

# “Iberians are different”

*On Breed, Power, and  
Queer Subversion*

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**Abstract:** Historically, Iberian horse breeds were considered the height of perfection, but with the development of the Thoroughbred (the embodiment of enlightened modernity), they increasingly were aligned with Spanish obsolescence. However, this dichotomy is too simple and often incorrect. As this paper illustrates, the Spanish Pure Breed itself is the outcome of a major modernization effort in the sixteenth century, linked to the Spanish colonial empire's own early modernity. Furthermore, "modernizing" attempts continue to shape the breed as breeders and breed organizations attempt to meet the demands of the sport horse market, emulating the success of the modern sport horse breeds. Thus, as this paper argues, within complex temporal interactions between older and newer forms of modernity, the resurgence of older, presumably superseded, projects presents a kind of queer subversion of the temporal narratives of progress, modernity, and modernization. This subversion is instantiated in the present moment by the traditional Iberian horse (as the product and icon of an older form of modernity). As a natureculture, this older modernity reverberates not only as a cultural investment but also as a "natural" resurgence of genetic diversity and multiplicity. This article theorizes the marginalized early modernities of Spain and Portugal in their baroque colonial multiplicities, and thereby rewrites the way European modernity has been understood.

**Keywords:** *Iberian horse, modernity, modernization, baroque, breed, purity, progress, power*

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*They usually have incredibly fat short necks. Their underdeveloped hind ends do not match their huge front ends. And they have a tendency to be lazy, so it's hard to push them forward. That makes it very difficult to get these horses looking pretty under saddle.*

— Personal conversation with a stranger discussing the quality of well-known Olympian Lusitano stallion, Rubi AR in 2022

*The Italians of the Renaissance [under Spanish rule] discovered the horses from the Iberian Peninsula. Not having been able to obtain from their mounts what they had seen done with the greatest facility by the Spaniards, they were driven to invent training rules permitting them to bring their horses to the degree of collection observed in the peninsular horses [...]. Therefore it was the horses of Iberian breeding that served as models for the Italians [...]. Thus was born the science of horsemanship.*

— Dom Diogo de Bragança, *Dressage in the French Tradition*, 10–11

## Preliminaries

Obviously, Iberian horses (PREs and PSLs<sup>1</sup>) are different from other breeds, as all breeds are different from each other. Yet, the contemporary sport dressage industry that is dominated by modern Warmblood breeds seems to reserve a special place of difference for Iberian horses. Perhaps because they were once the paradigmatic dressage horse, the horse of the old European masters who laid the foundation for what we now know as “dressage”, they have come to represent a kind of quintessential *über*-difference. They are not then

1 PRE stands for “Pura Raza Española” (“Pure Spanish Breed”) and PSL for “Puro Sangue Lusitano” (“Pure Lusitano/Portuguese Blood”).

the “non-dressage horse” — like many other breeds we see rarely in upper-level competition — but have instead become modern sport dressage’s (antiquated) other, something like its foreclosed past.<sup>2</sup>

In this essay, I examine the current situation of Iberians as a naturecultural phenomenon, arguing specifically that their historical, aesthetic, and epistemological link to the Spanish Baroque era functions today as an expression of queerness — that is, as a performative resistance to, and subversion of, the norms of modern sport dressage. The recent appearances of PRE and PSL horses at the highest levels of international dressage competition during Olympic and World Equestrian Games (including Tokyo 2021) also raise the spectre of modernization within Iberian breeds.<sup>3</sup> Since roughly the beginning of the millennium, many Iberian breeders have made a concerted effort to break into the national and international markets for dressage horses. Despite their closed studbooks, they have aimed to reshape their breeds to look, move, and function more like the Northern European sport horses (primarily German, Dutch, Danish, and Swedish Warmblood breeds) that dominate modern competition. Along the lines of what Foucault refers to as a “progress narrative”, the term “modernization” in horse breeding will, therefore, be examined not only as a way of mapping the contrast between Iberian horses and their modern rivals, but also as an internal dynamic within the PRE and PSL breeds that has manifested as a paradoxical

- 2 Other sport equitation (and Olympic) disciplines such as show jumping and three-day eventing have rarely considered Iberians as suitable mounts, defined as these disciplines are by modern breed standards and riding style influenced by the Thoroughbred type. A notable exception to this rule is the Manuel Veiga-bred Lusitano stallion Novilheiro MV, who, under John Whitaker, became British show jumping champion in the early 1980s and after 1987 went on to make an impressive impact in the breeding shed.
- 3 The issue of the modernization trend in Lusitano breeding is made clear in an article published on the FEI (Fédération Équestre Internationale) webpage about the four Portuguese dressage competitors in the 2021 Olympics, all of whom competed on PSLs: “In fact, it’s only in the last 15–20 years that Lusitano breeders have turned their expertise to producing horses for Dressage competition. Previously they were bred for bullfighting, classical Dressage and working equitation.” See Burton, “Portugal’s Dressage Stars Prepare for Tokyo”. I should note that the explicit differentiation here between “classical dressage” and modern competition dressage is odd to the extent that modern competition dressage, at least in principle if not in fact, still follows the rules written by the classical master General A.E.E. Decarpentry.

focus on simultaneously improving *and* preserving breed identity. In the case of ANCCE,<sup>4</sup> the Spanish national association, annual prizes are used to promote an explicitly "modern" PRE even as they continue to employ a traditionalist rhetoric of purity ("una sangre limpia sin cruces" [clean blood without outcrossing]) to set the PRE apart as presumably "purer" than modern Warmbloods with their open studbooks.<sup>5</sup> In what follows, I examine how the PRE is enmeshed in a series of "modernizing" moments that both consolidate and challenge different formations of modernity.

The centrality of equine breeds, especially the English Thoroughbred, to the project of Western modernity and national identity has been demonstrated amply in recent publications.<sup>6</sup> For Richard Nash the Thoroughbred as a "pure breed" paradoxically produced from the crossing of native English mares with imported "Oriental" stallions in the eighteenth century, epitomizes the naturecultural contradictions of modern horse breeding.<sup>7</sup> The Thoroughbred has become the chief modernizer of many horse breeds, including the Warmblood sport horses that dominate competition today and have been produced over the past five decades by outcrossing older Northern European Warmblood horses with Thoroughbreds to create new "super athletes." The Thoroughbred represents one thread in the story of breed identity as a product and producer of modernity; however, it is not the only one. Rather, I will suggest here, the seemingly archaic

- 4 ANCCE stands for Asociación Nacional de Criadores de Caballos de Pura Raza Española (National Association of Breeders of Purebred Spanish Horses). It was established in 2007, taking over the management of the breed from the Spanish government, which had run the PRE studbook since 1912.
- 5 This quotation is taken from the promotional video "El Pura Raza Española (PRE)" featured on the landing page of ANCCE's website [01:02].
- 6 Donna Landry's ground-breaking book *Noble Brutes*, particularly the chapter "The Making of the English Hunting Seat", scrutinizes the connections between the invention of the English Thoroughbred, the emergence of a novel English riding style, and modern English identity formation. Richard Nash's work, particularly "'Honest English Breed': The Thoroughbred as Cultural Metaphor", analyses the nexus between breed purity and the emergence of modern nationhood. In "A Perfect Nicking Pattern", Nash engages with the contradictions between anxieties about degeneration and hopes for perfectibility in "nicking" as "the perfectly paradoxical theory of modern breeding" that crosses the "nature/culture hybrid of racialized identities, both human and non-human" (40).
- 7 Nash, "Perfect Nicking Pattern".

Iberian horses now being "modernized" are, themselves, naturecultural products of an alternative strand of modernity that emerged in Baroque Spain.

This essay thus seeks, first, to complicate the understanding of Western modernity as unitary or singular, while positing that across its different manifestations modernity manifests a paradoxical commitment to "progress narratives" (change for the "better") and, simultaneously, to "preservation"; second, to suggest that, for as much as they have been understood to be the product of canonical figures such as Galileo, Columbus, Newton, Descartes, Voltaire, Napoleon, and Pasteur, Western modernities are always linked to broad global colonial projects and to the hybridization that occurs in the contact zones with subjugated cultures; and, third, that within the complex temporal interactions between older and newer forms of modernity, the resurgence of earlier, presumably superseded, projects presents a kind of queer subversion of the temporal narratives of modernity and modernization. In the context of my argument, this subversion is instantiated in the present moment by the traditional Iberian horse (as the product and icon of an older, presumably superseded form of modernity). As a natureculture, this older modernity resurges, or reverberates, not only as a cultural investment but also as a "natural" resurgence of genetic diversity and multiplicity.

"Resurgence", "reverberation", and "natureculture" are terms that will sustain this argument by relying both on theorizations of the Spanish Baroque by Cuban poet and intellectual Severo Sarduy, and on naturecultural conceptualizations of queerness as the performative subversion of ostensibly stable ontologies formulated by feminists Karen Barad and Donna Haraway. Sarduy, moreover, supplies a proto-deconstructive understanding of modernity as always necessarily accompanied by its own subversion, and does so within the specific context of the Spanish *siglo de oro*.<sup>8</sup> If the Spanish horse has its mythological point of origin in an (early) Spanish modernity

8 *Siglo de oro* commonly translates into English as "Golden Age", but the literal translation would be "Century of Gold", which, in its awkwardness in English, reveals the colonial connection between Spanish modernity and New World plunder.

