Introduction

The figure of the knight on horseback is at the core of chivalric culture and literature. The romance of chivalry is the story of a knight seeking adventures on horseback. An unhorsed knight, the one who loses his horse through *mesaventure* (misadventure) or is travelling by any other means than seated on a proud warhorse is suspect of losing his status. These facts have long been emphasized by scholars, and, for most part, they are intuitively seized by a reader of medieval romance. However, very little has yet been written about the horsemanship and horse lore that underwrites chivalric culture and that was taken for granted by the authors and audiences of medieval romance. Although there have been certain studies of horses in medieval literature, Arthurian romance included, there is still much to learn about the ethical, moral and spiritual undertones of representing horses in romance, as well as the practicalities which were familiar to medieval audiences.

With the rise of interest in animal studies, there hse been a growing interest in understanding the relation between the knight and his warhorse in chivalric literature. One idea, which has gained much currency, is grounded in posthumanism, understanding the relation of the medieval rider and the horse through their blending in order to create a new, collective identity. This representation of the self as a hybrid composite figure has been advocated by Jeffrey J. Cohen,[1] Susan Crane,[2] and, recently, by Karen Campbell.[3] Cohen argues that "the inhuman circuit of the Deleuzoguattarian horse have more immediate medieval relevance than for the rigorous training of subjectivity and

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[1] Jeffrey J. Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); see, in particular, chapter 2, "Chevalerie," 36-77.

[2] Susan Crane, "Chivalry and the Pre/Postmodern," *Postmedieval* 2 (2011): 69-87.

[3] Karen Brown Campbell, "Reriding Chivalry: Humans, Horses, and Social Systems in Medieval Chivalry," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Texas Technical University, 2012.

body that is chivalry, the code of idealized masculinity at the heart of knighthood. Like the masochist's program described by Deleuz and Guattari, this medieval technology of the self relies upon a complex assemblage capable of catching up human, animal, objects, and intensities into what also might be called a nonhuman body."[4] Chivalric literature provides a theoretical framework through which this view of the hybrid self was codified and disseminated to all those who belonged or aspired to chivalry.

Scholars of medieval literature, and of Arthurian tradition in particular, have long ago recognized the significance of the horse and rider figures in their sources. Beryl Rowland and Richard Rex have studied the horse in Chaucer's works, most importantly *The Canterbury Tales*, where references to horses and equestrian skills are used to characterize the pilgrims and where horses also appear in some of the tales told by the pilgrims.[5] Concerning Arthurian literature, studies have been devoted to the Celtic Arthurian tradition, with Sioned Davies discussing the horses in the *Mabinogion*.[6] There have likewise been studies on horses in the English, German, French, and Italian Arthuriana, focusing on the horse in either the individual romance or a group of related romances.[7]

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[4] Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, 46.

[5] Beryl Rowland, "The Horse and Rider Figure in Chaucer's Works," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 35:3 (1966): 246-259; Richard Rex, "Wild Horses, Justice, and Charity in the Prioress's Tale," *PLL: Papers on Language & Literature* 22:4 (1986): 339-351.

[6] Sioned Davies, "Horses in the *Mabinogion*," in *The Horse in Celtic Culture. Medieval Welsh Perspectives*, ed. Sioned Davies and Nerys Ann Jones, 121-140 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997).

[7] Many of these studies have been published in other languages than English. The contributions to the collected volume *Le cheval dans le monde médiéval* (Presses universitaires de Provence, 1992) all consider medieval literary texts, and many of them study Arthurian romances. A volume based on papers presented at a conference devoted to the medieval horse examines the horse in medieval literature and myth, with an article by Philippe Walter examining the Arthurian horse, arguing that the horse heightens the rider's honour in the Arthurian tradition: Philippe Walter, "Le cheval dans la littérature arthurienne," in *"Sonò alto un nitrito". Il cavallo nel mito e nella letteratura* ["There was a sound of neighing." The horse in myth and literature], ed. Francesco Zambon, 121-133 (Pacini, Pisa 2012). Beate Ackemann-Arlt has written a monograph on the horse in the Middle German: Beate Ackemann-Arlt, *Das Pferd und seine epische Funktion im mittelhochdeutschen "Prosa-Lancelot"* [The horse and its epic function in the Middle German Prose Lancelot] (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990).

The aim of this study is to examine some of the key factors in understanding horses as they appear in medieval romance: not only warhorses, but also other elite and non-elite equines, including coursers, palfreys, rounceys, and mules. The texts for this objective were chosen from the considerable corpus of one of the most popular medieval romance tradition, the Arthurian literature. Not only does the Arthurian literature represent ideal knighthood, chivalry as it ought to be, it was also a pseudo-historical model to which participants in chivalric culture aspired from the twelfth century onwards. Moreover, many of Arthurian romances are highly realistic in their use of information about social status, religious ritual and even some practical details, so that representation of horsemanship in it can – with some reservations – be used to deepen our understanding of historical equestrianism. Thus, experimental studies of the medieval warhorse often draw on the romances of Chrétien de Troyes (examined in the first chapter of this study).[8]

