

# Taming or Revering Nature? Equestrian Sports as a Mirror of Nature Perceptions in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

By M.A. Noemi Steuerwald

## Abstract

Equestrianism is a sport strongly linked with nature. This article demonstrates how horses served as a projection surface for conflicting ideas of nature in the early 20th century. Nature as something that needed to be tamed and conquered, nature as an antithesis to modern and industrialized societies or nature as a commodity to be experienced through travel, tourism, and sport. These conceptualizations were intertwined with notions of gender, race, and class, reflecting the era's complex relationship with nature. The article examines how these negotiations over the meaning of nature manifested in the treatment of horses as sporting and leisure animals in modernity. It further investigates how these perceptions shaped equestrian practices, from breeding to training methods. The study shows that equestrianism functioned as a cultural practice that both mirrored and shaped contemporary debates about nature, modernity, and power. The study thus highlights how the treatment of horses in sport and leisure was embedded in broader cultural efforts to define and negotiate the meaning of nature in an increasingly industrialized and stratified world.

**Keywords:** Cultural History, Gender, Race, Class, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Nature, Equestrian Sports, Discourse Analysis

Author: M.A. Noemi Steuerwald, Department for Economic, Social and Environmental History

Institute of History University of Bern Switzerland:  
noemi.steuerwald@unibe.ch

Copyright: © The author(s). Articles in IHS are published under a Creative Commons license (Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0), which gives third parties the right to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format provided that the author name and source are correctly cited.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61684/ihs.2025.57861>

Review: The article has been peer reviewed using the double blind peer review model.

How to quote: Noemi Steuerwald, "Taming or Revering Nature? Equestrian Sports as a Mirror of Nature Perceptions in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century", *Idrott, historia och samhälle: Idrottshistoriska föreningens årsskrift*, 2025 (vol. 44).

## Introduction

In the midst of the turbulent years of World War II, a French author, living in exile in the United States, wrote a poetic story. The story revolves around a boy who explores a remote planet. There, he encounters a fox. The boy asks the animal to play with him. However, the fox responds that he cannot comply: "Je ne puis pas jouer avec toi [...]. Je ne suis pas apprivoisé". In all translations, the French verb *apprivoiser* has been rendered in a similar fashion: in English as *tamed*, in Swedish as *tam*.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, *apprivoiser* is open to diverse interpretations. Apart from *tame*, the PONS dictionary lists alternative translations such as *make more amenable* or *win over*, suggesting a fundamentally different understanding of this passage. The story originates from the renowned book *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, originally published in both French and English in 1943. Saint-Exupéry, however, possessed very limited proficiency in English.<sup>2</sup> This raises the question of whether this pivotal passage has been accurately translated. Subsequent scenes indicate that the term *tame* may not capture the author's intended meaning. The Little Prince asks the fox to explain the meaning of *apprivoiser*, and the fox's explanation, in fact, bears little resemblance to the concept of human dominance and animal submission:

It is something too often forgotten, said the fox. It means "to create bonds". [...] You are still nothing more than a little boy who is just like a hundred thousand other little boys. And I have no need of you. And you have no need of me either. I am just a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But if you tame me ["apprivoises"], we will need each other. You will be unique in all my world for me. And I will be unique in all your world for you.<sup>3</sup>

The ambiguities of this passage are symptomatic of the West's contradictory relationship with animals and nature in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century – an interplay deeply embedded within the broader context of contemporary societal transformations. During this period, economic, social, and cultural shifts fundamentally reshaped both human interaction with and perception of the natural world within a relatively short span. After 1890, a second wave of industrialization

<sup>1</sup> Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince* (New York 1943), 45, 78, 87, quote p. 78. p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> See Adèle Breaux, *Saint-Exupéry in America, 1942–1943: A Memoir* (Rutherford et al. 1971), p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, p. 47.

commenced, bringing about rural depopulation and accelerating urbanization. Industrial production gave rise to mass consumption and the large-scale manufacturing of consumer goods. New technologies such as automobiles, aviation, and railways transformed the conception of time and space, while also exerting a tangible impact on everyday working life. Additionally, the competition for colonial territories, aggressively pursued around the turn of the century, fostered a perception of nature as an entity to be conquered, utilized and civilized by White European elites.<sup>4</sup>

This conflicted relationship manifested itself in many areas of society, including leisure and sport. Exploring how nature perceptions are reflected in sporting practice underscores sport's sociohistorical role as both a mirror and production site for broader cultural discourses. Among the many possible examples, such as horse or dog racing, hunting or breeding, equestrian sports offer a particularly revealing case. Unlike purely competitive or commercially driven animal sports, equestrianism emphasized partnership, discipline, and control, thereby combining utilitarian, aesthetic, and emotional dimensions of the human-animal relationship. It occupied a unique position at the intersection of nature and culture: the horse, as a living being, embodied the natural, while, in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the practices surrounding riding like training, breeding, or stable management were increasingly shaped by rationalization and technological intervention. Thus, with the nature/culture dichotomy essentially manifested within equestrian sports, horses, their treatment, training, and management became a stage for contemporary nature conceptions.

These ideas were intertwined with notions of gender, race, and class, making equestrianism not just a sport, but also a site for reflecting and reinforcing social hierarchies and power dynamics. This study examines these negotiations, analysing how particular images of nature shaped the treatment of horses as sporting and leisure animals in modernity. Germany and Switzerland serve as central case studies because both countries combined strong equestrian traditions with influential discourses on nature, pedagogy, and discipline.

The analysis places particular emphasis on gender, yet approaches it consistently from an intersectional perspective that also considers race and class. While other categories are relevant for human-animal relations as well, these were chosen as they represented the key axes along which both human identities of the time and human-animal interactions were negotiated. To address these complex interrelations, the article will initially examine contemporary conceptualizations of nature. Subsequently, these notions will be

4 See e.g., Christoph Haar, Matthias Kaufmann & Christian Müller (eds), *Civilization – Nature – Subjugation: Variations of (De-)Colonization* (Berlin et al. 2021); Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York 2000); Sven Lindqvist, *Exterminate all the Brutes* (London 2002); Mauro Scalercio, "Dominating Nature and Colonialism: Francis Bacon's View of Europe and the New World", *History of European Ideas*, 2018: 8 (vol. 44), pp. 1076–1091.

systematically traced within the context of equestrian sport. To this end, the human-animal relationship will be explored along two central and complementary discursive strands: on the one hand, nature as a force to be mastered and dominated; on the other, nature as a revered power, an idealized and pristine realm. While this binary inevitably simplifies a web of more complex and overlapping discourses, these two strands were particularly prominent and recurrent in the source material.