("Renaissance"), this modernity is accompanied closely by its own subversion ("Baroque"), and eventually situated within the context of a subsequent European high modernity in which both Spain and Portugal come to be associated with the decadent Baroque paradigm of decline, excess, and corruption rather than the hopeful modern progress narrative. Sarduy's contribution explains that the one is impossible without the other, and I intend to tease out the implications of this insight for current modernization projects within Iberian horse breeding.

## Modernity, Multiplicity, and the Baroque (Horse)

The time is now. I am talking about Iberian horses now, the ones in my backyard, the ones owned by friends, by teachers, by breeders of our horses and of their parents, breeders in various countries. I am also talking about horses that appear in competition against warmblood sport horses, even those that are sent to the Olympics to represent their countries. What are their specificities, their differences from the current norm, and how did they come to be the way they are? How does this history inflect the present moment?

The problems associated with the current modernizing paradigm emerge with striking clarity in a short video clip making the rounds on social media as I write this. The clip compares the extended trots of a Warmblood and a PRE from the 2021 Dressage World Breeding Championship for Young Horses in Verden, Germany. Both horses are five years of age. The PRE was bred by the prestigious breeding farm Centurión, one of the chief drivers behind reshaping the breed for a sport horse market, and the young stallion's pedigree is packed with horses that have received high breeding status from ANCCE.<sup>9</sup> Clearly, this young stallion is the *crème de la crème* within the modernizing paradigm. Yet, he and his rider have received 2.5 percentage points lower on the extended trot than the Warmblood. Those posting comments on the clip mostly agree that the PRE deserves this lower grade: there is no doubt that he has lost balance, is uneven in

9 Most prominently, his dam's sire, Kabileño VIII, is one of the handful of stallions who received all the highest grades, including the status of "élite", held only by five PRE stallions in the history of the grading system.

the length of strides that both hind legs take, steps wide behind, and is tilting the poll, among other signs of struggle with the movement.<sup>10</sup>

Much of the debate prompted by this clip focuses on the inherent unsuitability of PREs for this signature movement in modern competition dressage, as well as on recent improvement in PRE breeding to overcome this weakness. These “improvements” are precisely what is behind ANCCE’s grading system for breeding stock, and a very similar grading system is in place with the Portuguese breed association APSL, where movement is now receiving a coefficient of 1.5 to place greater weight on this key element of sport horse dressage. What is at stake for both registries is a kind of “updating” — or bringing the breeds to conform — to the standards and norms of what is expected of a modern sport horse under current market conditions.

This particular PRE is clearly trained and ridden to conform to modern standards, but fails to meet them insofar as purity of the gait and balance are lost, and is then rightfully penalized with a significantly lower grade. I say rightfully because, according to international dressage rules written in the 1950s and still in effect today, loss of balance and purity of gait must result in a lower score. While one could argue (and some social media commentators do) that the problem is simply rider error, the problems evident in this example occur so frequently with PREs that this case cannot be reduced either to simple rider error or to overt breed bias on the part of the judges. Instead, breed bias occurs at a much deeper level: that is, at the level of more broadly disrespecting (ignoring or “unknowing”) breed difference and thus treating the Iberians like “any other breed” (which in dressage at this historical juncture means “like a Warmblood”) when it comes to training, riding, presenting, and judging them.

At the level of the young horse breeding championships, this bias manifests even through categorical assumptions about age and pace of maturation, as well as training progression. According to inherited precepts of classical dressage where a horse begins to do

10 See the extended discussion in response to the video posted on Facebook by Marina Verdejo Sánchez on 26 August 2021: <https://www.facebook.com/100010039385939/videos/431108301572180>.



gentle work under saddle as a four-year-old, an extended trot should not be expected from any five-year-old horse. As a result of modern breeding practices, however, many young Warmbloods *are* able to produce this movement without much training and strength building, while young PREs are not able to do so. As a result, at this moment in time, Centurión’s keenest efforts to produce a big-moving PRE who can outcompete a German Warmblood on his own turf cannot override residual aspects of the breed—older norms of conformation and movement—that become apparent during the extended trot. So what is this difference? Where does it come from and what does it suggest? Why can an Iberian, even a modernized one, not “extend” the trot like a Warmblood as a required token of “dressage suitability” in the young horse evaluations? Why does he lose balance and rhythm when he is ridden in this way at this age? Why was his balance never—that is to say, until now—meant to be that of a horse pushing powerfully forward with a straight lengthened frame such as that manifested in the extended trot? Finally, what *would* he be if his breeders achieved their goal by “improving” away core aspects of his Iberian-ness to produce a new, homogenized and globalized, variety of luxury competition horse?

## Origins

There are two basic types of origin stories about the pure Spanish horse.<sup>11</sup> One is a romantic story based on mythologies that date back thousands of years and involve as agents the specific landscape, climate, and soil of the Iberian peninsula, particularly Andalucía; the entanglement of its horses with fighting bulls; a combination of isolation from Europe, and an influx of African and Arabic peoples and

11 The origin stories of Lusitanos, about which I cannot go into detail here, are more splintered and complex, both because Portugal was, at various points of its history, either part of Spain, or closely connected to Spain (for example, King Philip II, who figures prominently in the one type of origin story of the Spanish horse, was simultaneously King of Portugal when he established the Spanish breed). Lusitanos also drew genetically on the Spanish breed at various points of their history. For example, after the Alter Real line (one of the four major bloodlines in the Lusitano) had gone extinct in the early twentieth century, it was recreated based on PRE imports. A similar history defines another one of the four major Lusitano lines, the Andrade bloodline. Many important Lusitano ancestors in modern pedigrees are therefore of Spanish breeding.

their horses; and often, in a certain locus of prominence, the role of the Carthusian monks of Jerez de la Frontera as preservers of ancient purity from the onslaught of political invasion and corruption.<sup>12</sup> These stories do not have one singular temporal point of origin, and intentional, rational, human agency figures only alongside other agential factors.<sup>13</sup>

The other type of origin myth is the story told by rationalist academic historians who both refute the various existing mythologies (and their necessary mutual contradictions) and set a definitive origin date based on archival evidence. Most saliently, the work of Juan Carlos Altamirano both documents and re-enacts what I will call the "gesture of modernity".<sup>14</sup> As Kristen Guest and Monica Mattfeld point out, quoting Anthony Giddens, "modernity rests on the belief that the world is open to transformation by human intervention".<sup>15</sup> Altamirano's is precisely the narrative of such a belief, and it furthermore enacts the gesture of "purification", to invoke Bruno Latour's theory that the separation of culture from nature is the most fundamental definition of what constitutes the modern.<sup>16</sup> The "purified" (purely "man-made" cultural) Spanish breed receives its origin story in Altamirano's account to the extent that it becomes the product of a precisely dated instance of human intervention, via a strict separation of the singular human subject and nonhuman object. Instead of researching, documenting, and conceptually exploring the multiplicity and diversity of various breed projects of multiple actors which converged into what we now know as the PRE without any specific and singular

- 12 Sylvia Loch, whose 1986 volume *The Royal Horse of Europe* continues to play an ambassadorial role for the Iberian breeds in the English-speaking world, reproduces the myth that the Carthusian monks of Jerez had large herds of horses already in 1476 when the order was founded, and that they played a crucial role in preserving a particularly pure variety of Andalusian, the *cartujano* (Loch, 28). In *The History of the Carthusian Horses*, Juan Carlos Altamirano draws on historical documents to dispel this "Carthusian myth", which was so influential that it even informed government-controlled breeding policies. Altamirano uses this refutation to cement his thesis that King Philip II is to be seen as the creator of the PRE.
- 13 The prominent historian of the Spanish horse Juan Llamas Perdigo summarizes many of these myths in his book *This Is the Spanish Horse* (1989).
- 14 The main point of reference here is Altamirano, *Historia y origen*.
- 15 Guest and Mattfeld, "Introduction", 3.
- 16 Quoted in Nash, "Perfect Nicking Pattern", 27.

point of origin, Altamirano documents and describes a singular and universal project centred in the royal Spanish figure, Philip II.<sup>17</sup>

One defining feature of modern breeding is the practice of written and centralized record keeping, culminating in the creation of stud books.<sup>18</sup> This technology aims to systematize and standardize the existing breeding culture in which several, typically noble, families own and develop their own "breed".<sup>19</sup> According to Altamirano, the modern PRE is the product primarily of Philip II's project initiated between 1567 and 1625 at the Córdoba stud, a large-scale architectural complex which was built specifically for this purpose and that brought together hitherto novel numbers of breeding stock (up to 1,200 broodmares with over 500 annual foals).<sup>20</sup> This way of defining the creation of a "breed" is inherently modern, and Euro- and logocentric in that it either excludes, or relegates to a primitive, pre-historic, or unsystematic status, all oral breeding traditions and links it instead to the project of the nation.<sup>21</sup> More specifically, Altamirano's story centres the

17 Besides the work of Carlos Altamirano, other historians who have examined the role of King Philip II's breeding project as a foundational moment of the Spanish breed are Eduardo Agüera Carmona, Librado Carrasco, Juan M. López Rodríguez, and José Martínez Millán. The promotional publications featured on the ANCCCE website, as well, have endorsed this narrative of Philip II as the founder of the breed. Kathryn Renton's "Breeding Techniques and Court Influence" offers a revisionist historical analysis that aims to dispel the singularity of the origin myth constructed by Altamirano and others.

