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Special Issue:
Horses and Humans

Guest edited by
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and
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Humanimalia is a biannual journal devoted to the study of human–animal relations. It is interdisciplinary, open-access, and peer-reviewed, publishing original articles from a wide range of cultural, historical, philosophical, political, and aesthetic perspectives.

Humanimalia has three aims: to explore and advance the vast range of scholarship on human–animal relations, to encourage exchange among scholars working from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, and to promote dialogue between the academic community and those working closely with animals in non-academic fields.

We invite innovative works that situate these topics within contemporary culture via a variety of critical approaches. Ideally, we seek papers that combine approaches, or at the very least draw upon research in other disciplines to contextualize their arguments.

As much as possible, we seek papers that acknowledge and seek to advance a more-than-human conception of aesthetics, culture, and society.

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Cover: George Stubbs, *Anatomy of the Horse*, 1766

While visiting the International Museum of the Horse in Lexington, Kentucky, in 2017, we toured the spectacular Arabian Horse pavilion. As we wandered through the chronologically ordered exhibits that trace the origins of the modern Arabian, we were struck by the unexpectedly diverse aesthetics that predate the consolidation of the Arabian as a breed in the twentieth century. Early photographs from Homer Davenport's trips to Syria and Lady Anne Blunt's stud offered diverse images of "Arabian" horses from across the Middle East, some of whom displayed stocky builds, straight or Roman noses, and rather nondescript conformation. Alongside these were early Romantic, orientalized paintings of horses with dished faces, impossibly refined bodies, and flagged tails—the conformation that defines the Arabian breed today. The divergence between these examples of photographic and painterly representation, and the ways human imagination clearly played a role in shaping the modern aesthetic of the Arabian into the now recognizable "show" type horse, prompted us to think more broadly about how—and to what ends—we shape and reshape horses.

Our initial question was what came first: the horse or the representation of the horse—fiction or reality? We also questioned how human relationships with equines, and their relationships with us, alter how we think about, interact with, and shape them (and they us). How does this influence change over history and across geographic location? How are we as scholars to approach these complex issues? The cluster of five essays and roundtable collected here engage with these questions about horse–human relationships from distinct disciplinary perspectives. In doing so, this special issue hopes to add to the many excellent studies that have appeared over the past several years examining issues of horse–human relationships.

Current scholarship engages with questions about horse–human relationships and agency from multiple disciplinary and theoretical approaches. Lynda Birke and Kirrilly Thompson's *(Un)Stable Relations: Horses, Humans and Social Agency* (2017), for example, examines

equine agency, culture, and perspectives within horse–human affective relationships, as does Katherine Dashper's study of interspecies communication and collaboration in *Human–Animal Relationships in Equestrian Sport and Leisure* (2017). Dona Lee Davis and Anita Maurstad's edited collection, *The Meaning of Horses: Biosocial Encounters* (2016), utilizes a broad ethnographic approach to think about individual development and break down the nature–culture binary at the heart of horse–human relationships past and present. Also thinking about equestrian cultures, Jonna Bornemark, Petra Andersson, and Ulla Ekström von Essen's *Equine Cultures in Transition: Ethical Questions* (2019), raises important questions about interspecies interactions by exploring shifts in our understanding of horses as subjective beings with their own language systems and ways of being. Finally, Gala Argent and Jeannette Vaught's recent *The Relational Horse: How Frameworks of Communication, Care, Politics, and Power Reveal and Conceal Equine Selves* (2022) places equine ways of being at the centre of contemporary questions about horse–human relationships.

The interdisciplinary character of this recent scholarship makes clear the benefits of placing diverse subjects, and in some cases methodologies, side by side in order to explore the complexity and ethics of horse–human relationships. The contributors to this special issue of *Humanimalia* similarly draw on diverse disciplinary methodologies and experiences when confronting such questions. Taken together, the historians, literary scholars, social scientists, anthropologists, and sociologists whose work is collected here employ modes of inquiry that draw on the personal, the anecdotal, and the experiential alongside traditional disciplinary modes of analysis. Such intimate fusions destabilize accepted definitions of kind by asking what it means to see, hear, touch, and even know a horse (as well as what it means for the horse to know you).

In her contribution to this issue, Angela Hofstetter's deeply personal exploration of horse–human relationship foregrounds questions about the space in which interspecies intimacies are formed. Exploring the interrelationship between childhood trauma, grounding

in the present, and the resulting intimacy (or its destruction) with her Lipizzan mare Eroika, Hofstetter foregrounds the importance of being present to the horse as part of the training relationship. Taking broader historical approaches, Christian Gundermann and Margaret Derry examine the stakes of horse–human relationships in light of human fashions for equine body type. Focusing on Spanish breeds from the Baroque era to the present and concerns with purity, Gundermann pinpoints the role Spanish horses have played in iterating and “queering” modernity’s aesthetic in ways that challenge modern norms of competition and breeding. Similarly, Derry’s historical exploration of key strands of history that underpin modern purebred Arabian breeding examines “human interactions with animals, the culture that results from that interaction from a global point of view, and the difficulties that arise when trying to define quality in a living thing.” Jeannette Vaught’s contribution to this discussion draws on history and personal experience to query established norms of nonsexuality and gendered policing produced by equine reproductive technology. By thinking about our relationships to animal sexuality differently, Vaught argues, we may imagine alternative, and more ethical, ways for horses and humans to live together. The final essay, by Jocelyne Porcher and Sophie Barreau, explores the use of the human voice in training young horses to offer a new understanding both of animal labour and of the ways voice creates (or disrupts) equine happiness and contentment within horse–human training relationships. Together, these articles question established discourses, processes, and ways of being with nonhuman others by questioning the ingrained systems that have traditionally shaped horse–human interaction.

Sitting alongside these five articles is a roundtable focused on “Shaping the Equine Body” that likewise unpacks, questions, and mulls over established (and problematic) ways of being with horses. The roundtable’s participants — Susanna Forrest, Richard Nash, Karen Raber, and Jeannette Vaught — are diverse in their interests and disciplinary approaches: Forrest’s recent work focuses (among other things) on encounters that frame the long history of the “wild” Tarpan and Takhi; Nash is an influential scholar of the

eighteenth-century Thoroughbred who is also active in the modern world of Thoroughbred breeding and racing; Raber, whose research focuses on animals in Renaissance England, is a Grand Prix dressage rider; and Vaught, a former veterinary technician specializing in equine reproduction, now engages in research focused on the historical ethology of horse–human relationships. A particularly exciting aspect of this roundtable discussion is the way participants' relationships (of various types) with equines shape the methodologies and questions they bring to the subject. Together in conversation, these scholars offer an interdisciplinary and experiential exploration of the ways humans shape equestrian bodies and worlds, offering insights into the mythologies and stories surrounding equines within modernity, and suggesting new ways of being together that could improve the lives of both species.

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