## Previous Research

By engaging with this epistemological interest, the study addresses a central concern within the field of historical animal-human studies. This area consistently underscores the historiographical significance of animals, highlighting their substantial impact on human history.<sup>5</sup> Scholars within this field advocate for a historiographical perspective that does not position humans in "splendid isolation"<sup>6</sup> as the sole historical agents, but rather acknowledges the co-presence of animals. This recognition is essential because, as Donna Haraway insightfully articulates in her seminal book on primates and the natural sciences, "the marks of history and culture are written into the texts of life of monkeys and apes".<sup>7</sup> This assertion, of course, holds true for all other species as well.

The scholarly contributions emerging from historical animal-human studies have already yielded interesting insights, particularly as they critically engage with social power dynamics within animal-human-relationships. A key premise is that since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the themes of race, sexuality, gender, nationality, family, and class have been inscribed into the body of nature.<sup>8</sup> Nature thereby served as a discursive construct through which these categories of social power could be articulated and reproduced. In sports history, equestrian sports have received relatively limited attention compared to other sports. Although a few studies have addressed this topic, they mainly focus on Scandinavian contexts, while analyses of other European regions or other continents are

- 
- 5 See e.g., Kathleen Kete, *A Cultural History of Animals in the Age of Empire* (Oxford 2007); Gesine Krüger, Aline Steinbrecher & Clemens Wischermann (eds), *Tiere und Geschichte: Konturen einer "Animate History"* (Stuttgart 2014); Erica Fudge, "A Left-Handed Blow: Writing the History of Animals", in Nigel Rothfels (ed.), *Representing Animals* (Bloomington 2002); Sandra Swart et al., "Birds of a Feather: How Rethinking Animals Helps Us Rethink Ourselves", in, *Gender and Animals in History, Yearbook of Women's History* 2023 (42) (Amsterdam 2024); Reingard Spannring (red.), *Disziplinierte Tiere? Perspektiven der Human-Animal Studies für die wissenschaftlichen Disziplinen* (Bielefeld 2015); Linda Kalof (ed.), *Looking at Animals in Human History* (London 2007); James Gillett & Michelle Gilbert (eds), *Sport, Animals and Society* (New York et al. 2008); Dorothee Brantz & Christof Mauch (eds), *Tierische Geschichte: Die Beziehung von Mensch und Tier in der Kultur der Moderne* (Paderborn 2010); Keith Tomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500–1800* (New York 1983).
  - 6 Erica Fudge, "Writing the History of Animals", p. 15.
  - 7 Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York 1992), p. 2.
  - 8 Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions*, p. 1.

quite rare.<sup>9</sup> This contribution thus addresses research gaps in both the historical animal-human studies and sports history, offering a novel approach by combining the two fields.

## Source material and methods

In order to depict multiple perspectives, this article draws on a heterogeneous set of sources. A central source genre is historical guidebooks on horse riding, care, and training. Within the broader dissertation project from which this article emerged, over thirty manuals published between 1880 and 1956 were analysed. Most of these texts were written by men from elite social circles. In both countries, equestrian sports were almost exclusively the preserve of social elites. Switzerland, characterized by the absence of nobility since the early modern period, saw its elite predominantly composed of the prosperous upper bourgeoisie.<sup>10</sup> The social sponsorship of equestrianism in Germany, by contrast, was formed by two groups, the nobility and the aspiring bourgeoisie.<sup>11</sup> Despite these differing social backgrounds, a consensus regarding an elitist class habitus is evident in the source material. Therefore, the consistent portrayal of an elitist class habitus in these texts provides a key analytical lens through which to understand equestrianism in Central Europe during this period. In general, the dissemination and reception of advisory literature was a decidedly transnational phenomenon, grounded in complex networks of international production, translation, and readership. Numerous important works of equestrian advisory literature from other countries were translated into German, including, for example, the work of the Swedish hippologist Gustav Wrangel.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the notions articulated in these publications experienced significant diffusion across national and linguistic boundaries and were not confined to Germany and Switzerland only.

- 9 Susanna Hedenborg, "Female Jockeys in Swedish Horse Racing 1890–2000: From Minority to Complex Causes", *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 2007: 4 (vol. 24), pp. 501–519; Monica Mattfeld, *Becoming Centaur: Eighteenth-Century Masculinity and English Horsemanship* (Pennsylvania 2017); Noemi Steuerwald, "Modest Riding Missies or Victorious Amazons? A Gender Historical Approach to the History of Women's Equestrianism in Switzerland (1900–1940)", *STADION* 2023:1 (vol. 47), pp. 5–27; Erika Munkwitz, "Vixens of Venery: Women, Sport and Fox-Hunting in Britain, 1860–1914", *Critical Survey* 2012: 1 (vol. 24), pp. 74–87; Erika Munkwitz *Women, Horse Sports and Liberation* (New York 2021).
- 10 Further see Albert Tanner, *Arbeitsame Patrioten – wohlständige Damen: Bürgertum und Bürgerlichkeit in der Schweiz 1830–1914* (Zürich 1995); Albert Tanner, "Aristokratie und Bürgertum in der Schweiz im 19. Jahrhundert: Verbürgerlichung der 'Herren' und aristokratische Tendenzen im Bürgertum", in Sebastian Brändli & Rudolf Braun (eds), *Schweiz im Wandel: Studien zur neueren Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (Basel 1990); pp. 209–228.
- 11 Further see Jürgen Kocka (red.), *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert*, (Göttingen 1995); Eckart Conze & Monika Wienfort (eds), *Adel und Moderne: Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Köln et al. 2004).
- 12 Carl Gustav Wrangel, *Das Buch vom Pferde: Ein Handbuch für jeden Besitzer und Liebhaber von Pferden* (Stuttgart 1888). This book was so popular that it was reprinted no fewer than six times in German.

Guidebooks offer valuable insights into the social norms and values embedded within them. At the same time, they extended beyond linguistic discourse and were derived from everyday practice:<sup>13</sup> Their authors, typically practitioners rather than theorists or veterinarians, formulated what amounted to a culture of "best practices". To broaden this perspective and include more personal as well as societal dimensions, equestrian periodicals and autobiographical records were analysed. In Germany, *St. Georg* was the leading magazine, and in Switzerland, *Der Schweizer Kavallerist*. These journals combined technical articles, competition reports, and meeting minutes, thereby capturing prevailing opinions within the riding community. Memoirs and diaries provide a more personal perspective, offering insights into individual experiences. The visual material complements this textual corpus, drawing primarily on photographs produced in the analysed books and periodicals. These images capture not only practices of riding and training but also evolving representations of the human-horse relationship. Yet, as with the written sources, the perspective of the animals' perspective themselves remains absent, underscoring the anthropocentric bias inherent in the available material.