18 Many scholars of the history of the English Thoroughbred have pointed to the centrality of the technology of the stud book for the creation of the breed, and modern breeding in general. See Donna Landry's comment that "in the 19th century following the establishment of the General Stud Book in 1791, the question of purity becomes an issue and the notion of breed becomes something much more associated with nation" (Guest et al., "Roundtable", 15). And as Margaret Derry pointedly suggests, the notion of pure breed, upheld by the technology of the stud book "democratized the idea of breed" since it standardizes and institutionalizes it, wresting it from the strict personal and private control of the aristocracy (Guest et al., "Roundtable", 13). My argument, however, suggests that these developments did not begin in England in 1791, but rather, in different ways, with Philip II's nation building project in Spain in 1560.

19 See Nash, "Perfect Nicking Pattern", 34–35.

20 For this number of broodmares see, for example, Carrasco and López Rodríguez, "Las Caballerizas Reales", 14.

21 Martínez Millán presents the most detailed discussion of the specifics of Philip II's use of the novel pure Spanish *raza* for his nation building project, a new political organization that Martínez Millán calls *monarquía hispana* (Hispanic monarchy) under Castilian leadership, a transformation of his dynastic inheritance that resulted in the construction of the new court in Madrid. See Martínez Millán, "La Real Casa", 53–55.

origins of the breed in the efforts of three members of the Spanish aristocracy: the royal “stud master” Diego López de Haro, his grandson Diego López de Haro y Sotomayor, and, most centrally, Philip II, the inheritor of one half of the Habsburg Empire and consolidator of modern Spanish identity under the Castilian language.

While 1492, the year in which the “Reconquista” comes to completion, constitutes one of the major symbolic birth dates of the modern Spanish nation, Philip II fleshes this project out in new and concrete ways. As a native speaker of Castilian, Philip transformed his dynastic inheritance by rejecting the polyglot tendencies of his father, the previous King of Spain and Emperor of the Roman Empire, Charles V. As a gesture of centring Castilian power within the construct of “Spain”, he built the royal palace *El Escorial* in Madrid, established a distinctly Spanish absolutist court, and, despite the fact that he was also King of Portugal, of Naples, of Milan, and of the Low Countries, in addition to Spain under Castilian dominance, he transferred his principal residency to Madrid. For this novel political project, the new Spanish horse breed would become the most powerful emblem. In addition to the breed’s symbolic value at the centre of empire and nation, this new royal court drew significantly on the equine production of the royal stud in Córdoba for its ceremonial horses, as well as for diplomatic gifts to other European courts: a practice which symbolically anchored Spanish preeminence in the larger European context.<sup>22</sup> As Carrasco and López Rodríguez suggest, the breed was created both as a “horse for the nobility” and as “self-image and standard bearer of Spain”.<sup>23</sup>

In Spanish historiography, Philip II is most firmly associated with the Spanish *siglo de oro*, which, in broad strokes, signified a time of relative peace, wealth derived from the pillage and plunder of new American colonies, a flourishing of the Arts, and the centring of court culture. Within this context, Philip II cemented the crucial role of the horse for the absolutist court and its rituals, transforming its role from chivalric to courtly. By centring the history of the

22 See, for example, Renton, “Breeding Techniques”, 229–231.

23 Carrasco and López Rodríguez, “Las Caballerizas Reales”, 14–15.

PRE in that of Philip II, Altamirano anchors the origin and identity of the breed in the most glorious moment of Spanish modernity, a modernity that was propped up materially by the influx of American "precious metals" (most paradigmatically, it was under Philip's rule that Spain completed the conquest of the Inca Empire, its most important source of gold).<sup>24</sup> The Spanish Empire was, at this historical moment, the spearhead of Europe's colonial war machine, which enabled its rapacious accumulation of wealth and the concomitant creation of an early capitalist European economy. In turn, as a horse enthusiast, Philip was able to invest some of this colonial capital in the creation of a breed that "reuniera todas las virtudes que, desde la antigüedad, se consideraban ideales para un équido" [brought together all the strengths which, since antiquity, were considered ideal for an equine].<sup>25</sup> As Renton points out, the production of the Spanish horse as a *raza* was far from regional or homogeneous (as some of the popular myths would suggest) and incorporated many different strands and types by importation to Spain from regions as geographically removed as Flanders, Italy, and Tunisia.<sup>26</sup> The work of

24 The use of horses in the conquest and colonization of the Americas put a further strain on the sheer quantity of horses the central royal stud in Córdoba and its subsidiary networks of breeding operations had to provide. The military horse recruitments often entered into conflict with the breed standards of the Spanish horse as "horse of Kings" because its requirements were of a different nature. As Carrasco and López Rodríguez state: "En esos momentos la Caballería demandaba caballos con más velocidad y resistencia, contrarias al *caballo de picadero* que se estaba fabricando en Caballerizas reales, en el que primaria la facilidad para los aires reunidos, levadas, cabriolas, trabajo pie a tierra, etc." [At this moment, the Cavalry required faster and hardier horses, in opposition to the manège horses that the Royal Stables produced where the main value was placed on ease of collected movements, such as levades, caprioles, and in-hand work]. See Carrasco and López Rodríguez, "Las Caballerizas Reales", 18.

25 Altamirano, *Historia y origen*, 32.

26 "The King's stables in Cordoba mated select stallions and mares of different regional origins and functional types from his own territories in Naples, Flanders and North Africa, as well as from further east" (Renton, "Breeding Techniques", 229). Renton's articles "Breeding Techniques" and "Defining 'Race' in the Spanish Horse" demonstrate the heterogeneity or "impurity" at the heart of Philip II's project. In my view, this argument doesn't actually contradict, at a conceptual level, the implementation of a purity project, which is by definition always a regulatory ideal, not a reality. As Derrida pointed out, origin stories are always about difference ("*différance*") at the core, yet ideologically attempt to erase this difference (See Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel"). In this sense, Renton's argument can be reconciled with a deconstructive commitment to demystifying logocentrism's projection of purity in the origin.

the Royal Stud in Córdoba thus exemplifies what Nash, talking about the English Thoroughbred roughly two hundred years later, identifies as the paradoxes of modern breeding: the simultaneous and contradictory impulses of preservation and change (improvement), and the construction of purity through hybridity.<sup>27</sup>

The newly minted Spanish *raza* thus reflected the political and economic dynamics of an era that brought forth a major first wave of empire and globalization. Many of the features of the invention of the English Thoroughbred and the establishment of the General Studbook in England in 1791, as Nash and Landry, among others, analyse, and which for them accompany the construction of an English modernity through and alongside the emblematic English pure breed, had already been established in Spain at the height of the Spanish Empire’s modernity.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Breeding Stud as Biopower, *mestizaje*, and Purity**

Social institutions and their power structures constitute an important mechanism through which Western modernity/ies implement the “transformation [of the world] by human intervention”.<sup>29</sup> These institutions (re)produce the progress narrative, in this case the breeding of “better” horses: better, that is, at matching a given time period’s ideals and demands on the horses’ function. Once again, Spain’s (early) modernity seems to foreshadow many of the social developments associated with the high modernity of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the centre of imperial/colonial power shifted to the North (primarily to France and England). The creation of institutions such as the Córdoba stud could be understood along the lines of the shift Foucault describes toward

27 Nash, “Perfect Nicking Pattern”, 40.

28 In “Beware a Bastard Breed”, in the context of analysing the role of the earliest of the mythical three foundation stallions of the English Thoroughbred, Byerley Turk, Nash argues that during the lifetime of Byerley Turk in the last decades of the seventeenth century, “the very notion of distinct breed identities—much less, the idea of carefully policing the boundaries of such breed identities—remained an idea not yet imagined” (193). All the findings of the PRE historians quoted in this article, foremost Altamirano, contradict this argument for the Spanish context.

29 Guest and Mattfeld, “Introduction”, 3.

modern biopower instantiated in social institutions like the prison, the clinic, the madhouse, the school, the workplace/factory, or the military. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, for example, Foucault analyses the invention of the "medical gaze" as a central organizing principle for biopower within the emergent field of modern medicine.<sup>30</sup> Arguably, the modern breeding stud (and the stud book as one of its central technologies with its focus on bloodlines and purity) develops a specific, systematic, and meticulously defined "gaze upon the horse" (similar to the "medical gaze upon the patient" in Foucault), alongside bureaucratic registers of fixing or objectifying this gaze in order to regulate, normalize, and standardize (equine) reproductive life. Just as in Foucault's work, where the "patient" and the "doctor" are the products of this institutionally fixed gaze, "broodmare/breeding stallion," *yegüero* ("mare master"), and *caballerizo* ("stud master"), are institutionalized positions within a hierarchy that produces this new modern and disciplinary gaze upon horses. It is thus an institutionalized gaze which, in Altamirano's view, produced the Spanish horse (not a more variegated and complex interaction of human selection, landscape, climate, and interaction between various species).