The authors of medieval romance are often economic in their use of daily detail, and a simple mention of the type of horse ridden by a character can serve to identify the character's social status, his or her upbringing, and even his or her moral and spiritual condition. By sparing indications about the diet of horses, authors also regularly draw a larger picture of the welcoming or hostile settings in which the characters are located, the hardships they suffer or the comfort they enjoy, as well as providing some indication about the hardiness of both the horses and riders. This way, horses become participants in their riders' social and economic status, sharing in the prestige and fortunes of their human owners, but also contributing to their owners' public persona. Horse food as the indicator of the rider's social and spiritual status is mentioned at the end of the first chapter and considered in

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[8] Adeline Dumont, a French experimental archaeologist focusing on the twelfth and thirteenth century warhorse, has used information gleaned from Arthurian romances, especially those by Chrétien de Troyes, on numerous occasions (see, for instance, Adeline Dumont, "Du cheval au destrier: dressage, matériel et utilization en reconstitution militaire," *Bien Dire et Bien Aprandre. Revue de Médiévistique* 33 (2018): 235-248; also confirmed by private correspondence with her in December 2018. Likewise, information on equestrian equipment and practices presented in romance can be used by archaeologists; see the discussion of the spurs by Blanche M. A. Ellis, "Spurs and spur fittings," in *The Medieval Horse Equipment c. 1150-c.1450*, ed. John Clark (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004), 124-150, 124.

detail in the second chapter, focusing on the physical and spiritual nourishment in the anonymous French *Queste del Saint Graal.*

The third chapter of this study is devoted to the relation between horse type and the portrayal of horses and the rider's gender. While the iconic horse of the medieval knight is the *destrier* (warhorse), knights regularly rode other types of horses, particularly coursers and palfreys, although they occasionally even rode rounceys and mules. Ladies, on the other hand, rode only palfreys, amblers and mules. The characteristics and capacities of these equines are very different, and so are the purposes for which they were used. Each animal, moreover, corresponded to a certain set of social expectations: palfreys were expensive, comfortable animals, but their use by knights was reserved to out-of-combat situations. A knight riding a palfrey was, by definition, unprepared for battle, and certain reservations about his masculinity could be intimated. A lady riding a palfrey was expected to ride in a graceful, gentle manner, as palfreys were not suitable for high-speed, arduous journeys that could be undertaken with coursers and, in romance, with destriers. Again, in the *Queste del Saint Graal,* female messengers riding their palfreys at speed are alarming to both knights and the audience, as their unusual manner of riding is an indicator of urgency.

The best example of the set of social expectations associated with each kind of animal, its equipment, including saddles, and the way in which it was ridden is provided in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, which, together with the *Queste del Saint Graal,* is examined in the third chapter. While *Canterbury Tales* itself is not an Arthurian romance, it participates in the Arthurian tradition by its inclusion of one Arthurian romance in its structure, the tale narrated by the wife of Bath. Some of the riders in the *Tales*, both male and female, are representative of the chivalric culture in which Arthurian romances were produced and consumed. Moreover, their manner of riding, their horsemanship and their mounts are subject to intense scrutiny by Chaucer, who, by evoking one or two details, can convey a wealth of information to his medieval audience. Even the different positions in the saddle of the female riders – riding astride, as the wife of Bath, or side saddle, as the religious women – are indicative of the women's social aspirations and characters.

While examining the riding postures and equestrian styles of all characters in *Canterbury Tales* is beyond the scope of this short study, it has to be noted that, over the course of the Middle Ages, riding styles and equipment diversified depending on the purpose, gender, and affluence of the rider. Towards the end of the Middle Ages (when instruction literature conveying information about various skills and accomplishments associated with social elites becomes increasingly popular) the first equestrian manual, Dom Duarte's *Art of Horsemanship*, is written.[9] The treatise is unfinished and never enjoyed – and was probably never meant to enjoy – large audience beyond Duarte's immediate circle. However, it records the existing equestrian practices and registers the emergence of the nobleman as accomplished rider who not only sits strongly but also looks well in the saddle. The burgeoning literature on horsemanship printed from the early sixteenth century onwards documents the development of equestrianism into the modern sport of dressage, where the horse and the rider are to appear elegant and harmonious – an art which has little practical application on the battlefield, but which was expected among the standard accomplishments of the courtier. The chapter concluding the present study presents a brief outline of the riding styles described by Dom Duarte, their evolution in the early modern period, and their analogies in the various equestrian disciplines of today.

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[9] Duarte I of Portugal, *The Book of Horsemanship by Duarte I of Portugal,* trans. Jeffrey L. Forgeng (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2016). His father, John I of Portugal, wrote a treatise on hunting, *Livro da Montaria,* which includes some information about equestrian skills required for this dangerous pastime, which was viewed as practice for war. The latter treatise has been edited in 1918; no translation into any other language has been made: João I, King of Portugal, *Livro da montaria feito por D. João I, Rei de Portugal publicado por ordem da Academia das Sciências de Lisboa, por Francisco Maria Esteves Pereira* [Book of riding by John I, King of Portugal, published by the Academy of Sciences of Lisbon for Francisco Maria Esteves Pereira] (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 1918).

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sometimes strict, teacher about real horses and suffered all my experiments in historical and contemporary equestrianism.

Needless to say, all errors and inaccuracies are entirely my own.