Methodologically, the study is grounded in the concept of historical discourse analysis as developed by Michel Foucault and further advanced within the discipline of history.<sup>14</sup> This method is particularly suitable for the article's research interest, as Foucault sees knowledge and power as inextricably linked. The first is produced, stabilized, and disseminated through the latter by means of speech, texts, and practices. Discourse analysis, therefore, focuses not only on content but also on the conditions of power under which discourses were articulated. In practical terms, textual and visual sources are systematically analysed to identify recurring patterns, classifications and regimes of truth. Historical discourse analysis further involves reconstructing the institutional and social actors that authorized, circulated or contested specific statements.

## Foray into the History of Mentalities: Nature Perceptions in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Nature has never merely constituted a passive object. Instead, since antiquity, it has served as both a subject and a reflection of human fears, desires, and aspirations. The accomplishments of modernity, marked by industrial exploitation and management of nature at the onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, led to a

<sup>13</sup> Timo Heimerdinger, "Alltagsanleitungen? Ratgeberliteratur als Quelle für die volkswissenschaftliche Forschung", *Rheinisch-westfälische Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 2006 (vol. 51), p. 60.

<sup>14</sup> Most importantly see e.g., Michel Foucault, *L'ordre du discours: Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France prononcée le 2 décembre 1970* (Paris 2009); Franz Eder, *Bilder in historischen Diskursen* (Wiesbaden 2014); Achim Landwehr, *Geschichte des Sagbaren: Einführung in die historische Diskursanalyse* (Tübingen 2001); Siegfried Jäger, *Kritische Diskursanalyse: Eine Einführung* (Münster 2015).

diversification of human-nature relationships, giving rise to at least three central discourses. The first tenet was the perception of nature as divine and animated. This ideology, rooted in the thoughts of philosophers such as Baruch Spinoza, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz, or Jean-Jacques Rousseau, challenges the modern paradigm of progress, interpreting cultural evolution as a decline from an archaic unity between nature and humanity. In this view, nature symbolized an antithesis to the repulsiveness of modern city life and the constraints imposed by civilization. This emotionally charged perspective profoundly shaped the bourgeois perception of nature in Germany and Switzerland.<sup>15</sup> Sustained by these social groups, it naturally extended its impact to leisure culture. Tourism, travel, and sport became expressions of a desire to experience nature's unadulterated beauty and sublimity. For social elites, nature emerged as both a counterpoint and a sanctuary, providing refuge from the demands and complexities of modern-day life.

The second discourse saw nature as foreign and alien, as an object that could be conquered and exploited to serve the needs of civilization.<sup>16</sup> The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century marked an era of triumphant conquests over nature, as humanity repeatedly demonstrated its ability to master the natural world. Engineering achievements such as railway tunnels, dams, and large-scale infrastructural projects like the Suez Canal each represented a form of nature's subjugation, serving the increasingly dense and rapidly interconnected capitalist market economy. At the turn of the century, nature was thus progressively transformed into an object of technical domination. It became a canvas for human mastery and a monument to modernity.

Not every battle against nature, however, ended in human victory. Alongside the idea of nature as something to be mastered ran an equally persistent perception of it as a formidable force – dangerous, untamed, and destructive. In modernity, natural disasters repeatedly challenged human belief that the natural world could be fully mastered. Such events starkly reminded humanity that, despite all advancements, they remained vulnerable to nature's uncontrollable forces. Prominent examples include forest fires, avalanches, devastating floods, and volcanic eruptions, such as the eruption of Mount Tambora in 1815, which triggered widespread famine across Europe.<sup>17</sup> Events like these fuelled a fear of nature and perpetuated the ancient narrative of nature as wild and vengeful into the modern era.

These three briefly outlined tenets did not replace each other – they coexisted, reflecting the complex, multidimensional, and contradictory relationship

15 Cf. further Joachim Radkau, *Die Ära der Ökologie: Eine Weltgeschichte* (München 2011), p. 69; François Walter, *Bedrohliche und bedrohte Natur: Umweltgeschichte der Schweiz seit 1800* (Zürich 1996), p. 96; Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte*, p. 183–185; Albert Tanner, *Arbeitsame Patrioten*, p. 392–394.

16 Joachim Radkau, *Die Ära der Ökologie*, p. 39.

17 See e.g., Hans Maid, *Mythos Lawine: Eine Kulturgeschichte* (Innsbruck 2007).

with the natural world during this period. Nature was simultaneously revered as divine and sublime, perceived as an object of domination and technological ambition, or a source of fear, a terrifying counterpoint to the advancing trajectory of human civilization. These disparate discourses shaped how people interacted with nature in everyday life, thus also influencing their concrete actions. To demonstrate their tangible impact, the following two sections will examine how these overarching, large-scale narratives played out at the micro level of the human-horse relationship.

## Dominating Nature

The very opinionated authors of hippological advice writings at least came to one consensus: The horse had to be mastered. At its core, human-horse relationships were thus governed by the subjugation of nature by mankind – or more precisely – by men. By virtue of their mere physical strength and imposing presence, horses served as an ideal stage for hegemonic notions of masculinity. Riding not only symbolized but also amplified the superiority of the White male subject. This nexus of masculinity, domination and equestrianism was deeply sedimented in cultural memory and drew upon a long-standing discursive tradition. Drawing on imagery from St. John's *Book of Revelation*, European rulers staged themselves on white horses, deliberately alluding to the first of the Four Horsemen – a symbol of victory, purity, and divine justice.<sup>18</sup> A particularly iconic example of this symbolic imagery is the famous painting of Napoleon Bonaparte at the Great St. Bernhard pass by Jacques Louis David.

Apart from the horse's physicality, this strong link stems from the practical aspects of horseback riding. Even the most meticulously trained horse does not offer its service autonomously; it requires human intervention and control.<sup>19</sup> At the time, riding was thus an exceptionally apt medium for expressing and cultivating masculinity. This logic, however, was double-edged. On the one hand, riding served as a means for men to acquire, cultivate, and refine core masculine virtues. The qualities of a good rider, as stated in contemporary literature, included for instance "boldness, vitality, and agility",<sup>20</sup> "courage, presence of mind, [...] self-control, assertiveness",<sup>21</sup> "determination, willpower"<sup>22</sup> or "confidence in oneself and one's abilities".<sup>23</sup> Horsemanship was perceived

18 See Jens Herzer, "Der erste apokalyptische Reiter und der König der Könige: Ein Beitrag zur Christologie der Johannesapokalypse", *New Testament Studies* 1999: 45, p. 240.

