I may go wherever I please!”

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