Academic literature in equine studies of the last twenty years or so has generally located this nexus between modernity, purity, and equine breeds in the late eighteenth century in England with a specific focus on the invention of the English Thoroughbred. The distinction here between the older (pre- and early modern) concept of "type" (often linked to geographical regions and defined through certain physical and mental characteristics) and "breed" (as a formalization or institutional and/or genetic "fixing" of type under the concept of purity) is seen as the symbolic moment where breed becomes a reflection of, and vehicle for, the modern nation.<sup>31</sup>

30 See Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*.

31 The symbolic significance of the PRE is tied to the Spanish nation repeatedly throughout history, most notably with Napoleon's invasion of Spain in 1807, which constituted a threat to the continuance of the Spanish breed, or the demise of the Franco regime in the 1970s, during which time several US-based Iberian studbooks were established. The main studbook (IALHA, the "International Andalusian and Lusitano Horse Association") continues to constitute a challenge to Spain's sovereignty over the breed to

Donna Landry concisely summarizes this argument:

There is type, but it is taken from character as well as visible type. So there’s a long early-modern period between 1550 and 1850 when these terms [type and breed] are coexisting. But increasingly after 1750, and certainly [...] in the 19th century following the establishment of the General Stud Book in 1791, the question of purity becomes an issue and the notion of breed becomes something much more associated with nation.<sup>32</sup>

Altamirano and other Spanish PRE historians, however, allow us to see in Philip II’s production of the Pure Spanish Horse (which subsequently becomes the hegemonic horse of absolutist power throughout Europe and beyond), a phenomenon not only very similarly dedicated to purity beyond the characteristics of “type,” but equally implicated in the construction of the nation, and in the horse breed *as a nation*.<sup>33</sup> The Spanish term *raza* (as in “Pura Raza Española”) is of particular relevance in this context as it is

this day, which Spain has actively sought to marginalize since the establishment of the Spanish breed association ANCCE in 2007. The contentions, differences, and disagreements between the “mother studbook” in Spain and the American offshoots are worth an investigation in their own right and exceed the scope of this article. However, I wish to signal that the work of Christoph Lange on the Arabian horse, specifically the colonial dynamic of the creation of Arabian studbooks outside of the Middle East, and the eventual postcolonial reappropriation of control over the breed in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, is of great relevance for this discussion and would allow for an assessment of the quasi-colonial status of Spain and Portugal at certain points in modern history vis-à-vis Anglo-Saxon and French world hegemony. See Lange, “Making and Re-making”.

32 Guest et al., “Roundtable”, 15.

33 Arguing with Renton’s demonstration of the heterogeneity at the heart of the Córdoba project, my contention is that purity here does not mean the opposite of crossbreeding (similarly to the invention of the English Thoroughbred where “Oriental” stallions and “native” mares were crossed), but the controlling and documenting of “*linaje*” from here on out, a bureaucratic fixing and administering of a population (of equines, in this case). Altamirano points out that Philip II called his chief stud administrator “governador de la raza” (“governor of the breed”) and implemented an entire bureaucracy from “yegüero mayor” (“mare master”) to “caballerizo” (“stud master”) to “contador” (“accountant”) (Altamirano, *Historia*, 139). Eduardo Agüera Carmona insists that Diego López de Haro was this chief and principal “governador de la raza”, and that he managed to meld and fix, over a period of roughly six equine generations between 1565 and 1598, the various and diverse influences that Renton rightly points out, into a homogeneous racial prototype that, from then on to the present, constitutes a stable, pure, and recognizable breed. See Agüera Carmona, “El caballo”, 69.



frequently invoked as an indicator of purity over other breeds that are not *razas*.<sup>34</sup>

As Sandra Swart notes in the South African context where, in Afrikaans, the term for breed is also "race" (*ras*), *raza*/race/breed in animal breeding "is the final place where ideas about purity of breed and openly eugenic discourse can be freely embraced".<sup>35</sup> In sixteenth-century Spain, the construction of breed purity under the term *raza* (not as the opposite of cross-breeding at the origin, but as fixing and administering of *linajes*) may arguably have already served as a counterweight to the increasing cultural, political, and legal threat of hybridity and miscegenation that defined the colonial empire Philip II was building, and for which the new Spanish horse served as the central emblem. Spain's "early modern" coloniality may seem, from the perspective of Anglo-Saxon horror of miscegenation, to be strangely tolerant of racial mingling, as when the military men at the colonial frontier (fetishistically known as "Conquistadors" in English) were not only allowed but encouraged, to take American indigenous women as concubines and have children with them in order to create a bilingual mestiza class that would serve as intermediaries between their cultures. In this sense, Spanish coloniality did not explicitly uphold a strict separation of European conquerors and American colonized subjects, but instead understood emerging cultures in America as complex systems of mingling or "contact zones".<sup>36</sup>

The mestizo reality, however, created contradictory scenarios of racism, discrimination, and legal-cultural deadlock, as demonstrated by the famous case of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, son of a Spanish conquistador and an Inca noblewoman. To mention Garcilaso, one of Spanish America's most famous early mestizo authors, in the context of a discussion of horse breed and purity is not entirely fanciful. Not

34 Often in blog-based breeder discussions, *raza* (Spanish) is contrasted with the older/laxer notion of "blood" (as in the "Puro Sangue Lusitano", i.e. Pure Portuguese Blood) of the Portuguese breed, which in nationalist banter against the Portuguese means that the Portuguese breed presumably lacks this foundational anchor present in the purity of the Spanish race/breed).

35 Guest et al., "Roundtable", 16.

36 For a theorization of the term "contact zone", see Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*.

only do we know, as Mario Vargas Llosa affirms, that he was “fond of horses” and equitation and eventually settled down in the small village of Montilla near Philip II’s equine capital of Córdoba<sup>37</sup> — where, in 1579, Garcilaso’s stallion was chosen as breeding stud for the King’s services<sup>38</sup> — but more specifically because Garcilaso became acquainted with them as a young man through his Spanish uncle’s horse breeding operations in his native Cuzco where horses were an entirely “new” animal. Here, he learned to become a proficient rider, and eventually rode a Spanish horse in the celebration of and pledge to the new king, Philip II, in 1557. In this festivity, he participated in the *juego de cañas* [game of sticks], a contest of Arabic origin where two riders “duelled” each other with sticks, and which, in Spain, had come to symbolize the history of the confrontation between Islamic and Christian forces, terminating in the “Reconquista” of Islamic territories between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. The game quickly gained traction in the colonies, no doubt because the colonized populations recognized themselves in the “Moors”, or as Victor Sanchis Amat puts it: “El moro ahora era el indígena” [The Moor was now the Native American].<sup>39</sup> Garcilaso’s specific identification with horses, evinced both in his writings and his interest and participation in Philip II’s breeding project in Córdoba, highlights the horse as a complex tie between the three cultures (Islamic, Castilian, and Inca). Indeed, the horse’s role in the *juego de cañas* — which showcased the specific dexterities of the Spanish, Barb-related horse for close combat — also suggested the hybridity and violent confrontations central to a Castilian imperial project deeply obsessed with purity.

Just how complex the miscegenation and purity themes played out at the social and legal levels during Phillip II’s rule is evinced by “the Inca’s” arrival in Spain in 1560 to reclaim his paternal heritage, title and name, and to litigate an inheritance claim over his father’s fortunes during the 1560s. In other words, his half-Inca lineage as son of a Spanish soldier and his Inca concubine (of royal blood herself),

37 See Vargas Llosa, “El Inca Garcilaso”.

38 Sanchis Amat, “El Inca Garcilaso”, 110.

39 Sanchis Amat, “El Inca Garcilaso”, 112.

a father who was then married to a Spanish noblewoman, did not prevent him from levelling a legal claim as his father's legitimate heir.<sup>40</sup> While his legal battle was ultimately unsuccessful, he settled in Spain to pursue a military and literary career as one of the world's first and most prominent mestizos, supported by his father's family, at precisely the moment when Philip II was embarking on the Córdoba project to create a pure equine *raza* that would be, in Altamirano's words, an "emblema de un imperio" [emblem of an empire].<sup>41</sup> "The Inca" Garcilaso took great interest in the creation of this breed,<sup>42</sup> which appeared at a moment when the empire was grounded both in the kind of hybridity embodied in persons like Garcilaso and in cultural practices such as the *juego de cañas*. It also came at a historical juncture when, as Renton shows, the "breeding" of the nobility itself was becoming suspect.<sup>43</sup> In this context, Philip's obsession with combining multiple types of horses to produce a "pure Spanish race",<sup>44</sup> might be regarded as an attempt to harness notions of purity as a way of fashioning the empire he had inherited into an (early) modern nation state.