19 Heinz Meyer, *Reiten – Handlung und Erlebnis: Zur Psychologie und Soziologie des Reitens* (Frankfurt am Main 2012), p. 79.

20 Wilhelm Hartmann, *Reiten* (Aarau 1917), p. 5; without originals highlighting.

21 Richard Schönbeck, *Reithandbuch für berittene Offiziere der Fusstruppen sowie für jeden Besitzer von Reitpferden* (Leipzig 1902), p. 288–289.

22 Harald Siems, *Reiten und Erziehung* (Berlin 1933), p. 49.

23 Siegfried von Sanden, *Der Reitsport* (Leipzig 1900), p. 12.

not merely as a skill but as a practice that developed male gender identity. On the other hand, riding served as a proving ground for masculinity: Only those who had internalised "true" masculinity were deemed capable of mastering a horse. This notion, too, is deeply rooted in a long-standing cultural narrative. In the vita of Alexander the Great, for example, his taming of Bucephalus is portrayed as a prefiguration of his future excellence as imperial ruler as well as a compelling affirmation of his masculinity.

This domination over horses was, at its core, intersectional: It not only signified male mastery over nature but also the racialized power of White men. In colonial discourses of the turn of the century, both women and racialized people were equated with the realm of nature. They were perceived as an antithesis to culture, embodied by the European man, thus justifying their subjugation.<sup>24</sup> Male mastery over nature and animals was never a reflection of his individual authority only. It was deeply intertwined with cultural status, hierarchies of imperialism and colonialism, and broader global power structures. As Bernhard Gissibl demonstrated in his article on colonial animal-human relations, power claims were also enacted through animal bodies. In the colonial context, big-game hunting functioned as a ritualized performance of dominion over nature and territory.<sup>25</sup> In "civilized" Europe, horseback riding came to stand for this distinct expression of the White man's dominance over animals and the natural world.

It is interesting to note that, despite horses being such striking visualizations of power, riding always carried an inherent potential to challenge these very structures. A rider could always lose control over his mount, thereby threatening more than mere physical balance in the saddle. The inability to assert complete control over a horse inevitably casts doubt on the rider's masculinity and on his cultural superiority. Consequently, such a loss of control had to be avoided at all costs. Perhaps for this reason, many guidebooks advocate disturbingly forceful methods at even the slightest sign of resistance. In some books, this power dimension is stated explicitly. In a manual, aptly titled *Making horses with vices fit for service*, the author consistently advocates for ruthless treatment. He recounts from his practice: "Horses afflicted with vices all had to lie down before me first, so that they come to feel that man ['Mensch' in the original, auth.] is their master". To illustrate this technique, he included a photograph. It depicts a horse, lying on the ground with his legs tied up. To reinforce his supremacy and to heighten the animal's humiliation, the author positioned himself atop the restrained horse. The caption underscores the more profound significance of such methods: "A naughty horse that must bend to the will of

<sup>24</sup> Further, see literature in footnote 6.

<sup>25</sup> Bernhard Gissibl, "Das kolonisierte Tier: Zur Ökologie der Kontaktzonen des deutschen Kolonialismus", in *Werkstatt Geschichte* 2010 (vol. 56), p. 15.

man”.<sup>26</sup> The underlying cultural implication of such practices becomes unmistakably clear. Horses, or more precisely their subjugation, were used as a tool for expressing classed, racialized, and gendered notions of male superiority.



Figure 1: W. Capobus Büsum, *Pferde mit Untugenden dienstbrauchbar machen* (Neudamm 1916), p. 3.

In other guidebooks, this link between the power of White men and horsemanship was not always as overtly stated as in the example above. Nevertheless, they emphasized complete mastery over the animal, its submission, and the rider's unquestioned authority as essential prerequisites for riding as well – enforced, when necessary, through harsh, brutal, and even tyrannical treatment. James Fillis, a then-prominent figure in the equestrian world, was a staunch proponent of such techniques. In his writings, he repeatedly promulgates the “battles” that riders must carry out with their horses. In his seminal work *Principles of Dressage and Horsemanship*, he states:

[M]y paramount objective is that I remain the master of my horse, and for the horse to recognize that all resistance is futile. To achieve this crucial outcome, I do not hesitate to provoke excess, to challenge resistance, in order to assert dominance. This is the true secret of dressage, to achieve the horse's absolute submission. As long as a horse has not been compelled to defend itself, its

<sup>26</sup> W. Capobus-Büsum, *Pferde mit Untugenden dienstbrauchbar machen* (Neudamm 1916), p. 3, 32Ibid., p. 3.

training remains incomplete, for there are still battles to be fought. As long as a rider hesitates to challenge battles that he feels are still ahead, that are inevitable, there can be no question of complete dressage.<sup>27</sup>

Fillis regarded brute confrontation as an essential component of a horse's training. At the same time, these "battles" consistently functioned as a test of the rider's assertiveness, strength, and dominance – qualities he was expected to embody as a horseman, and above all, as a man. Similar to Fillis, the author of another guidebook provides comparable instructions for dealing with a bucking horse. He advises his readers to bring such an animal into a deep clay, ploughed field and to provoke it into a "duel": "Armed with a severe Newmarket flogger and long hunting spurs, the horseman [...] will rain stinging cuts over his head, ears, neck, shoulder, and flank, lancing his sides all the while, till he gives up the contest".<sup>28</sup> In *Making horses with vices fit for service*, the author outlines yet another self-devised method, called "Launenecke" ("moody corner"). To punish unruly horses, he placed them in a corner, tethered to the left and right so they could no longer move. "The horse remains in this position throughout the whole day, deprived of food or water", the author instructed. The following day the horse was made to stand on three legs "until it breaks out in a good sweat. If it falls and refuses to rise, it may feel the whip properly once in a while".<sup>29</sup>

27 James Fillis, *Grundsätze der Dressur und Reitkunst* (Stuttgart 1918), p. 108.

28 James Fillis, *Grundsätze der Dressur und Reitkunst*, p. 133.

29 W. Capobus-Büsum, *Pferde mit Untugenden*, p. 38.

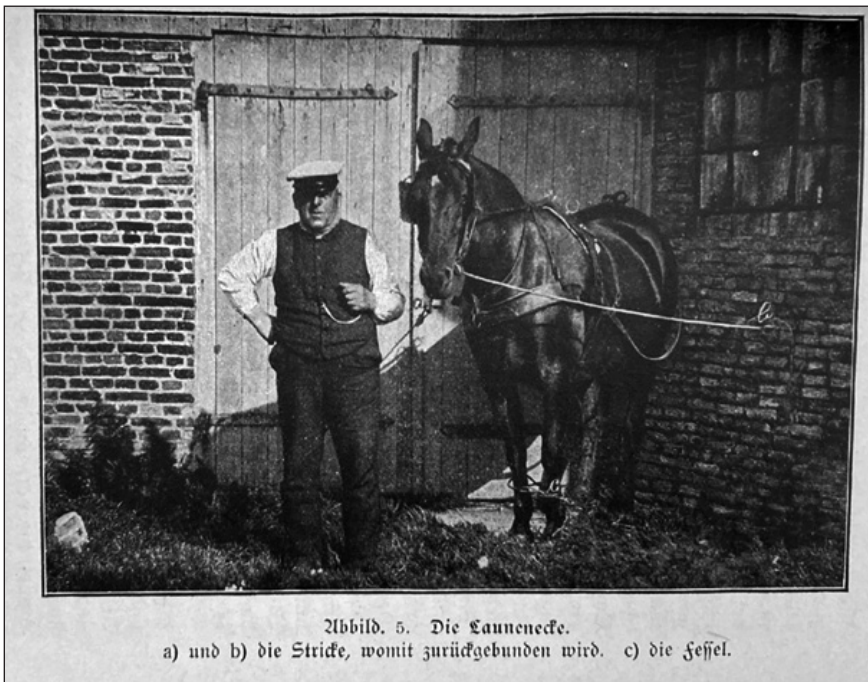


Figure 2: W. Capobus Büsum, *Pferde mit Untugenden dienstbrauchbar machen* (Neudamm 1916), p. 37.

The underlying rationale behind these methods is both explicitly and ideologically loaded. The horse was to be rendered docile and compliant through acts of deliberate violence and humiliation. At no point was a reciprocal or cooperative relationships between human and animal envisioned, instead, the horse's absolute submission was the central aim. The assertion of control over a big, strong animal was not merely a practical necessity. It was also a symbolic performance of White men's dominance over nature. In this regard, horses served as a central stage upon which White masculinity could be enacted, affirmed, and performed.

A revealing way to further grasp how deeply gendered hierarchies were woven into equestrian practice is to examine the contrasts between advice offered to male riders and that directed at female equestrians. The relationship between women and their horses, as described in guidebook literature, can generally be characterized by striking ambivalences, arising from intersectional convergence of discourses on power. On the one hand, European female riders were White and members of social elites. Thus, absolute mastery over their horses reflected their social and racial supremacy, making dominance and control central maxims for them as well. Similar to advisory literature for men, there are many passages in "Ladie's Riding Manuals", that promote

physical and violent treatment of horses.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, this behaviour placed women in direct opposition to the bourgeois female gender role. In that authority, dominance, and assertiveness were clearly attributed to the male gender habitus.<sup>31</sup> To resolve this contradiction between women's gendered, classed, and racialized identities, authors conceptualized female authority over animals as fundamentally distinct from that of men.

One approach was to emphasize the limitations of female power. In this narrative, a female rider too, was expected to master her horse. Yet, due to her gender, she was denied the ability to exert complete control. Authors thus advised female riders to leave severe punishments, "battles" or difficult lessons to her "male protector".<sup>32</sup> Another discursive strategy was to present female dominance in an idealized, glorified, or eroticized manner. The rather prudish guidebook literature was somewhat reserved in this regard,<sup>33</sup> at most noting how pleasing it was to see "a youthful, slender, and flexible figure confidently mastering her horse".<sup>34</sup> In literary texts, however, this strategy becomes more pronounced. A relevant example for this is a poem titled *Mädchen zu Pferd* by Fridolin Hofer, published in the Swiss *Horse book*:

Today I saw a maiden of horseback,  
Slender and proud, with charming bearing  
Playfully guiding a thoroughbred bay. - - -  
A beautiful sight, how the noble steed,  
Its nostrils flared with the thrill of the chase,  
Barely restrained its steps to a prancing gait,  
Yet yielded, both willingly and reluctantly,  
To the whims of its youthful mistress,  
The gentle pull and tug of her delicate maiden's hand  
And from the highborn girl with her fine features  
Every glance radiates a quiet satisfaction:  
Ruling!  
Well, the knightly one might have sensed,  
Foreseeing triumphs yet more glorious,  
How, just as reins steer the spirited charger,  
Proud young hearts of men can be guided,

30 See e.g. Carl Gustav Wrangel, *Das Buch vom Pferde*, p. 351; Hilda Dollmann, *Das Reiten der Dame* (Berlin 1931), p. 57; Käthe Olshausen-Schönberger, *Beiträge zur Damen-Reitkunst nach eigenen Erfahrungen* (Leipzig 1909), p. 61.

31 See Karin Hausen, "Die Polarisierung der 'Geschlechtscharaktere' – eine Spiegelung der Dissoziation von Erwerbs- und Familienleben", in Werner Conze (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte der Familie in der Neuzeit Europas: Neue Forschungen* (Stuttgart 1976); Karin Hausen, *Geschlechtergeschichte als Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (Göttingen 2012); Ute Frevert, *Bürgerinnen und Bürger: Geschlechterverhältnisse im 19. Jahrhundert: Zwölf Beiträge* (Göttingen 1988).