The year 1492 was not only connected with the conquest of the Americas which initiated a vast colonial encounter with human difference but was also the date of Castilla's definitive victory over the last Islamic stronghold (Granada) on the Iberian Peninsula. It also brought the definitive expulsion from the territory of all Jewish residents who would not convert to Christianity.<sup>45</sup> While the focus of the banishment of the Jews initially, and at face value, appears to be religious in nature, it also signalled the moment at which the presence

40 This legal claim was, to top it off, centred in a horse: Garcilaso's father had been disgraced for lending his horse to the rebellious Francisco Pizarro (see Sanchis Amat, "El Inca Garcilaso", and Vargas Llosa, "El Inca Garcilaso").

41 Altamirano, *Historia*, 77.

42 Sanchis Amat, "El Inca Garcilaso", 110.

43 Renton explains that "Carillo Lasso himself observed that that the project of conserving the race, or conversely the need to remedy its decline, was a phenomenon that one could also identify in the state of human nobility [...] it is hardly surprising that contemporary discourses linked the lineage of horses to the lineage of nobles." See Renton, "Breeding Techniques", 234.

44 Altamirano, *Historia*, 76–77.

45 See Pérez, *The Spanish Inquisition*.

of converts in sixteenth century Spanish society became a different sort of cultural problem: with the perception that conversion could no longer completely wash away the bad *linaje*, “new” Christians with Jewish *linaje* were suspect and subjected to more stringent investigation (by means of the Inquisition) into their conjectured “crypto-Jewish” practices. The need to prove pure Christian *linaje* within Spain thus signalled a crisis of racial purity that unsettled the newly established national identity. In this context, the thoroughly disciplined, “pure”, and controlled *linajes* of a Spanish *raza* of horse, created by Philip II as the symbolic unifier and consolidator of Spanish imperial national identity, worked to ideologically offset the nation’s heterogeneity symbolized by the Jewish convert (who had come to represent an “imperfectly purified” citizen). Beyond combining desirable phenotypes, then, the modern foundation of the disciplinary breed project was shaped by the purposeful control and deployment of bloodlines, including the fixing of those phenotypes through repeated linebreeding during the period between 1665 and 1698 into a pure, recognizable, and “repeatable” breed type that has lasted for four centuries.<sup>46</sup> The term *linaje* (literally “lineage,” but in breeding contexts best translated as “bloodline”) thus suggests how animal breeding during this time was able to perform the kind of symbolic work necessary to resolve conflicts within Spanish society.

Since we know that Philip’s *raza* was created both to supply the newly consolidated absolutist nobility with mounts for their novel horsemanship pursuits<sup>47</sup> and to represent Spanish influence across the continent at practically all of the courts, the traits vaguely named as “good” or “strong” in communications to and from the King’s “governors” of the breed refer to their aptitude for high collection and

46 For Agüera Carmona, this fixing of the racial prototype into a recognizable breed for the four centuries to come, is attributable to the sole visionary genius of Diego López de Haro, whom Philip II had put in charge of the Córdoba stud during the period in question. Thus, for Agüera Carmona, López de Haro is the “hacedor [del] caballo andaluz” (“the creator of the Andalusian horse”). See Agüera Carmona, “El caballo”, 60.

47 For an analysis of the role of horses and their training in the new courtly culture in France, and more specifically, of the performance and exhibition of the airs above the ground as conduits of noble male identity during this period of profound social transformation, see Tucker, “Early Modern French Noble”.

*alta escuela* airs above the ground.<sup>48</sup> The associated mode of high school riding was taught prominently in Spanish-ruled Naples by Federico Grisone, to whose school aristocratic riders from across Europe flocked and whose influential dressage manual, considered to be the first in modern times, was translated into Spanish in 1568.<sup>49</sup> The new Spanish horse widely adopted for the manège was not only characterized by a signature subconvex profile, but also by a short, wide back, sloped croup and low-set tail, strongly developed, high-set neck, and generally strong muscling<sup>50</sup> — all characteristics that continue to inform today’s breed standards for the traditional PRE.<sup>51</sup> Carrasco, López Rodríguez, and Agüera Carmona refer to several well-known paintings from the time period, most notably by Van Dyk, Rubens, and Velázquez as evidence of the preferred conformation indicated only sparsely in historical documents. While one could object that paintings were likely influenced by ideals as much as physical realities, idealizations do express the aspirations that inform breeding choices and ultimately coalesce as breed.

The conformational requirements for a horse to perform airs above the ground probably give us another explanation as to why, even today, these breeds do not readily lend themselves to the extended trot so prized in current dressage competitions. The compact build of a horse that can easily find the balance to sit on its hind legs (piaffer to levade) and then propel itself up into the air into the dramatic school jumps (courbette and capriole) without building momentum through speed, contrasts sharply with the longer frame that allows for effortless extensions in modern Warmblood sport horses. Needless to say, the Baroque painters to whom PRE scholars

48 Carrasco and López Rodríguez, “Las Caballerizas Reales”, 18.

49 See Tobey, “Legacy of Federico Grisone”, 149. While Grisone’s 1550 work *Gli ordini di cavalcare* is usually considered the first “known treatise on dressage after that of Xenophon” (Bragança, *Dressage*, 73), in fact, *alta escuela* equitation was present on the Iberian peninsula at least since the Portuguese King Dom Duarte published his work *Livro da Ensinança de Bem Cavalgar Toda Sela* (*The Book on Teaching Good Riding in Any Saddle*) in 1434. It is unclear whether King Duarte’s equitation was directly transmitted to the court of Philip II, but the connections to Grisone are obvious.

50 Carrasco and López Rodríguez, “Las Caballerizas Reales”, 14–15.

51 For a detailed definition of breed type (“prototipo racial”) of the PRE, see ANCCE, “El caballo español”.

have recourse for visualizing the conformation of the seventeenth century horse do not depict them performing in forward extension, but rather celebrate the highly collected equilibrium. However, the *alta escuela* was not the only functional requirement that can be assumed to have produced the classical, short-coupled Iberian horse as we know it in the twenty-first century.

## Of Bulls and Horses

Alongside the narrative of Philip II's *raza*, another important origin story of the Iberian horse emphasizes the roots of these breeds in interaction with Iberian cattle, and most importantly, with fighting bulls. As PRE historian Juan Llamas Perdigó affirms, Spanish horses are born of the encounter with the aggressive bull of Andalucía, and this encounter has shaped their morphology, balance, and movement.<sup>52</sup> One might argue that the bullfighting lineages of the Iberian horses constitute an inherent counterpoint to the modernizing, homogenizing, and nationalist narrative of the Córdoba project, even while morphologically there is a fair bit of overlap between the bull-oriented Iberians and the *alta escuela* PREs. As such and through its queer relation to power, the origin of the bullfighting horse is always multiple and undisciplined, closer to type than *raza*. Indeed, one finds many cross-breeds among the actual bullfighters: Hispano-Arabs, *tres sangres* (PRE×Thoroughbred×Arab), *cruzados* (Luso-Arab), etc.

While Llamas's romantic-poetic formulations participate in myth-making, they also introduce naturecultural considerations that position the history of the PRE much differently than narratives focused exclusively on political and social contexts. For Llamas, the Spanish horse is not simply a product of human rationality and agency associated with modern disciplinary and institutional power as it is in Altamirano's account, but is instead endowed with an agency of its own and in affinity with the landscape in which it evolved. Horse, bull, human, and *marisma* (brackish river) inextricably tangle into each other in his writing. In encounters with a fighting bull, especially when this is a close encounter, the horse needs

52 Llamas Perdigó, *This Is the Spanish Horse*, 17.

to possess both a particular type of athletic ability and an extremely flexible body that can spin or turn on a dime, gallop, stop, and move sideways or backward within a split second.<sup>53</sup> Modern sport horses have been bred for ample ground covering gaits, not for manoeuvrability in tight quarters. As a result of their more forward balance, less flexible backs, and less closed stifle angles, neither the Thoroughbred nor the modern Warmblood could ever move like an Iberian horse around a bull.

Portuguese academic rider and dressage historian, Diogo de Bragança, explains the interconnections between the Iberian horse, classical Portuguese equitation from the fifteenth century to the present,<sup>54</sup> and Iberian bullfighting traditions. For Bragança, “tauramachic horsemanship is [...] the only equestrian activity proving that the horses [that academic dressage] uses are truly ‘finished’ as School horses.”<sup>55</sup> Both the balance of the bullfighting horse and the old-school *rassembler* (collection according to pre-nineteenth-century principles) require the type of equine conformation found in the Iberian, a horse that has “gaits that are not very ample by nature”.<sup>56</sup> Traditional Iberian riding, whether bullfighting, cattle work, or the *alta escuela*, “puts its horses on the haunches, and I think that it is good since it is in *this* position that the handling of peninsular horses is at its best.”<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, Bragança recommends that “the aptitude [for balance on the haunches] should be emphasized” with Iberian-type horses in their training.<sup>58</sup> Bragança’s reflections thus

53 Llamas calls this the “essence of the Spanish horse”, an “essence” upheld by the anatomy of neck and stifle angles (*This Is the Spanish Horse*, 18).