32 Adolf Schlager, *Die Dame als Reiterin*, p. 78.

33 See Noemi Steuerwald, "Modest Riding Missies or Victorious Amazons?", p. 9–10.

34 Richard Schoenbeck, *Der Damen-Reitsport*, p. 109.

Willingly, reluctantly brought to heel  
 Oh you beautiful girl's dream!<sup>35</sup>

The girl's ability to control a horse serves allegorically as a symbol of her power over men who desire her. Her allure is both accentuated and perpetuated through her command of the animal. However, the author did not present her control as a form of serious or authoritative dominance. The horse does not fully submit to its rider, rather, it merely "willingly, reluctantly" complies with her "delicate maiden's hand". Hofer's poem also engages a third discursive strategy in conceptualizing the woman-horse relationship. The girl exerts a certain degree of control over the animal, yet this authority is exercised through qualities traditionally associated with femininity – playfully rather than with physical force. This idea finds resonance in contemporary guidebook literature. According to the book *Horsemanship for Women*, female riders should attain mastery over their animals only through "tact and patience".<sup>36</sup> Other publications instructed them to treat their horses with "tenderness",<sup>37</sup> "gentleness"<sup>38</sup> and to administer aids "as invisible as possible".<sup>39</sup> Women were expected to unite "courage with gentleness" without "compromising feminine delicacy".<sup>40</sup>

The guidance given to women reveals how gender stereotypes were inscribed in specific norms governing historical animal-human relations. While traits traditionally coded as masculine were consistently promoted for men, women were increasingly advised to express feminine qualities when engaging with horses. Yet, in both the man-horse and woman-horse paradigms, one observes a consistent underlying principle: the centrality of human dominance over nature and the animal world. Control, subjugation, and hierarchy emerge as key pillars of this relationship, reflecting the unquestioned sense of supremacy upheld by White European elites.

## Revering nature

Nevertheless, many guidebooks proposed entirely different approaches from those outlined in the previous section, advocating gentle, calm, and patient treatment of horses.<sup>41</sup> In apparent reference to other methods, author Maxwell

35 Fridolin Hofer, "Mädchen zu Pferde", in F. A. Frikart (red.), *Schweizer Pferdebuch* (Basel et al. 1944), p. 329.

36 Theodore Mead, *Horsemanship for Women* (New York 1887), p. 18.

37 Helene von Rheiffen, *Die Dame zu Pferde: Briefe eines alten Reitlehrers über den Reitunterricht der Damen* (Hildesheim 1992 [1907]), p. 323.

38 Gottfried Bergnaud, *Praktischer Unterricht in der Reitkunst für Herren und Damen, insbesondere zur Selbstbelehrung* (Basel 1840), p. 119.

39 Anni von Biel, *Damen-Reiten. Ratschläge und Winke für alle Freundinnen der Reitkunst* (Berlin 1895), p. 14.

40 Leopold von Heydebrand und der Lasa, *Die Amazone: Einführung in das Gebiet der edlen Reitkunst für Damen* (Leipzig 1884), p. 30.

41 It is important to recognize that human-animal relations did not evolve along a straight-

McTaggart's states: "It is not the imperious men and, boldly determined' riders who achieve the best results in training [horses, auth.], but those who possess infinite patience and an indulgent and compassionate disposition".<sup>42</sup> These writings placed strong emphasis on the importance of connection, empathy, and partnership between horse and rider. To cite just one book, in *Neues Reiten* (1929), the author outlined his ideal of the human-horse relationship: "The foundation of all communication is an absolute relationship of trust between horse and rider".<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, such instructions were often articulated in the very same texts that endorsed violent forms of domination, creating a striking ambiguity. In *The Art of Riding*, Hugo Meier contends: "Calmness is the rider's first duty. The rider must conduct himself with dignity towards the horse; he must not allow himself to be carried away by impatience or brutality. He must, with calm blood, break any resistance and punish any disobedience with appropriate means [...]".<sup>44</sup> Even the infamous author of *Making horses with vices fit for service* supplemented his instructions on "Launenecke" and the like with the following remark: "The most important thing, however, remains calmness, patience, and perseverance" – *Sapienti sat*.<sup>45</sup>

This ambivalence likely stems from four main factors. First, contemporary masculinity was deeply conflicted. For one thing, aggression and violence were strongly disregarded, especially among members of the social elite. Conversely, aggression persisted as a constitutive element of normative masculinity, especially in the era of World Wars.<sup>46</sup> This model of masculinity emphasized "self-control", as frequently advocated in contemporary advice literature, yet simultaneously endorsed impulsive, physical, and overt expression of violence in specific situations.<sup>47</sup> Second, proponents of humane approaches grounded their rationale not so much in sentimental affection for animals as in pragmatic concerns about economic profit. Authors of equestrian manuals recognized that harsh training often ruined horses and thus rendered them "completely worthless".<sup>48</sup> Given the considerable costs of acquiring and maintaining a horse, such outcomes were economically untenable – whether for private owners

---

forward cultural narrative of progress – from primitive brutality to enlightened care – but rather followed complex, often contradictory trajectories.

42 Maxwell Fielding Mc Taggart, *Stall und Sattel: Der Bruch mit Vorurteilen* (Berlin 1931), p. 135.

43 S. Freyer, *Neues Reiten: Ueber die Grundlagen der modernen Gebrauchsreiterei* (Berlin 1929), p. 63.

44 Hugo Meier, *Die Reitkunst: Zum Gebrauche für Offiziere und Berufsreiter* (Berlin 1908), p. 12.

45 W. Capobus-Büsum, *Pferde mit Untugenden*, p. 39.

46 See e.g., Ann-Dorte Christensen & Ralle Rasmussen, "War Violence and Masculinities: Introduction and Perspectives", *NORMA* 2015: 3–4 (vol. 10), pp. 189–202; Jason Crouthamel, *An Intimate History of the Front: Masculinity, Sexuality, and German Soldiers in the First World War* (Basingstoke 2014).

47 Holger Brandes, *Der männliche Habitus: Band 1: Männer unter sich: Männergruppen und männliche Identitäten* (Wiesbaden 2001), p. 122.

48 Conrad Joseph Diepenbrock, *Praktischer Reitunterricht für Schule und Feld* (Basel 1855), p. 54.

or military institutions. In response to this issue, a distinct subgenre within equestrian literature emerged, explicitly dedicated to the "re-training" of abused or difficult horses.<sup>49</sup>

Third, accompanying these considerations on more humane treatment was a parallel discourse addressing the animacy of animals. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, numerous hippological works engaged with the inner life and psyche of horses. They raised questions such as: Do they possess feelings? Do they have reason and morals? Do they feel pain? Do they experience joy, friendship, and attachment?<sup>50</sup> At their core, these questions echo contemporary controversies sparked by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, which positioned humanity as an integral part of nature rather than as a divinely created exception. Central to the debate was to what extent animals reflected human qualities – or, conversely, how inherently animalistic humans themselves are. Hippological literature mirrored this divide, offering two opposing answers, each of them grounded in a distinct conception of nature and humanity's place within it. On the one hand, authors saw nature and animals as imbued with animacy. Franz Zweifel, for instance, stated in *Problematic Horses*: "The animal's soul differs from ours not in quality, but only in degree".<sup>51</sup> This, of course, implied respectful treatment. In contrast, other authors adopted an entirely different stance: "The horse has no means of expressing his feeling, neither vocally nor by facial contraction [...]".<sup>52</sup> According to his notion, animals were dumb creatures, distinct and inferior to humans, thereby justifying their forceful exploitation.<sup>53</sup>

Fourth, and most importantly, the promotion of humane methods of animal handling must be understood from a class perspective. All of the advice literature examined here was directed at an elite readership and thus reflected a distinct social habitus, manifested not only in matters of dress and comportment, but also in the treatment of horses. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a self-described bourgeois morality found kindness to animals axiomatic for its own class distinction.<sup>54</sup> Mistreatment of animals was framed as a distinctly working-class phenomenon and construed as symptomatic of their lack of affect regulation and cultural inferiority. The discourse on animal rights was not only about species protection but also about enforcing a bourgeois

49 See e.g., Adolf Friedrich Joseph von Xylander, *Die häufigsten Unarten eines Reitpferdes und deren Korrektur* (Berlin 1899); Richard Schoenbeck, *Die Widersetzlichkeiten des Pferdes, deren Ursachen, Folgen und abhelfende Behandlung* (Berlin 1893); Franz Zweifel, *Problematische Pferde: Ein Beitrag zur Psychologie des Pferdes* (Pfäffikon 1963).

50 See e.g., Emil Hauck, *Das seelische Verhalten des Pferdes und des Hundes* (Berlin 1928), p. 68; Stefan von Máday, *Psychologie des Pferdes und der Dressur*, p. 122–128.

51 Franz Zweifel, *Problematische Pferde*, p. 44.

52 Maxwell Fielding MacTaggart, *Hints on Horsemanship* (London 1919), p. 13.

53 Alexia Oberstolz, *Naturvorstellungen in der Kulturgeschichte: Von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Saarbrücken 2008), p. 3.

54 Kathleen Kete, "Introduction", in *ibid.* (ed.), *A Cultural History of Animals in the Age of Empire* (Oxford 2007), p. 3.

moral code. Within this ideological paradigm, violent treatment of horses was not only seen as immoral but also as socially discrediting. This discourse was intertwined with the animal rights movement that emerged in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century England and subsequently spread to continental Europe. Largely driven by bourgeois circles, the movement initially focused on cases of animal abuse inflicted by the "lower classes", especially targeting coachmen who mistreated their horses in public. This ideological framework reiterated the same argument previously outlined regarding the nexus of race and animal handling: treatment of animals consistently served as an allegory for the treatment of socially marginalized groups, such as women or racialized individuals.<sup>55</sup> Due to this discursive convergence, the animal rights movement shared significant parallels with both the abolitionist as well as the bourgeois women's rights movement, not only in terms of ideology but also regarding personnel or organizational structures. Once again, this connection underscores that animal-human relationships have been imbued with complex symbolic and socio-political meanings.

The advocated gentleness towards animals, alongside the unquestioned maxim that humans – specifically White European men – should dominate nature, were inherently contradictory. How, then, was self-control, kindness, and composure reconciled with the subjugation and domination of animals? Ultimately, it was a matter of balance. Even the most "humane" guidebooks included instructions on severe physical punishments. Such measures, the authors insisted, were at times necessary but had to be carried out with moderation, especially emotional temperance. Never should it "degenerate into an angry beating".<sup>56</sup> In guidebooks, violence and brutality were portrayed as vices inherent to "lower classes" only, which in turn needed to be corrected by the cultured and disciplined social elite. In the sections that condone violent behaviour, the perpetrators are rarely members of the upper classes. Most often, they are servants, workers, stable hands or carters.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the principle of self-control in handling horses was gendered. As author Hertha von Knobloch stated, "as unpleasant as a lack of self-control is already in a gentleman, it is particularly offensive in a lady".<sup>58</sup>

55 See e.g., Moira Ferguson, *Animal Advocacy and Englishwomen, 1780–1900: Patriots, Nation, and Empire* (Michigan 1998).

56 Moritz von Kaisenberg, *Der berittene Offizier und sein Pferd: Ein Ratgeber und ein Vademekum für alle berittenen Offiziere der Armee* (Berlin 1907), p. 62.

57 See e.g., Alexander Graf von Keller, *Erfahrungen eines alten Reiters; Rathschläge für Pferdebesitzer und angehende Reiter. Reitenlernen ohne Lehrer, Behandlung junger, bössartiger, verrittener Pferde sowie das Zureiten und Einfahren derselben und Fohlenzucht* (Leipzig 1877), p. 32, 34; Fritz Egger, *Der Pferdefreund. Unentbehrlicher Ratgeber für Pferdebesitzer und Pferdepersonal* (Solothurn 1909), p. 8; Oswald Wolkenstein, *Gedanken über das Pferd und seine Behandlungsweise* (Wien 1886), p. 38; N. a., "Massregeln gegen Pferdeschindereien", *Schweizerische Pferde-Zeitung*, 1/10–1909, p. 1.

58 Hertha von Knobloch, *Plauderei über Damenreitsport* (1911) p. 16.

How did riders relate to these discourses in practice? Where they merely idealistic concepts or actual practical guidelines? Of course, reconstructing historical practice is always challenging and often only possible fragmentarily. However, some sources do suggest that bourgeois moral values had a tangible influence on riding practices, and that violations against these norms were strictly sanctioned. An article published in *Der Schweizer Kavallerist* provides insights into how horses were trained in the Swiss army. The author notes:

Whenever I saw remounts<sup>59</sup> or even redressage<sup>60</sup> horses being ridden [...], calm, systematic, silent work was the norm; short, effective punishments were a rare exception; with subtle mockery, one of our most respected instructors rebuked the noise of whips and banging on the walls by whistling the then popular tune: "Im Grunewald, im Grunewald ist Holzauktion".<sup>61</sup>

The cavalry instructor advocated and cultivated a composed relationship between horse and rider. Any form of misconduct or violation was met with strict punitive measures. Horse abuse, in fact, was openly condemned in the *Schweizer Kavallerist*, with names of perpetrators explicitly mentioned. Furthermore, official regulations governing military competitions, stipulated that the "carrying of whips and noisy, rough driving of horses" was prohibited and that participants would be disqualified for "improper riding".<sup>62</sup>

Particularly in women's autobiographical writings, there are almost no accounts of forcibly imposed dominance over animals. Instead, many female riders articulated a pronounced sense of awe toward nature and their animals. In their accounts, they portrayed horses as a means of experiencing this realm more imminently, often reflecting contemporary bourgeois conceptions of nature. For instance, the edited diary entries of Friederike von Rokitansky provide evocative descriptions of her outings on horseback. She mentions that she particularly enjoyed riding by night because, then

nothing is more magical than the night-time tranquillity in the woods and fields. The trees breathe completely differently than during the day. You fill your lungs with the delicious air. Sometimes light wisps of fog hang over the forest clearings like forgotten veils from a dance of elves. To gallop into them would be a sin! Walk slowly on a long rein! How the saddle gear creaks familiarly! The horses quietly chew on their bits.<sup>63</sup>

59 In military contexts, a "remount" was a horse selected and trained for use in the cavalry.

60 "Redressage horse" typically referred to horses spoiled by poor and incorrect training.