54 According to Bragança, Portuguese classical equitation was, from the eighteenth century onward, closely linked to French dressage as consolidated by Louis XIV’s *écuyer* François Robichon de la Guérinière. This is partly reflected today in the performance costumes used at the Escola Portuguesa de Arte Equestre (the Portuguese School of Equestrian Art, the Portuguese equivalent of the Spanish Riding School of Vienna), which are in the style of Louis XIV’s Versailles school. Bragança mentions as well that today’s internationally known “traditional” Portuguese saddle is a direct reproduction of French eighteenth-century saddles (*Dressage*, 77).

55 Bragança, *Dressage*, 159.

56 Bragança, *Dressage*, 173.

57 Bragança, *Dressage*, 174.

58 Bragança, *Dressage*, 173.

remind us that “it is only after having worked our peninsular horses at collected gaits that we can make them take up extended gaits without too much difficulty.”<sup>59</sup> Since developing the “old-school *rassembler*” takes several years of training and extended trot could only be expected at the end of this development, it would be impossible for an Iberian to demonstrate an extended trot at an early age. Bragança’s argument serves as a perfect explanation for where the prevailing modern training and testing system in place today fails young Iberian horses.

In addition to the morphological characteristics of a horse that can “turn on a dime”, the bullfighting horse also needs to possess a form of bravery that disposes him to flirt with disaster. Within the PRE, there are several brands/bloodlines that are most directly associated with bullfighting and cattle work.<sup>60</sup> In the case of the PSL, the breed as a whole is more uniformly associated with this type of functionality, although there is one main PSL bloodline that is strongly associated with bullfighting.<sup>61</sup> In the PRE, these lines are rarely found in pure form today as their breeders no longer exist, but they have been incorporated into many contemporary breeding programs at the forefront of the modernizing movement. Arguably, the degree to which the PRE has been modernized over the past decades to meet the demands of the modern dressage arena signifies a watering down of its heritage as a bullfighting and *alta escuela* horse, while certain Portuguese breeders have retained those traditional qualities in the Lusitano up until now.

The encounter between an aggressive bull and a horse provides a snapshot of the traditional Iberian horse’s natureculture, which has sedimented into its specific morphology: “a neck that seems to reach

59 Bragança, *Dressage*, 173–74.

60 The four breeders/bloodlines most directly associated with bullfighting are Miura, Paco Lazo Díaz, Guardiola, and Domecq. With the exception of Guardiola (which also still exists as a stud) all of them also maintained close connections to the Portuguese, and Lazo Díaz explicitly opposed the closing of the Spanish stud book to Lusitano influence in the late 1960s. Guardiola’s brand is not directly associated with the bullfight, but with another torine sport called *acoso y derribo*, a discipline similar to American cattle sorting, but with more fast and violent action.

61 This is the brand of Manuel Veiga, which still exists to this day.



up towards the sun and the stars [...] combined with an exceptionally sharply angled stifle joint, gives a natural ability to feint and dodge unmatched by any other breed."<sup>62</sup> This morphology has shaped these horses' biomechanics, but equally characteristic is how they watch out for things around them, how their skin reacts to touch, how their ribcage moulds around the rider's inside leg, how their energy is explosive, but always upward and retracting, never bursting forward into pressure. To burst directly into a bull in the manner of a Thoroughbred who bursts forward out of the starting gate and onto the flat racetrack, would be suicide for a bullfighting horse.<sup>63</sup> The Iberians play with power, but do not confront it directly. They dance and bend around an attack, provoking and dodging their adversary.

Beyond the onto-epistemological claim about the Iberian horse's queer historical positioning, to be developed further below, I would argue that this relationship to power is itself a queer manoeuvre that works against the grain of the focus on purity and disciplinary/institutional control associated with the historical creation of the PRE. Not only does the etymology of queer link back to the notion of "oblique" (related to the German word "quer"), it also suggests an indirect form of confronting power that has recently been reclaimed in queer studies as a form of minority discourse. Coining the term "disidentification" as his main theoretical vehicle, José Esteban Muñoz argues that the ambivalent and indirect relation to power constitutes nothing less than "the blueprint for minoritarian counterpublic spheres".<sup>64</sup> To disidentify, ultimately, is to neither identify with (or assimilate to) the demands of hegemonic (white, straight, male) power, nor to counter-identify against (or refuse outright) all hold that it has over minority subjects through direct, violent confrontation; rather, it stitches together an encounter that is neither (yes)/nor (no), but a "perhaps" or "for the time being" or "somewhat" or "not completely," or "not quite yet".

62 Llamas Perdigó, *This Is the Spanish Horse*, 18.

63 Bragança argues that "blood horses with great scope, selected by tests of speed [...] lack strength in the slow gaits, a serious obstacle to obtaining the training necessary for facing a bull with precision at a deliberate pace" (*Dressage*, 162).

64 Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 5.

There is a way of reading the negotiations of the bullfighting horse with the brute force of the bull as similarly ambivalent, as not quite confronting, but neither as evading or capitulating (fleeing). Within the putative prey animal “nature” of the horse, to not flee from danger but instead to flirt with it suggests a strange or queer natureculture rather than a “straight nature”. Ethology-based animal rights advocates might consider the behaviour of a bullfighting horse to be a form of learned helplessness produced merely by harsh or terrifying training. However, anyone who knows Iberian horses from bloodlines that excel in this ritual understand that you cannot intimidate a horse into this kind of bravery. In the bullfighting ring, the rider’s life often depends on the horse’s ability to take care of the rider. The horse must not only take the initiative, then, the rider must also trust in the horse’s “intuition”, to borrow Kirrilly Thompson’s words.<sup>65</sup> Such expressions of agency underscore the fact that this ability has become the Iberian horse’s natureculture and is not merely a conditioned response or a pre-given nature.<sup>66</sup> A natureculture represents

65 When I speak of the “bullfighting horse”, I am referring to the *caballo de rejonas*, not to the *caballo de picar*, an important distinction theorized by Kirrilly Thompson with regards to the Spanish bullfighting tradition. Thompson also points out that the former is ridden in the *jineta/gineta* style, whereas the latter *a la brida* like the heavy Northern European jousting horses of the Middle Ages. In the Portuguese mounted bullfight, the figure of the *picador* and his armoured, restrained, and muzzled horse who has little to no agency in the fight and only serves as a wall into which the bull is provoked to crash, and against which the rider braces when attacking the bull, does not exist. By contrast, the *caballo de rejonas* is an active participant whose interaction with his rider produces the *compenetración* (rapport/understanding, literally “deep mutual penetration”) that Thompson theorizes as “becoming centaur”. Thompson is right in stressing the importance of the “intuition” of the *caballo de rejonas* for the dynamic and safety of the rider-horse couple. See Thompson, “Theorising”, 243. In the Portuguese version of the ritual, this dynamic is much more central than in the Spanish mounted bullfight, and furthermore, the bull does not die, and his horns are wrapped in leather sheaths to prevent injury or death of the bullfighting horse.

66 I applaud Thompson’s emphasis on performativity and actor-network theory in her theorizing of the dynamics of the mounted bullfight. In this vein, she deftly proposes that “the application of performativity to animals frees them from essentialist scientific discourses” (“Theorising”, 325). In other words, it frees them from their subjection to “straight nature”; yet, there is an incongruity at a key moment in her argument where she distinguishes in binary fashion between the horse’s (natural) “instinct” to flee, which in her argument is suppressed in the encounter with the bull, and his “intuition” (243) for flamboyant and provocative movement, and even aggression toward the bull, which are highly valued in Iberian culture, and which, in my argument, constitute the Iberian horse’s natureculture.

a potential, in this case for movement or behaviour. Realizing this potential, stallions in many bullfights provoke attacks from the bull but then dodge them. They approach, then retreat, but not fully in order to continue the fight. The biomechanical balance of the bull-fighting horse on the haunches and his elastic ability to roll back onto his hocks, allows him to fully develop this ambivalence, which is neither forward nor backward, but often both and neither as he dances around the bull in lateral manoeuvres.

## Baroque Subversions

Altamirano points out that the Spanish *raza* came into its own during the Baroque period (roughly 1550–1750), and that the stallions chosen for breeding during that period reflected the Baroque aesthetic predilection for curved lines. They were, therefore, physiologically “curvy”, including the convex frontonasal profile of the head.<sup>67</sup> The nasal profile of the Baroque horse blends into the overall convex shape seen from the side that includes a rounded, arched neck and a sloped croup with low set tail, an overall conformational dynamic further emphasized by a short back and loin. Altamirano explains the nasal profile as a cultural preference for curved convex shapes and rejection of straight lines, without, however, going into any exploration of the significance of these aesthetics or problematizing the notion of a strictly sequential nature of so-called artistic periods. In this manner, aesthetic difference is assumed simply to be the result of a succession of tastes and there is no sustained discussion of the biomechanical significance of this “roundness” in the way that Bragança discusses its relevance for the bullfight and *alta escuela* equitation. One might therefore ask: what is the wider cultural significance of the Baroque curve that Altamirano invokes but does not theorize? The theoretical essay *Barroco* (1974) by Severo Sarduy — a Cuban exile who lived much of his life in Paris and whose career intersected with some of the most prominent Parisian post-structuralists interested in the Baroque (Barthes, Lacan, Foucault, Deleuze) — offers a basis for developing a more capacious exploration of the “curvy lines” of the Iberian horse.