61 Ganghofer, "Dressur ist Kampf?", *Der Schweizer Kavallerist*, 24/03–1924, p. 51.

62 "Allgemeine Bestimmung der Spring-Konkurrenz u. Militär-Campagne-Reiten auf dem Harfeld bei Langenthal", *Der Schweizer Kavallerist*, 30/05–1912, p. 3.

63 Friederike von Rokitansky, *Geliebte Pferde: Tagebuchblätter einer Reiterin* (Pfäffikon 1960), p. 52.

Feminist writer and politician Lily Braun gave another poignant account of her rides as a girl in the Mark Brandenburg, as described in her essay *In the saddle, I feel free*.

I have never been able to feel at home in the Mark, but when its soft sand gave way to my horse's hooves, so that riding was like a gentle rocking and its meadows and forests stretched out endlessly before me, a wonderful track for a long gallop – then I loved it [scil. the Mark], then I took possession of it and dreamed myself the mistress of the ground my horse trod. A feeling of freedom and dominion – that is what only riders know [...].<sup>64</sup>

These sources articulate a profound longing for nature that could be fulfilled through horseback outings. However, nature was not encountered in a detached, consumerist way, as was the case, for instance, for tourists of the time, admiring mountains from cable cars or the ocean from the decks of a luxurious steamboat. Horseback riding offered a more immediate and intimate engagement with nature as riders in some way became part of it. On a horse's back, nature was tangible, not only through the landscapes that one rode past, but through the direct sensation of the animal's movement. Friederike von Rokitsansky described this dimension in *Der Schweizer Kavallerist*:

The horse's movement, the rhythm of its divinely gifted body, which could race with the wind, the primal wildness, the power, and strength tamed only by the rider's hands and legs, it granted me moments of divinity, where all petty humanity fell away and I felt one with the sun, the sky, and the earth, carefree and happy.<sup>65</sup>

From these accounts emerges a profound connectedness to nature, accessed through outdoor rides. At the same time, authors articulated a class-specific and idealized vision of the natural world. Horses thus became to stand as a counterpoint to the escalating pace and mechanized nature of modern life, epitomized by the "nervous overexcitement of the car and the motor".<sup>66</sup> Yet, riders not only reflected prevailing cultural imageries of the natural world in their writings. Horseback riding also provided a way to experience these very notions in a concrete and embodied form.

64 Lily Braun, "Im Sattel fühle ich mich frei" (1908), in Gertrud Pfister (ed), *Frau und Sport* (Frankfurt am Main 1980), p. 238.

65 Friederike von Rokitsansky, "Harte Liebe", *Der Schweizer Kavallerist*, 15/12–1949, p. 615.

66 Eduard Wildbolz, "Vorwort", in Robert Staub (ed), *Reiten und Fahren: Ein Schweizer Handbuch* (Zürich 1924), p. 11.

## Conclusion

This article has demonstrated how equestrian sport mirrored contemporary perceptions of nature. Two central discursive strands, evident in guidebook literature and elucidated through concrete examples, have been identified. First, animal-human-relationships were profoundly influenced by the concept of human mastery over nature and animals, positioning the animal as an object of patriarchal and colonial power dynamics. This discourse underscores the inscription of upper-class masculinity and race within human-equine interactions, establishing equestrian sports as a centrale site for the performance and reproduction of masculine and White identities. Second, a contrasting discourse advocated consistently gentle horsemanship, challenging the often dominant forceful methods of other guidebooks. In this paradigm, the salient role of social class becomes evident. For social elites, violence towards animals or brute handling was considered characteristic of the lack of self-control attributed to the working class. The demonstration of kindness towards them came to serve as a marker of social refinement and moral character, reinforcing class boundaries. Notably, however, some texts exhibited striking ambivalence, combining forceful and gentle approaches, thereby indicating the era's complex and often conflicted relationship with nature.

The analysis advanced three central tenets. First, it demonstrated the profound ways in which social power dynamics manifested within the tangible interactions between humans and animals. Gender, race, class, and their intersectional complexities were unequivocally evident across the two discursive strands, frequently and explicitly discernible even within the source material. Consequently, this article reinforces a key finding established by historical animal-human studies: A rigorous analysis of human-animal relations necessitates a critical examination of power categories. How humans interact with animals always implies power dynamics in some form. Omitting this crucial dimension would neglect a fundamental aspect of human-animal interactions.

Second, this article demonstrated that societal power dynamics were not merely reproduced but actively performed and affirmed through human-animal interactions. For contemporary observers, an individual's handling of their horse served as a salient visual articulation of social standing, gender, or ethnicity. Mounted on a horse, riders could perform masculinity and femininity through attire, posture, and riding style. Furthermore, confident mastery of the horse could demonstrate cultural superiority or provide cues regarding one's social standing. Consequently, the article's title proves somewhat unidimensional. Equestrian sports not only functioned as a mirror reflecting society; instead, the sport's practice provided a pivotal arena for giving social hierarchies a tangible expression.

Third, the study revealed striking ambivalence of co-existing discourses. Frequently, the very same texts that advocated for humane treatment also prescribed shockingly harsh techniques. This intricate interplay emphasizes the inherent complexity of human-animal relations in the context of modernity. Furthermore, it is symptomatic for the ongoing negotiation between empathy and exploitation in the human management of nature. This discursive heterogeneity points to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a period marked by significant shifts in animal-human relations. During this period, horses underwent a substantial yet gradual transition from primarily working animals to companions of leisure and sport. The coexistence of divergent ideals thus symbolizes underlying tensions and contradictions in the cultural agreement of appropriate interactions with animals. Ultimately, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century stands as a critical juncture in understanding the shifting cultural paradigms governing human engagement with the natural world, a dynamic also vividly portrayed in the ambiguity and indeterminacy of the passage from *The Little Prince* that opened this article.