67 Altamirano, *Historia*, 160.

Considering that it is largely devoid of any functional value and therefore a purely aesthetic marker, the frequent focus on the “frontonasal profile” of the Iberian horses has become a signal of how Iberians, particularly PSLs, have failed to modernize. An Anglo-Saxon equestrian tourist quoted by Altamirano notes that “Spanish judges like everything that we look down upon: they don’t like a straight and dry head,” and “the curved head [is] essential for the pure breed”.<sup>68</sup> Altamirano also notes that the convex profile is no longer favoured in the PRE.<sup>69</sup> This is perhaps a reflection of the modernization project of the Yeguada Militar in the 1930s and 40s, a kind of modernization that did not occur in the Lusitano until much later, and with less consistency.<sup>70</sup> The pressure to modernize on that part of the military—to serve the need for fast, ground-covering mounts rather than the *alta escuela* horses associated with Philip II’s *raza*—can be seen as a continuous strain or tension on Iberian breeds since the rise in popularity of the Thoroughbred in the nineteenth century.<sup>71</sup> The modern aesthetic idealization of the concave, or dished, head associated with the Arabian horse has since come to be a powerful marker of a horse’s attractiveness, even among some Iberian lovers. But why, to an audience that has not been specifically educated to appreciate it as a sign of Iberian “nobility”, is a curved head outdated, “unmodern”, old-fashioned, inelegant, and even ugly (anecdotally many people have surprisingly strong reactions against this nasal profile)? What does its continued linking

68 “Los jueces españoles gustan [de] todo lo que nosotros despreciamos en un caballo: no gustan de una cabeza recta y seca...” and “era esencial en la raza pura la cabeza acarnerada.” Altamirano, *Historia*, 167.

69 Altamirano, *Historia*, 160.

70 It should be noted that the Yeguada Militar (YM), founded in the 1890s by the Spanish government with the goal of improving the breed by providing access to quality stallions for PRE breeders, is considered to be a continuation and revival of Philip II’s project in Córdoba in the sixteenth century. See Carrasco and López Rodríguez, “Las Caballerizas Reales”, 22. The YM also owns and breeds the most significant number of Arabians on the Iberian peninsula, as well as a smaller number of English Thoroughbreds. The speculation that the YM might secretly have experimented with outcrossing PREs to Arabians or Thoroughbreds in its modernization project in the first decades of the twentieth century—a practice already in place under the various labels and registrations for *Hispanoárabe* or *cruzado* (crossbred) or *tres sangres* (three bloods)—without officially declaring it, might have been stimulated by the presence of these other breeds on the premises of the military stud farm.

71 Carrasco and López Rodríguez, “Las Caballerizas Reales”, 18.

to the Baroque signify? As will be shown, what is at stake is the relationship of modernity to its own internal critique. Indeed, the shape of the Baroque Iberian horse is not in itself the subject of this critique, in the sense of essence or ontology; rather, it *performs* this critique in the context of, and in relation to, the modern horse.

For Sarduy, the oblique and elliptical curve (not the roundness of the circle) is one of the central elements that define Baroque aesthetics and cosmology. It is, in this context, a subversion of the rationalist Renaissance focus on the circle as the expression of the perfection of symmetry. In this sense, Sarduy sets up the Baroque from the very beginning of his essay not so much as an Other, or alternative to, or even supersession of, the Renaissance, but rather as a deconstructive re-reading of the rationalist discourse of modernity itself as a process of undoing and unravelling. Sarduy describes Galileo's obsession with the symmetry of the circle and its singular centre,<sup>72</sup> arguing that the Baroque transforms these aesthetics not so much through a complete rejection of the paradigm, but rather by distorting the circle into an elongated and decentred imitation of a circle. The ellipsis in effect distorts the symmetry of the circle, as there are now two or multiple centres.<sup>73</sup> Of paramount importance is that, for Galileo, the symmetry of the circle was not only perfect and divine, but also "natural", and its distortion is therefore *contra naturam*. This turn against nature is precisely the nexus that subtends Sarduy's view of Baroque aesthetics as ultimately queer in an obliquely sexual sense as well. One effect of this production of nature and power as centred and singular (so the rejection of multiple truths), is perhaps the phobic obsession with the forces of decentring and multiplicity that the Baroque paradigm kindles.

*Retombée* (as a French word used throughout the Spanish text) is one of Sarduy's key terms, making its appearance in the first

72 "Galileo se aferra al círculo como a la noción de naturalidad que en la tradición aristotélica le es consubstancial; la fetichización de esta figura participa también del espejismo que deriva de las últimas lecturas, mecánicas, de esa tradición." [Galileo is fixated on the circle as well as the concept of naturalness, which in the Aristotelian tradition are coextensive; the fetishization of this figure is also part of the mirage that appears in the last readings on mechanics of this tradition.] Sarduy, *Barroco*, 46–47.

73 Sarduy, *Barroco*, 19.

sentence of the book. It could be translated into English as “fall-out” — literally that which “falls” (“tombe”) back (“re-”) — or “repercussion” (with its sonic references), or “consequences” in a broader causal sense. Sarduy thus defines the Baroque against the dominant periodizing habit, as a much broader phenomenon which keeps producing its *retombée*, and therefore intervening in the (modern) present, with its continuous oscillations, reverberations, and echoes (re-percussions). The Baroque, in this sense, is not over. Rather, it has always been ghostly and continues to produce its subversive effect on the modern, both in the sense of present/contemporary and in its more technical meaning as the ongoing dynamics of modernity and modernization realized as the compulsion to “update”. My interest is to understand the Iberian (Baroque) horse as an instance of *retombée* within the context of modern horse breeding and its “updating” urge. To some extent, this return happens in naturecultural ways within the complex web of genetics and cultural practices as a point of failure to conform. Within the context of modern sport horse dressage, I would suggest, the traditional Iberian horse functions as a continual question mark.

Closely related to the ellipsis as a distortion of the divine/natural circle and a multiplication of its centres in Baroque aesthetics is the importance of anamorphosis.<sup>74</sup> For Sarduy, anamorphosis is a perversion of Renaissance perspective,<sup>75</sup> which centres the viewer and has him look “head on” or “straight at” the object of his gaze.<sup>76</sup> Anamorphosis makes such a “straight” positioning preposterous, because the truth of a subject can only be seen by looking obliquely, or queerly. To look straight on is to miss the point altogether. Anamorphosis thus offers a visual analogy of the aesthetic and athletic strategy of the

74 Lacan’s famous reading of Holbein’s painting *The Ambassadors* highlights poststructuralism’s interest in displacing rationalist notions of power. See Lacan, *Les Quatre Concepts*, 101–2.

75 Renaissance perspective can be said to be the precursor not only of modern visuality, but also of the scientific method. For an argument along these lines, see Jackson, *Strategies of Deviance*, 126.

76 “La anamorfosis aparece pues como la pervisión de la perspectiva y de su código — presentar de frente, ver de frente” [Anamorphosis appears therefore as a perversion of the perspective and its code — to present up front, to look straight on]. Sarduy, *Barroco*, 49.

bullfighting horse who both confronts and subverts the power of the bull by distorting straight-on attacks via elliptical movement. Since the predominant tradition of horse training in the Iberian peninsula is ultimately based on this aesthetic (and its connection to *alta escuela* as Bragança demonstrates), and since the Iberian horse's natureculture has developed around this ritualized form of moving, it seems important to expand the discussion of the Iberian horse's "baroque-ness" beyond the "curvy" shape of his or her frontonasal profile (or even back and croup) toward a more capacious consideration of the traditions that have shaped this horse as an oblique curve, and that underpin its elliptical subversion of modern power.

One might concede that the modernization of Iberian breeds is a recurring theme throughout their history, from Philip II's foundational modernization in the latter half of the sixteenth century, to the Yeguada Militar project between the 1890s and the 1940s, and to present attempts within the PRE and the PSL to breed for the sport horse market. Modernization is perhaps an inevitable historical force, yet, Sarduy's argument that this process of modernization is always haunted by the *retombée* of Baroque subversion raises questions about the coherence of such enterprises. Does the old-style of Iberian horse command a difference, an allure, a difficulty, and a delight that cannot be laid to rest, even natureculturally, as it continues to re-emerge as genetic difference? Does the persistence of this difference present itself in the difficulties of riders and breeders today who ignore the traditions?

Sarduy allows us to proceed along this conceptual path, and while the word "queer" was not in his vocabulary (in Spanish at the historical moment of Sarduy's articulation), it seems appropriate when understood in its etymological relation to the "oblique" or "wayward". It is with these theoretical markers in mind that I have concluded that the Iberian horse is queer. The term represents an imperfect translation of Sarduy's link between Baroque aesthetics and sexual minority discourse (which, in his text, is hinted at obliquely more than made explicit), but for the time being, there seems to be no better word available in the English language.

## The Production of Nature

Another way of exploring the connection between Sarduy’s theory of the Baroque as strategic, subversive *retombée* and my claim that the Baroque Iberian horse is a queer ironic commentary on the modern sport horse, is by taking a final swerve through queer feminism’s onto-epistemology. What I identify throughout this essay as a core component of “modernization” is a progress narrative that relies on the logocentric operations opposing nature to culture, matter to meaning/agency/intention, and animals to humans. As an extension of modernity, modernization is always a process in which human agency acts upon a presumably passive nature/matter in order to “improve” it. When Derrida reminds us that “there is no nature, only [...] denaturalization and naturalization”,<sup>77</sup> he posits that nature itself does not exist outside of its cultural production. In similar fashion, Donna Haraway pointedly asks “what gets to count as nature, for whom and when, and how much [does] it cost [...] to produce nature at a particular moment in history for a particular group of people”.<sup>78</sup> In the case of the Iberian horse, one might ask about the cost of Philip II’s *raza*, the twentieth-century Yeguada Militar project, or the current focus on producing sport-bred Iberians? Who bears it and to what effect? There is no space here to pursue this question fully, but to offer just one concrete example, one might consider whether increasing the average size of the PRE from 15–16hh to 16–17hh over the last two decades — an increase felt to be desirable for dressage competition where increased size also implies rangier, larger movement — could account for the growing prevalence of OCD lesions in the joints of young Iberians in recent years.<sup>79</sup>

This deconstructionist critique of humanist thinking, however, requires a next step to become fully useful to my argument. Donna

77 Derrida, *Given Time*, 170; quoted in Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 1.

78 Paper Tiger TV, “Donna Haraway Reads” [2:06–2:16].

79 OCD, or osteochondritis dissecans, is a disabling disease of equine joints, which could be the product of, among other factors, extreme and rapid growth spurts during development. Several Iberian breeders with whom I spoke about this subject blame the recent obsession with size for the apparent increase of OCD cases in Iberians. This claim is not based on statistical analysis.



Haraway addresses this need with her neologism "naturecultural", where nature and culture are understood to be so tightly woven into and through each other that matter and meaning, nature and culture, cannot be separated. One of the central issues at stake in her use of this term is agency within a logocentric cultural system that has, for millennia, cast matter as passive, even when etymologically the term (derived from *mater*, mother) is also linked to *matrix* (womb), which is inherently generative. For Haraway, all "critters" (organisms, technologies, molecules, or ideas) are "material-semiotic actors", not *either* matter *or* meaning makers.<sup>80</sup> All meaning-makers are also material (and hence constrained by concrete situatedness and limited sight), and all matter has inherent meaning-making capacity.

Equally relevant is quantum physicist Karen Barad's theorization that matter is endowed with agency as an active meaning maker. Barad largely agrees with the performative or linguistic turn in twentieth century philosophy in that she refutes essentialist ontologies and hence understands that the material manifestations of reality are brought about performatively and relationally. With Foucault, she also refutes representationalism, the idea that reality and meaning/language are separate from each other, or that one can describe something neutrally without simultaneously constituting it. In this manner, we might understand a horse breed, as Altamirano does with regard to the PRE, as culturally produced by social institutions including Spanish imperialism, colonialism, and the cultural need to modernize Spanish nobility from its medieval role into emergent absolutism. Barad's ideas become particularly weighty and novel for my argument when she posits matter itself as performative, and as an actor.<sup>81</sup> In other words, Spanish noblemen did not simply take pre-existing passive forms of nature (the existing native Jennet horse, Neapolitan imports, the Barb, fertile pasture lands around Córdoba, etc.) and shape them into the

80 Haraway, "Situated Knowledges", 595.

81 Alluding to an array of recent publications in cultural studies, Barad ironically observes: "Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter." Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity", 120.

(early) modern Spanish *raza* through their sole intentional action, but rather (early) Spanish modernity was co-created by various material-semiotic actors (including horses, landscapes, soil composition, Inca gold, Spanish nobility, Caribbean sugar, etc.), congealing into a dense web of correspondences that we now call the PRE. In Altamirano's discussion (as in most discussions that do not take an explicitly naturecultural approach), equine morphology ("matter/nature") is left out as an actor, stripped of agency, as it were, as if a shift from *a la j/gineta* (the predominant riding style of the military pre-Reconquista in the peninsula) to airs above the ground ridden with a longer stirrup (not exactly *a la brida*) in the modes of aristocratic self-representation was not a necessary consequence of a different type of horse, and thus dictated by naturecultural entanglements with horses rather than simply human cultural volition.<sup>82</sup>

Barad further suggests that the term queer has a particular affinity with her project of troubling the seemingly stable binary oppositions between nature and culture, matter and meaning.<sup>83</sup> Barad's projection of the usefulness of the term queer within a quantum-physics-informed frame offers a radical reconfiguration of the foundational categories of space, time, and causality, as well as matter. In "Nature's Queer Performativity", she develops the notion of a "queer critter": someone whose "very 'species being' [...] makes explicit the queering of 'identity' and relationality". She insists, moreover, that it is "not enough to simply assert that identity is a relation, if the relation in question is between or among entities that are understood to precede their relations".<sup>84</sup> For Barad, in effect, "beings" or "entities" are constituted entirely through relations among agential actors. In the case of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European nobility who represent themselves through *alta escuela* movements

82 Thompson's concept of "centaur" as a performative, and always technologically mediated, act of continuous becoming together is very similar to the human/equine naturecultural entanglement out of which, in my argument, the modern PRE has emerged. See Thompson, "Theorising", 232.

83 "queer is a radical questioning of identity and binaries, including the nature/culture binary [...] including [...] causality, matter, space, and time" Barad, "Nature's Queer Performativity", 29.

84 Barad, "Nature's Queer Performativity", 33.

with their mounts, most specifically through airs above the ground, as Treva J. Tucker demonstrates, their identity as nobility is as much constituted through the interaction with these “new” horses as the horses themselves are through their interaction with the noblemen, each other, or the architecture of the manège, and perhaps most specifically the pillars. Equine morphology, movement, balance, and indeed breed altogether must be understood as active meaning-makers, not simply as a human product. It was, then, the possibility opened up by the movement in bullfighting and *alta escuela* airs of a specific equine conformation and morphology that allowed for the development of Renaissance/Baroque horsemanship and breeding, as much as the other way around. Moreover, equine conformation and movement was not simply produced by humans *ex nihilo* through breeding and training, but rather developed over time, in history, in what Barad calls “intra-action”, between actors who did not exist prior to that intra-action.

My suggestion, then, would be to understand the critter “breed” itself as a material-semiotic actor that does not precede its entangled relationalities. It is not simply a passive product of human agency, a “thing” that “is” or “is made”; rather breed actively contributes to and encodes the fields of multi-species power becoming manifest in the various riding academies of Europe, beginning with Dom Duarte’s earliest (fifteenth century) example, and culminating in Robichon de la Guérinière’s service to Louis XIV as *Écuyer du Roi* and codification of classical dressage in the 1730 treatise *École de cavalerie*, which today counts as the basis of all classical dressage theory.

From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the Spanish *raza* was the hegemonic horse, and congealed the norm for equine–human power structures in that moment. It was also the “modern” horse, even as this very modernity was also already undercut by the *retombée* of its baroque-ness. In calling the contemporary Iberian horse queer in a Baradian sense, however, I am referring to its historical positioning as a critical critter in the present moment, not in an essentialist, transhistorical sense. In so doing, I suggest that the Iberian horse *today* offers a critical, destabilizing, de-naturalizing angle

from which to understand the normative institutional forces of modernization manifest through breed, first via the Thoroughbred as the modernizer of nearly all modern horse breeds, and now in international competition via the modern Warmblood sport horse. In recent history, in effect, “breed” sits alongside other Northern European critters such as liberal democracy or advanced capitalist efficiency, all of which eclipsed Spanish world hegemony and relegated it to an unmodern and Baroque ghostliness. I have not had space to develop a full argument about some of the specific positions of the PSL in this constellation. It is a breed that lacks the institutional grounding in a full-fledged (early) modernity of its own and was on several occasions reconstructed based on the PRE. It thus represents a minor chord within the minority discourse, even as it has simultaneously eclipsed the PRE in its recent rise to prominence in international dressage competition and associated markets. The classical Iberian horse, however, the one that persists despite intense modernizing pressure both onto and from within existing breed structure, provides us with an aesthetic delight that is at odds with the present congealments of beauty, power, and progress—of what constitutes a good, or better, horse for sport—and signals that there are alternatives to the status quo. This is a delight that is capable of queering the modern power of the sport horse.

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